

My name is Dawn Sweeney and I am a parent to five school aged children in Owen J. Roberts School District. My oldest is the class of 2017 and my youngest is the class of 2028. I have been actively involved with Keystone Exam graduation requirement issues for 5 years. I am also the author of a statewide blog called Opt Out Pennsylvania, which discusses Keystone exams issues and how to opt out of them. From mid-April to mid-May this year there were days that my blog had over 1,000 views. This is significant considering the demographic is limited to parents of students who are in 8th, 9th and 10th grade. In four weeks last month there were 18,539 views on: How to Opt Out of the Keystone Exams. This is an indicator that the Keystone exam graduation requirement is affecting quite a few students and is a significant issue.

Issues with the Keystone Exams:

No usable feedback or data to students or teachers from the Keystone exam results

Keystone remediation replaces elective courses, and sometimes replaces a core course

The scorers of the open ended portion of the Keystone exams do not need to be certified teachers or have any background in education or the Keystone content area

College admissions do not consider the Keystone exams scores in any capacity

There is no educationally usable feedback to students or teachers from the Keystone exam results. Students who do not pass re-test without knowing what they got wrong on the exam.

My daughter had a grade of B in Algebra class but did not score proficient on the Keystone exams. I requested that her teacher review her test results with her so that she could study and work on areas she needed to improve for the re-test. Our principal said it would cost \$75 (payable to DRC) to get the student test booklet only, which is the test answers without the test questions. The process was not followed through and my daughter did not have an opportunity to review her test. At this point I opted her out of the Algebra re-test and the Biology and English Keystones.

Generally, students who don't pass a Keystone are placed in remediation in the form of a class or online curriculum like Key Math or Study Island. These remedial classes are an overview of Keystone exam content and do not address students specific content area needs. These remedial classes also cost the school district financially and sometimes results in other classes not being offered due to scheduling because teachers are pulled to cover a remedial class.

Keystone remediation often replaces elective classes and sometimes take the place of a core class. I've talked with parents students were place in a year long Algebra 1 Key Math class instead of two half year electives or instead of Geometry (these students

lose a year of math and are likely going to be less prepared for college as a result).

The people who score the Keystone exams are not required to have any teaching experience or any background in the tested areas of Algebra, English or Biology. To be a Keystone exam scorer, proof of a college degree is all that is required. Scorers are not required to be certified teachers and do not need to have any education experience. The scorers are paid \$11-\$14 an hour. The Algebra Keystone is 40% open ended which is graded by a scorer - this allows for an increased chance of human error.

There are generally 3 levels of high school classes. At my daughter high school they have Standard, College Prep and Honors. Yet because of the Keystone exams, students are all preparing for the same test content which minimizes the distinction of Honors versus College Prep and Standard classes.

I've included a Keystone Constructed Response Guide that my daughter's class used when she was in 10th grade Honors English. It describes the written portion of the English Keystone Exam. Please note that this written portion is worth 35% of the exam points. Also keep in mind that this will be scored by people who are not required to have a teaching certificate, or have any teaching experience or any background in the content area.

On this Keystone Constructed Response Guide, students are told not to use "overly sophisticated language", in other words, don't use big words, keep it basic. More concerning is they were told to write the thesis statement incorrectly, different than what they have been previously taught (this is emphasized on the Keystone test prep guide) and in a way they will not write in college. Essentially, this is not just test prep, but its test prep specific to the Keystone exam and it's the only time students should write a thesis this way.

The Keystone guide on how to write a paragraph is TEE-3:

T - Thesis (MUCH different than what you are used to)

E - examples

E - explanations

3 - three of each (examples and explanations)

The reason this is an incorrect way to write a high school level paragraph is that the thesis statement should be at or near the end of the introductory paragraph - where sentences lead up to the thesis. Writing is a cornerstone skill for students in high school, college and beyond, and the Keystone exams requires that students write incorrectly and for 35% of their exam points!

I assume that the reason students are asked to do this is because the scorers are told to look at the first sentence as the thesis statement. A qualified, certified English teacher

would be able to read through an introductory paragraph and find the thesis statement.

I want to emphasize that is not the fault of teachers, rather it's the Keystone mandate that essentially forces teacher to teach to the test, even when it goes against teachers professional training.

College admissions do not consider the Keystone exams in any capacity. Yet, they are given at the same time students are preparing for SAT/ACT and need to maintain a good GPA. The Keystone exams take valuable educational time away from students during critical high school years they need to prepare for college. That the PDE considers putting Keystone exam scores on transcripts demonstrates their lack of understanding that the Keystone exams are not a component of college readiness, at least not to college admissions.

I would like to tell you about a local 10th grader who attends West Chester Area High School. Grace is a sophomore at West Chester East High School. Grace has taken the Biology and Algebra Keystone twice. On both occasions, she has failed to meet the passing benchmark. She participated in the recommended remediation, including in school and after school support. Grace's combined grade on her second Biology attempt was lower than the first. Algebra performance was better on second trial, falling 6 points short of passing.

She currently has the literature test looming. Grace has a diagnosis of a reading disability. Her prognosis for passing a language arts based measure is questionable. She meets the criterion for a 504 plan but not an IEP thus requiring her to meet all the graduation standards of the regular education curriculum.

She is left with the option of a religious opt out. However, each test opt out would require 15-20 hours to complete a project based assessment; consider tripling that if she fails all three Keystones. Project based assessments would take the place of electives in Grace's schedule. Most would agree that electives are essential to a well-rounded education. To complicate matters further, it is questionable if Grace would acquire the number of credits required for graduation if one accounted for lost electives.

Grace, on the brink of her junior year, wonders if "they" will truly not let her graduate if she has passed all subjects. I think that question needs to be extensively and exhaustively considered by the legislature. The ramifications could be tremendous for Grace, and thousands of students statewide who pass all of their high school classes and requirements but have their 12 years of schooling reduced to the results of a single test.

Thank you for considering the issues presented today. Please, I urge you to do whatever you can to eliminate the Keystone graduation requirement.



PSSA & Keystone
Review Request Form

Data Recognition Corporation
13490 Bass Lake Road, Maple Grove, MN 55311
Phone: 1-800-451-7849 Fax: 763-268-3031
Email: PAcustomerservice@datarecognitioncorp.com

DIRECTIONS: Complete this form to request a copy of a single student answer booklet from Data Recognition Corporation (DRC). A review does not include a rescoring of the student responses. This form must be fully completed and returned with a purchase order (P.O.) or P.O. number to DRC to initiate the review process. A \$75 fee applies to each subject being reviewed. Please print or type the information requested below and keep a copy for your records. Requests may take up to six weeks to process after DRC receives both the P.O. and the request form.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| District/School Information | District: | School: |
| | District AUN #: | School Code #: |
| | Address: | Phone: |
| | | Fax: |
| | | Contact Name: |

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| Student Information | Name: | Grade: |
| | PASecureID: | Date/Test Administration: |

| | | | | | |
|--------------|---|----------|---|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| PSSA: | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing | EYSTONE: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Algebra I | Explanation for Request: | <u>PARENT REQUEST</u> |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Math | | <input type="checkbox"/> Biology | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading | | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | | | Security Barcode #: | Answer Booklet: |
| ONLINE TEST: | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes | | | | Test Booklet (if applicable): |

9/25 - 10/10
8:00

Of Mice and Men Independent Study- Honors 10

Directions:

For each two chapters (1&2, 3&4, and 5&6) you will complete the attached learning guide while you read, following the due dates carefully. Each set of notes has three sections. **The first section** is a "constructed response" which will help prepare you for a major section on the Keystone exam. Below, you will find a guide to help you construct your responses. Follow it closely! **The second section** is to help you develop your analysis from the constructed response. Be sure to be insightful and specific in this section! **The third section** asks you to find three significant quotes from the two chapters and to analyze them. Choose what you feel are the **three most significant quotes** from those two chapters.

Keystone Constructed Response Guide

Constructed Response:

- Written portion of the test
- 1 paragraph in length
- Based on reading the passage
- Scored → 0, 1, 2, 3
- **35% of the exam points**

TEE-3:

- **T**- thesis (MUCH different organization from what you are used to)
- **E**- examples
- **E**- explanations
- **3**- three of each (examples and explanations)

Structure and Style:

- **Open** with **thesis** (yes, this is different from what you are accustomed to doing ☺)
- **End** with a **summary statement** (bring the paragraph to a close)
- Use language that helps to prove or explain your examples (one reason, another reason, finally, which shows, etc.)
- **No overly- sophisticated language** necessary (I know, this is once again different from what you are accustomed to doing ☺)

The prompts will ask you to:

- **Explain** or **analyze** (analyze= to explain the examples and your thought process/rationale behind the examples chosen)
- **Prove** why the examples you choose are **relevant**
- **Connect** the main point (non-fiction) or theme (fiction) of a passage to a literary concept (mood, tone, conflict, point of view, etc.)