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Keystone Exam Info for Parents

Reports from my middle school parents at last week's back-to-school nights were that the Keystone Exams are resulting in a great deal of confusion. Here is a quick explanation you can use with your parents, and the link to the two page informational piece might prove useful for parents looking for extra details.

The Keystone Exams are end-of-course tests designed by the state of Pennsylvania to check that all students are proficient in certain subject areas. Over the summer it was announced that beginning with this school year, the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams will replace the 11th grade PSSA tests in math, reading, and science.

All students in grade 11 will take the Algebra I, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams this year. It is quite possible that your child took either Algebra 1, Literature or Biology in a previous school year, even as long ago as 7th grade in the case of Algebra 1. While it is confusing to think the students are being tested on a class from an earlier year, this situation will only happen during this first year of testing. From this year forward, all students in any grade level enrolled in Biology, Literature or Algebra 1 will take the Keystone that year at the conclusion of the course. The exam will count towards their 11th grade testing requirements.

To summarize, this year all 11th graders will be tested in Biology, Algebra 1 and Literature. Students in other grades who are enrolled in Biology, Literature or Algebra 1 will also be tested. Finally, the class of 2017, this year's 8th graders, will be required to pass the Algebra 1, Literature, and Biology Keystone Exams in order to graduate. Students in earlier years will be tested but are not required to pass in order to graduate. The link below contains additional information on the Keystone Exams.

http://static.pdesas.org/Content/Documents/Information_for_Parents_or_Guardians_PA_Keystone_Exams_Aug_2012_final.pdf

Ideas for Regional Meetings

What topics are on your mind this year? What information can we provide to you? If you have ideas for topics for our regional meetings, please send them to me at kare.....

What's happening in Chicago won't stay in Chicago

The teacher's strike in Chicago will end, but the headlines and news stories about the strike will linger in the nation's memory. Please take some time and read the articles on the strike I have included below, or others you may come across. For me, there are two key points to remember which will color our work going forward. The first is that unfortunately for teachers everywhere, the Chicago teachers were negotiating for a 16% raise. This seems huge in the middle of a recession with high unemployment. The teachers were seeking compensation to cover a lengthened school day and school year, but this fact is not widely known. I think the second main point is that teachers were also protesting against conditions in school that no child should be in, such as 43 students in a kindergarten class and dilapidated, unsafe buildings. Much commentary on the strike said the teachers "only cared about themselves," yet they are receiving support from many parents in Chicago schools, which demonstrates the parents feel the teachers care about their children.

I bring up these points not to encourage you to "take a side," but just to encourage you to be an informed leader in your school community. The strike could serve as a discussion item for parent groups or perhaps even for high school students. It's a learning opportunity. We will never improve our schools if we don't tackle the difficult issues, encourage our communities to look at an issue from all sides and provide a sounding board. Unlike Vegas, what is happening in Chicago won't stay in Chicago, and has likely left a bad impression about public schools on someone living in your community right now.

Scholarships from eschoolview

Scholarships for high school graphic design, web design, and other art majors are now available from eSchoolView through a Web Design Contest. A total of eight scholarships will be given ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000. You can find out more from eSchoolView at www.eschoolview.com/scholarships. The deadline is February 1, 2013.

Membership Renewal

It's membership renewal time. Please click here for a form.

The Pennsylvania Administrator

There's an article in the September 2012 issue of *The Pennsylvania Administrator* about community engagement during difficult times. It mentions PenSPRA. Unfortunately the magazine is not online for easy forwarding but I've included a PDF here

News From Around the State and Nation

School districts are reimbursed for 50% of the cost of providing state mandated pensions. However, school districts are currently required to use 100% of the pension cost in the charter school calculation. There is a double-dip in the charter school funding formula since charter schools are also provided 50% reimbursement for their pension costs. Several state educational organizations drafted this letter to Education Secretary Tomalis and Governor Corbett on this issue.

http://www.pasbo.org/15Jun2012_Tomalis_Corbett_final.pdf

A journalist gives his view of when school PR is necessary and helpful.

<http://readingeagle.com/article.aspx?id=414586>

Teacher evaluation is a major sticking point in the Chicago teacher strike. Here's an article that supports the teacher's concerns.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/why-rahm-emanuel-and-the-new-york-times-are-wrong-about-teacher-evaluation/2012/09/12/d0c53044-fce7-11e1-a31e-804fccb658f9_blog.html

Another take on the Chicago teacher's strike. As PR professionals, we need to look at all sides of this issue.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/18/opinion/nocera-how-to-fix-the-schools.html?_r=1&hp

An interesting read on a teacher evaluation system that is working in Maryland.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/06/education/06oneducation.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all