

May 5, 2017

Dear Parents,

For the last several years I've been working with our legislators and state Department of Education to address my concerns (shared by many educators, parents, and others) about the amount and kind of mandated standardized testing in our schools. I wanted to give you an update on Keystone Exams.

Keystone Exams: Currently our state requires students to pass three Keystone Exams (in the areas of Biology, Algebra, and English Literature) in order to graduate. I firmly believe that a student's diploma should not be dependent on his or her success on three exams, with no regard for the work they've done in school. In June, 2016, the General Assembly unanimously passed a bill to delay this graduation requirement until the class of 2019, *thanks in large part to your letters and social media posts asking them to do so*. However, our legislators have done nothing else to change this requirement and we are quickly approaching another testing window for students in the class of 2019.

Senate Bill 660 was recently introduced to the Education Committee by Senator Killion, and I am asking that you write and call (phone calls seem to be particularly effective) your state legislators to support it. Click the following links for a [sample letter](#) and a [list of local legislators](#). This bill provides flexibility to school districts by allowing students to choose one of the following four options in order to meet graduation requirements:

1. Pass all three Keystone Exams.
2. Achieve equivalent scores on alternate tests approved by the Department of Education (such as SAT, PSAT, ACT, etc.)
3. Pass school district courses and pass the National Occupancy Competency Testing Institute (NOCTI) test or other technical skills tests (this option is designed for technical school students.)
4. Pass school district courses with additional evidence related to the student's graduation plan (e.g. an internship with an accounting firm, service project, obtaining a guaranteed employment letter, etc.). Currently every student in WACSD is required to graduate with a graduation plan.

Regardless of which path students take, the federal mandate still requires all students to take the Keystone Exams, much the way students currently take the PSSA tests.

The WCASD has spent more than \$1.5 million over the last five years on additional biology and math specialists who have been helping our students to pass these tests. That money could have been spent in so many other ways to support all students. For a list of reasons why I (and many other educators) believe Keystones are harmful rather than helpful, please [click here](#) to read: *Keystone Exams Update May 2017-A bad idea for our students*.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jim Scanlon
Superintendent