

What are the Keystone Exams and PBA?

According to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), “the Keystone Exams are end-of-course assessments designed to evaluate proficiency in academic content. The exams are designed to measure the state’s Common Core Standards, which align toward college and workplace success” (PDE website). The Keystone Exams determine and rate each student’s mastery of content knowledge as Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic, with scores ranging from 1200 to 1800. To earn a score of proficient, a student must earn a minimum score of 1500.

At Charter Arts, students currently enrolled in Biology, Algebra 1, and 10th grade Literature will be required to take the related Keystone Exams during the May testing wave. Students that need to retest may be scheduled in January and/or May.

“Pursuant to Chapter 4 regulations, each Keystone Exam is designed in modules that reflect distinct, related academic content common to the traditional progression of coursework. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has developed a project based assessments system (PBA) that is aligned with the modules for each Algebra 1, Biology, and Literature Keystone Exam for students who are unable to demonstrate proficiency on a Keystone Exam or Keystone Exam module. Successful completion of a PBA aligned to the Keystone Exam or Keystone Exam module on which a student did not demonstrate proficiency shall satisfy the Chapter 4 Keystone Exam graduation requirements.”

In the PDE FAQ, which is posted to our school website, PDE further clarifies that students are only qualified to participate in the PBA once they have taken the content-related course and were unsuccessful in achieving a score or proficient on the Keystone Exam after at least two attempts.

“If upon inspection, parents or guardians find the Keystone Exam (or portion of) to be in conflict with their religious beliefs and wish their students to be excused from the assessment, the right of the parents or guardians will not be denied upon written request that states the objection to the applicable school district superintendent, charter school chief executive officer or AVTS director.” Later in the FAQ, PDE further clarifies that “students who opt out for religious reasons

must participate in the PBA; thus the transcript will reflect the earned score on the PBA,” (PDE FAQ).

“Based upon Chapter 4 regulations, the information presented on a transcript shall include the highest performance level demonstrated by a student on the associated Keystone Exam, validated local assessment, or project based assessment at the time the transcript is produced. If a student receives a satisfactory mark on the PBA, the transcript reflects a proficient performance level. Note: This requirement takes effect with the 2016-2017 graduating class,” (PDE FAQ).

PDE developed a project-based assessment system, in alignment with the Keystone Exam, to serve as an alternative pathway to meet graduation requirements for students who are unable to demonstrate proficiency on a Keystone Exam. PBAs are required by state law for these students. Please note that while PDE Chapter 4 regulations allow a parent or guardian to opt a child out of a state assessment for religious reasons, 22 Pa. Code 4.3, identifies that the PBA is NOT a state assessment. Thus, Chapter 4 does not permit opting out of the PBA. The PBA is an alternative pathway to graduation, and if the student does not successfully complete the PBA, s/he will not graduate. Satisfactory performance on a PBA will be reported on a student’s transcript as proficient and will not identify that the student earned proficiency on the PBA rather than the exam itself.

What does this mean for a student at Charter Arts?

As identified in PDE Chapter 4 regulations listed above, beginning with the class of 2019, in order to graduate any high school in the state of PA, students must demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams or related PBA. If the student does not score Proficient on the first attempt on a Keystone, he/she may retest after successful completion of supplemental instruction. Charter Arts will enroll students in a semester workshop course in order to provide supplemental instruction as required by PDE, and the student will participate in a Keystone retest. If the student does not score Proficient after the second attempt, he/she may move right into the PBA. Charter Arts will enroll students in a semester PBA course in order to provide additional supplemental instruction and support so that the student will be successful when completing the PBA, which will also

happen during this course. Students enrolled in the PBA may participate in a retest as determined by the PBA teacher and school administration.

Once a student has not been successful on the Keystone Exam after two attempts, there is no requirement that the student continue to retest. However, the student must move directly to the PBA. If a student has only taken the Keystone once or never and the parent/guardian refuses to allow them to participate for religious reasons, those students will have to demonstrate their proficiency on the PBA. Again, in order to meet this state requirement, Charter Arts will enroll the student in the PBA course.

If enrolled in a workshop class in the fall, the student will retest during the January testing wave. PDE will release testing results to Charter Arts mid-March. If the student is enrolled in a workshop course in the spring, the student will retest in May and results will be received in early July. Charter Arts may provide optional tutoring sessions based on teacher availability and student interest after school. Registration for these sessions is done by department and does not replace the supplemental instruction provided during the workshop course.

What does this mean for a student with an IEP?

All students with an IEP are required to take the Keystone Exam at least once to fulfill their participation in the statewide assessment to comply with federal regulations. If a student with an IEP takes the Keystone Exams and does not attain proficiency, the student will be enrolled in the workshop course as his/her schedule allows. Students will retake the Keystone Exams after remediation. However, the IEP team makes the determination of how a student with an IEP meets graduation requirements. Additionally, the IEP team cannot write into a student's IEP that he/she doesn't have to participate in the Keystone Exam, as participation is both a state and federal requirement. Only after a student does not earn a score of proficient can the IEP team meet to discuss alternate plans for the student to meet graduation requirements. As outlined in the PDE FAQ: "Students may move to the project (based assessment) after one attempt of the Keystone Exam if the IEP so states. As written in the IEP, all SDI included in the student's IEP applies ... The IEP team determines the criteria the student will meet regarding graduation requirements."

What is the current legislation regarding Keystone Exams/PBAs?

There were two bills recently introduced in the Senate, but Charter Arts has not heard about any movement on either. One of them would delay the requirement until the class of 2020 so that the legislature has time to come up with an alternative proposed graduation requirement. The other proposes the replacement of the Keystones with the SAT. Until Charter Arts gets clarification from PDE regarding updated requirements, we are held to the current state requirements as outlined in Chapter 4 as identified above and will therefore hold all students to those expectations.

Charter Arts/PDE Keystone Parent Test Review Expectations

“Parents and guardians may review the Keystone Exams if they believe they may be in conflict with their religious beliefs by making arrangements with the School Test Coordinator once the exams arrive at the school. Confidentiality agreements must be signed, and no copies of the Keystone Exams or notes about exam questions will be permitted to leave the school. If, after reviewing the Keystone Exams, parents or guardians do not want their child to participate in one or all of the exams due to a conflict with their religious beliefs, they may write to the school district superintendent or charter school CEO prior to the beginning of the exam(s) to request to excuse their child from the exam(s),” (PDE Assessment Coordinator Handbook).

Parents must complete this review and write a letter to the CEO requesting exemption every time the Keystone Exams are given. Again, as stated above, if a parent chooses to opt their child out of Keystone Exams for religious reasons, the child is then required participate in the PBA process. No exceptions will be granted. More information about the PBA process can be found in the PDE FAQ found on our school website.

Charter Arts Parent Review Procedures

Parents must contact both Carise Comstock, Principal, and Ann Marie Squerrini, School Assessment Coordinator, to request the opportunity to review the Keystone Exams. Parents will be able to review the exam no earlier than two weeks prior to the testing dates for each exam due to the PDE shipment dates of

the testing materials. To make the request to review the exam(s), email: asquerrini@charterarts.org.

Prior to reviewing the Keystone Exam(s), parents must sign a “Parent Confidentiality Agreement” in accordance with 22 PA Code 4.4 to ensure the security and confidentiality of the assessment. This document ensures that parents agree to not “discuss, disseminate, or otherwise reveal the content of the assessment materials to anyone, including my own child(ren)” (PDE).

Parents/guardians will be escorted during their visit to review the exam and will not be allowed to be alone with students or with the test at any time during their visit in order to ensure student safety and test security. Additionally, parents/guardians will not be allowed be in possession of cell phones, cameras, or other recording devices while they are reviewing the exam(s).

After reviewing the exam(s), if a parent/guardian wishes to request that their child be excused from the exam(s), s/he must submit a written request (email is preferred) to Charter Arts CEO Diane LaBelle at dlabelle@charterarts.org and copy the Principal and School Assessment Coordinator (as identified above).