

2025-2026 Winter Wave Biology Keystone Guidance

Because this is the first operational year of STEELS-aligned testing, the Winter keystones will be aligned to the old (legacy) science standards, and the Spring keystones will be aligned to the new STEELS standards. The overlap exists because the new test being implemented is based on field-testing data from last spring, and the process of finalizing the test takes time. Additionally, PDE can't set official cut-points for proficiency (and basic, advanced, and below) on the new STEELS tests until Summer 2026, after the Spring tests are complete. If we'd chosen to give a STEELS test in Winter, students wouldn't receive scores for those tests until Fall 2026. We felt that, of the two less-than-ideal options on the table, giving a legacy test in the Winter and providing scores by Spring was the better.

In the case of a Biology course in 2025-26 offered through block scheduling, schools should consider how they might best align the standards to their instruction. Students in first-semester course, testing in the winter, may continue to be instructed through legacy standards. Second-semester students testing in the spring should receive instruction aligned to the STEELS standards. Because keystones are subject specific, the core Biology content is relatively consistent. Yearlong courses with testing in the spring should be aligned to the new STEELS standards.