

# FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

for further information:

Jesse Mermell (617) 864-4810

or Bob Schaeffer (239) 395-6773

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## **PA LEGISLATORS URGED TO BAR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION TESTS; REFORM LEADERS TO TESTIFY “EXIT EXAMS CREATE MORE HARM THAN GOOD,” FAIL TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR UNDERSERVED STUDENTS**

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest), the country’s leading assessment reform organization, is calling on Pennsylvania legislators to prohibit the State Board of Education from requiring students to pass a test or series of exams in order to receive a high school diploma. In testimony scheduled for delivery to the Pennsylvania General Assembly’s Senate Education Committee on Wednesday, May 14, FairTest Policy Analyst Lisa Guisbond concludes, “More than two decades of evidence demonstrates that high school graduation tests are the wrong prescription for what ails public education.”

Guisbond will explain that exit exams fail to address the serious problems many Pennsylvania public schools face, noting, “Pennsylvania, like most states, has gaps in educational access, quality and outcomes. But exit exams won’t cure these ills. For too many students, the cure is worse than the diseases. Rather than provide better education and expanded opportunities, graduation tests add punishment – denial of a diploma – to those who most need help.”

The FairTest testimony includes data from Texas and California, where dropout rates rose after those states adopted high school exit exams. It also argues that high-stakes testing “undermines rather than improves education. Untested subjects are ignored, while tested topics narrow to test coaching programs. Since these tests are mostly multiple-choice, students focus on rote learning to identify correct answers instead of learning to think and apply their knowledge.”

In Massachusetts, whose exit exam test proponents frequently praise, dropouts increased among minority and limited English proficient students after an exit exam requirement was adopted, according to statistics provided by FairTest. The problem was particularly severe in low-income urban districts, such as Boston. FairTest’s national headquarters is in Massachusetts.

As an alternative to the proposed graduation testing mandate, FairTest is calling on Pennsylvania to follow the lead of states such as Rhode Island and Wyoming, which use multiple measures to award diplomas. “Other states have avoided the exit exam route specifically because they recognized the costs can outweigh the benefits . . . We would be pleased to work with you and Pennsylvania educators, parents and citizens to craft a different approach to graduation, one that would rely on local determinations of adequate achievement but that would establish methods to ensure the quality of the local determinations,” the FairTest testimony states.

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- The complete FairTest testimony to the Pennsylvania legislature is online at <http://www.fairtest.org>