



Chairman Hite, Vice Chair Sykes, and Members of the Finance - Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee:

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony to this subcommittee. My name is Jeanne Melvin, and I am a retired public school teacher and president of *Public Education Partners*, a statewide advocacy group for public school districts and the children and families that they serve.

The Board of *Public Education Partners* is strongly opposed to tying high school graduation to state-mandated standardized tests. Because the Ohio General Assembly created these new graduation requirements in 2014, one third of Ohio's Class of 2018 is now at risk of not receiving a high school diploma, and the percentage of non-graduates could reach 60-70 percent in urban areas.

We can all agree that those projected percentages are unacceptable.

High school exit exams tie standardized test scores to high school diplomas, but unfortunately, they can push students who miss the mark out of school into the streets, the unemployment lines, and the prisons. There are no federal regulations that require tying graduation to standardized tests - Ohio is one of only 13 states that mandate high school exit exams. In the last few years, 10 states have repealed high school exit exams. California, Georgia, South Carolina, and Arizona even decided to issue high school diplomas retroactively to thousands of students who had previously been awarded "certificates of participation" because of their scores on state tests.

According to the *National Center for Fair & Open Testing (FairTest)*, exit exams deny diplomas to tens of thousands of U.S. students each year, regardless of whether they have stayed in school, completed other high school graduation requirements, and demonstrated competency in other ways. A review by the *National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences* concluded that high school graduation tests have done nothing to improve student achievement but have raised the dropout rate. These tests give some students, who have worked hard, played by the rules, and stayed in school, the status of high school dropouts with the same barriers to future opportunities.

Adults without diplomas earn less, are less likely to be employed or have a stable family, and are more likely to be imprisoned, as exemplified by the phrase "the school-to-prison pipeline."

Test defenders claim that end-of-course tests will benefit students with disabilities, English language learners, African American, Latino, and low-income students, but those children are more likely to be denied a diploma for not passing the tests. Test supporters say the exit exams “give value” to a diploma, but the research shows the opposite is true. Advocates of this test and punish system also insist that the assessments bring “increased rigor,” but no evidence proves that an increase in assessments can improve student performance.

A student’s transcript, not a test score, is what makes a high school diploma “worth more than the paper it’s printed on,” and it gives the most reliable picture of a student’s readiness for college and career. Two major studies confirmed that high school grades are much stronger predictors of undergraduate performance than are standardized test scores. The High School GPA remains the best predictor of college success.

Test scores should be only one part of a student’s high school record that includes credits earned, courses taken, activities, service, attendance, projects, and other indicators of academic accomplishment. Requirements for earning a diploma should be based on evaluation by local school district educators who know the student best - not on state “cut scores.”

The 23-member graduation work group recommended that the Class of 2018 students who passed their required courses and took all seven state tests, regardless of score, could graduate if they met at least two of the six other requirements the committee created, and the State Board of Education concurred with its recommendations.

The Ohio House chose not to address the pending graduation crisis in its recent budget amendments, so *Public Education Partners* is respectfully requesting that your committee figure out a way to do what’s right for Ohio’s high school students who are at risk of not receiving a diploma.

Please add specific provisions to HB 49 to give the class of 2018 a safe harbor for high school graduation, and then encourage your colleagues to join you in the process of eliminating state-mandated exit testing as a high school graduation requirement for the class of 2019 and beyond.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Board of *Public Education Partners*.

Jeanne Melvin

President – *Public Education Partners*

