



Child Welfare Professional Education Screen Sections # 4

4. PROGRESS TOWARD PROMOTION/GRADUATION	
A. Child attends school regularly.	
A. Child is placed at appropriate grade level for age/development.	
A. Child is receiving remedial services as needed.	
A. Child is making adequate academic progress (i.e., child has a C-average or better).	
A. Child received all credits earned for classes successfully completed (applies only to students grades 9-12).	
A. Child completed high school requirements and diploma or GED was or will be issued	

Why This Matters

- Only ONE THIRD of children in care graduate on time within four years.

Why This Matters

- Children in care are more likely to have gaps in their schooling.
- Children are more likely to have a history of truancy and difficulties engaging in school
- Children in care often need remedial support and may have gaps in learning that are unnoticed
- Differences in graduation requirements across school districts and schools disproportionately impact children in care.

Why This Matters: Outcomes

- Obtaining a H.S. Diploma makes a significant difference in an adult's life:
 - Access to higher education
 - More likely to be employed
 - Higher earnings throughout life
 - More likely to achieve housing stability
 - More likely to achieve life-long stability
 - Less likely to be homeless, incarcerated & drug-addicted

The Law

- Pennsylvania State Laws:
 - Chapter 4 (Regulation § 4.24)
 - Chapter 12 and 13
 - Chapter 14
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- U.S. Constitution & PA Constitution
 - Equal Protection & Due Process

The Law

- Under the Public School Code, the State Board of Education has longstanding authority to establish state graduation requirements.
- On January 8, 2010, the State Board of Education promulgated new high school graduation requirements under state law to ensure that students beginning with the class of 2015 meet state standards. For more information re Keystone exam: http://static.pdesas.org/Content/Documents/Pennsylvania_Graduation_Requirements_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf

A. Child Attends School Regularly

- The **greatest predictor of dropping out**. By 9th grade, missing 20% of school is a better predictor of dropping out than test scores.
- **Chronic absence** (missing 10 % of school days) in kindergarten is associated with significantly lower academic performance in 1st grade.
- **Children who missed the first day** on average missed 18 days (double the number of 1st day attendees).

Non-Attendance: Some Causes

- Academically adrift: Needs remedial help in reading and math
- Unidentified Special Ed Needs: High rates of dyslexia & other learning disabilities
- Social issues: Family issues, community issues
- Cultural issues: Including negative attitudes toward school or teachers
- Individual Issues: Bullying, lack of connection etc.

What You Should Know: Right to a Public Education in PA

- All children have the right to attend public school in PA from:
 - **Age 6** (possibly younger) until
 - **High school graduation** or until the end of the school term in which the child turns **21** (whichever comes first).
- A child still has a right to attend school if:
 - She previously dropped out, has passed the GED Tests, or is not “on time” to graduate;
 - Lives without the support of parents;
 - Does not have legal status as a U.S. citizen.

Compulsory School Age: When Children Must Attend School

- Children must attend school or participate in an approved education program from age 8* (or 1st grade, if earlier) until reaching age 17.
 - *Age 6 in Philadelphia
- Enrolling a child in a neighborhood school, a charter school, cyber charter school, a licensed private school, or an approved homeschooling program satisfies the school attendance requirement.
- “Work Release” Exception.
 - Student must be 16 and regularly employed.
- A few other exceptions.

Definition of Truancy

- State law does not specifically define “truancy.”
- PDE has said truancy is any unexcused absence from compulsory school attendance.
- However, a formal response isn’t triggered until a student has **three (3) unlawful absences** over the course of a school year.
- Lack of statewide definition makes it that much more important for districts to have **clear written policies regarding absences** that are applied consistently and for districts to inform parents on **ongoing basis** about what is expected of them.

When Can A School Take Action? Habitual Truancy Defined

- The term “habitually truant” is defined as absence for more than three (3) school days or their equivalent **following the first notice of truancy.**
- Habitual truancy is the term used to trigger several different types of consequences under the School Code and the Juvenile Act.

Three Unlawful Absences in a School Year: The Trigger

- School district must send parent written notice after 3rd unlawful absence by certified mail. Attached to notice should be penalties for violation of compulsory attendance policies.
- Upon the 3rd unlawful absence, PDE recommends districts hold a school/family conference to discuss the cause of the child's truancy and develop a **Truancy Elimination Plan**. See **Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan BEC**.

The Truancy Elimination Plan

- The Truancy Elimination Plan (TEP)
 - Developed cooperatively through school-family conference
 - Purpose of conference is to discuss the cause(s) of the truancy & to develop a mutually agreed upon plan to assure regular school attendance
 - Need to identify, understand, and explore ALL issues contributing to truant behavior
 - Results in an “individualized” plan of action

Addressing Attendance

- Talk with child and current caretaker about importance of school attendance and consequences of truancy
- Contact school social worker/guidance counselor in school to discuss the underlying causes of truancy (bullying, spec ed)
- Work with school to develop a truancy elimination plan
- Refer child to a mentoring program – preferably within the school – to provide support to child within school
- Refer child to an afterschool program or other program that “attaches” child to school and helps improve school attendance
- Refer family to Children, Youth and Families Truancy Prevention Program to help improve school attendance

B. Child is placed at appropriate grade level for age/development

- Child's age
- Educational history
- Current skill level in core areas (RL & Math)
- Ability to make progress in current grade
- Age-appropriate
- Developmentally appropriate
 - Socially and emotionally
- Least restrictive placement

What to Do If Child is in the “Wrong” Class

- Encourage the parent/guardian to contact the school counselor or principal with you to discuss why school believes current grade level placement is appropriate
- Consider contacting the school social worker/guidance counselor to discuss need for testing to determine the child’s gaps
- Review student's courses with school
- Develop a plan for promotion or graduation

C. Is the Child making progress?

- On grade level in reading & math
- Scoring proficient on PSSAs?
- Grades of C or better in subjects
- On track for promotion
- On track for graduation
- **Passing Keystone Exams or other local assessment**

What is the PSSA?

- The Pennsylvania System of School Assessment or PSSA, measures how well students have achieved in reading, mathematics, science and writing.
- Score options: Advanced, Proficient, Basic & Below Basic
- Test scores are used to determine whether school is making AYP – adequate yearly progress.

What is AYP?

- According to ***No Child Left Behind Act***, ALL students must be 100% proficient in reading and math by 2014. (PA now seeking Waiver)
- AYP is the measure to assess progress towards that goal.
- The PA state goals for this 2011-12:
 - 78-81% = proficient or higher in Reading & Math
 - Statewide, 94 percent of the 500 districts made progress targets, but only 46.9 percent made it based on student performance. (Safe Harbor)

What to do if Child is NOT making progress

- Identify any “gaps” in the child’s academic history? (e.g., no algebra in 9th grade)
- Does the child need remedial help?
- Should the child be evaluated for a specific learning disability or other disability?
- Does the child need accommodations for a disability in school? Are there ELL issues?
- Does the child need a behavior plan in school?

What You Should Know About ELL

- English Language Learners have a legal right to:
 - Complete a “home language survey”
 - Be tested to determine ability level
 - School MUST adjust a student’s classes and accommodate them for tests AND evaluate a student’s progress on an ongoing basis.
 - Receive ESL (English as a Second Language): PDE guidelines state that a child should receive 2-3hrs (no English); 2hrs (beginner); 1-1.5 hrs (intermediate) and 1 hr (advanced)

What to do if Child is NOT making progress

- Encourage parent/guardian to contact main teacher to discuss lack of progress and child's specific issues in school.
- Contact the school guidance counselor about the availability of programs and interventions within the school to help the child make academic progress
- Schedule conference with school officials to discuss available and appropriate remedial services within the school.

D. Child needs remedial help

- Refer the child to tutoring or other remedial program to help child achieve academic progress.
- Talk to school about what the child needs to do at home to reinforce and build skills.
- Ask about the availability of remedial on-line programs
- Consider summer school options

Remedial Services



- **Title I Schools & Set Asides**
- **Educational Assistance Program**: Provides extended learning opportunities and is designed to boost student achievement and help all students succeed.
- **Supplemental Educational Services**: This is a federal program that offers tutoring to eligible individuals.
Eligibility: K – 9th grade who
 - Score at “basic” or “below basic” on the PSSA or
 - In the bottom half on a state-approved test
- **Local School District**: Check with your local school districts to see if they offer a tutoring program to their students.

E. Credit Issues

- Child should receive all credits earned for classes successfully completed (applies only to students in grades 9-12)
- Credit for classes attended in residential placement, JJ placement, boot camp, while on homebound instruction etc.
- Independent study option
- Are other credits required?

Credit & Diploma Issues

All credits earned in a public school MUST be accepted by another public school. See 22 PA Code §4.24

Waivers may be granted to accommodate students who experience extenuating circumstances (including serious illness, death in immediate family, family emergency, frequent transfers in schools, or transfer from an out-of-State school in 12th grade). 22 Pa. Code § 4.24(j) (emphasis added).



Waivers will be based upon receipt of a written request from school district superintendent for good cause shown.

Credit Issues: What to Do

- Review the education records with the child, parent/guardian, and school to ensure that the credits were accurately counted
- Encourage the parent/guardian to contact the school guidance counselor to find out reason child did not receive all credits earned
- Ask about on-line & licensed software credit recovery programs such as ***PLATO, CADI & Keystone.***
- Consider waiver options for specific subjects

F. Securing H.S. Diploma or GED

- Encourage youth to stay in school even if
 - over-aged and under-credited
 - not sure they will be able to graduate
 - have dropped out
 - have re-engaged several times
 - plan to take the GED.

What You Should Know: Graduation Requirements in PA

- H.S. Graduation requirements are determined by each school district = 500 different requirements (may vary by school)
- Promotion requirements may vary as well
- Children receiving special education services may graduate through their IEP goals as set by IEP Team and continue in school
- **The Future: High Stakes Keystone Exams**

New Path to Graduation

- **COMPLETION OF COURSES & GRADES**
- **COMPLETION OF CULMINATING SENIOR PROJECT**
- **PROFICIENCY IN EACH STATE STANDARD – Common Core State Standards (Reading, Writing and Math)**
- **AND.....**

NEW Keystone Exam Standard

School district graduation policies must also include at least ONE of the following:

- State-developed Keystone Exam Counting as at Least 33% of Course Grade **OR**
- Independently-validated Local Assessment **OR**
- Keystone Exam as a Stand-alone Graduation Requirement **OR**
- Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) Exam

http://static.pdesas.org/Content/Documents/Pennsylvania_Graduation_Requirements_Frequently_Asked_Questions.pdf

NEW Graduation Requirements

- Common assessment will produce exams in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math ONLY; these exams are not scheduled to be implemented until 2014-2015;
- Keystone Exams will cover **10 core academic subjects**: Algebra I, Algebra II, Biology, Chemistry, Civics and Government, English Composition, Geometry, Literature, U.S. History, World History and ***begins with class of 2015.***
- OR school districts may use independently-validated local assessment.

What to Do: Graduation

- Determine WHAT school youth will graduate from – particularly child in residential placement.
- Encourage caretaker to contact the school social worker/guidance counselor to discuss the youth’s “graduation plan”
- Ensure all credits are on the student’s record
- Ensure that youth will complete senior project.
- Determine whether youth with an IEP will graduate through IEP goals.

Other Paths to Graduation

Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma is a secondary school credential available to PA residents who do not possess a high school diploma & meet criteria specified in 22 PA Code Section 4.72 in either of the following ways:

(1) Applicant is a resident of Pennsylvania, does not possess a high school diploma & completes a minimum of one full year or 30 credits at an accredited institution of postsecondary education.

(2) Applicant is a resident of Pennsylvania, does not possess a high school diploma, is **not enrolled** in a public, licensed private, registered accredited or licensed nonpublic secondary school and **has earned a passing score on the GED Tests.**

F. Obtaining a GED

- It is NOT an easy test
- Determine what youth needs to study
- Take GED prep courses
- Practice tests are a worthwhile investment
- Test can be taken in “phases” – sections
- Study and do not presume you can pass

GED Eligibility: Age 18 or older

- If you are 18 years old or older, you must meet the following criteria:
- Resident of PA
- Have not graduated from high school or received a high school diploma or equivalency certificate
- NOT enrolled in a public, licensed private, registered accredited, or licensed nonpublic secondary school

GED Eligibility: Age 16 or 17

- If you are 16 or 17 years of age, you must meet the above criteria AND
- Provide written verification from your school superintendent or principal stating that you are withdrawn from school AND
- Provide a letter from ONE of the following stating that GED is necessary: Employer; College; Armed Services; state institution where you are a patient or inmate;

GED Eligibility: Age 16 or younger

- Persons 16 years old and older who are under the direction of correctional facilities or parole/probation offices are eligible to take the GED Tests while enrolled in school, if so ordered by a court.
- No persons under the age of 16 are eligible to take the GED Tests in Pennsylvania.

Passing the GED: Score Required

- Pennsylvania requires a passing score of 2250 total points on all five GED tests.
- Each test score can be no lower than 410 points. If you receive at least 410 on each of the five tests but do not receive a total score of 2250, you may retest on any of the tests to achieve the points necessary for a 2250 total score.

Passing the GED: YES - Retesting Allowed

- Applicants may retest any test they don't pass.
- Applicant may take each test only three times a year because there are only three different forms of the tests.
- Discretion of the Chief Examiner to determine frequency of retesting. Applicants should attend GED preparation classes prior to retesting.

Obtaining GED Diploma

- Pennsylvania Department of Education issues a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma based on GED
- One per customer; Duplicates are not issued.
- Transcripts are issued with diplomas and can be reissued upon request.
- Candidates who take the GED Tests before turning 18 years old will be issued diploma ***on their 18th birthday.***

Key Points to Remember

- Progress towards graduation begins with consistent attendance.
- Identify if a child has any gaps in schooling that may be impacting her now and address those gaps.
- Ensure the child receives remedial assistance.
- Know the graduation requirements for each school.
- Ensure students receive credit for coursework
- Support a child to access credit recovery programs as needed.
- Consider whether child should seek a credit waiver – even of a core requirement.
- Know the test requirements – Keystone exams, etc.

Links & Resources

- **Basic Education Circulars – PDE**

- **[Compulsory Attendance and Truancy Elimination Plan](#)**

- http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/purdon's_statutes/7503/compulsory_attendance_and_truancy_elimination_plan/507353

- **[Educating English Language Learners](#)**

- [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pa_codes/7501/educating_students_with_limited_english_proficiency_\(lep\)_and_english_language_learners_\(ell\)/507356](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/pa_codes/7501/educating_students_with_limited_english_proficiency_(lep)_and_english_language_learners_(ell)/507356)

- **[GED & Secondary School Certificates](#)**

- [http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/ged%C2%AE_learner_information/9084/ged_information_and_faq_\(frequently_asked_questions\)/522864](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/ged%C2%AE_learner_information/9084/ged_information_and_faq_(frequently_asked_questions)/522864)

- **[Keystone Exams](#)**

- <http://www.pdesas.org/module/assessment/Keystone.aspx>



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