

To: All State Policymakers in both the Pennsylvania House & Senate

From: Kim Geyer of Mars Research & Retrieval Services, www.marsrrservices.com

Date: December 30, 2008

Re: "Achieve Now Advises State Policymakers to Move Away from Graduation Exit Exams"

Here's some facts to help you determine WHY Pennsylvania should no longer invest time and/or resources into an education policy no longer advised by the original organization promoting it.

Fact One:

There are two recent reports in which Achieve, Inc. and The Education Trust (both Washington D.C. education reform organizations) call for a policy shift advisement to states to take immediate notice....

"Measures to Matter" and "Transforming Statewide High School Assessment Systems: A Guide for State Policymakers" now instructs and recommends to states **in the American Diploma Project network, to which there are approximately 34 states now standardized with mandated graduation exit exams, "to adopt high school assessment systems that rely on a combination of statewide and local measures and do not require students to pass a high-stakes test or tests in order to graduate."**

Fact Two: Pennsylvania became a member of the American Diploma Network as early as 2005. Pennsylvania's State American Diploma Project Action Team (ADP Team) includes key officials from the Governor's office, the General Assembly K-12 and higher education, business officials, and the State Board of Education. Team Leader is Donna Cooper, Dr. Gerald Zavorchak, Representative Dwight Evans, Dr. Judy Hample, Daniel Fogarty, and Karl Girton, who may now be replaced., Dr. Lori Shorr, and members of the Governor's Commission on College and Career Success.

Fact Three: Pennsylvania, as of this date, has no publicly endorsed these reports previously mentioned above or announced any change to its current agenda for implementing Graduation Competency Assessments.

Fact Four: Achieve notes in their report "that it would be unfortunate if states simply layer more tests on top of existing tests." They go on to emphasis that testing should be streamlined within the system. They suggest the goal should not be more testing, but, smarter testing.

Fact Five: Achieve's own words **“Given the current state of student readiness and school capacity, virtually NO STATE is in a position to insist that all students hit the college and career ready level of performance on these tests to earn a high school diploma in the next few years.”**

Fact Six: Achieve's own words again: **“Rather than requiring students to pass college and career ready tests for graduation, states should consider attaching positive incentives.”**

Fact Seven: Achieve's own recommendation suggests: **“States should take responsibility to ensure that all schools and districts have access to at least one full set of high quality interim assessments. (ONE FULL SET) Districts should be free to use their own if they are of high quality.”**

Fact Eight: Achieve recommends that states and districts should collaborate to identify tests that can be eliminated because they serve similar purposes or provide similar information.

With this in mind, we come to....

Fact Nine: Pennsylvania has reported to Achieve that they hope to implement End of Course Tests in place in the next several years....that would likely be, the ten series graduation competency assessment plan in which students can take at any point in high school. Yet, according to “Pennsylvania’s State Plan for the American Diploma Network” under the subsection “Summary of State ADP Action Plan” the Pennsylvania Department of Education is moving the agenda of several areas including that of **“working with some sectors on plans to use the PSSA for placement.”**

I mention this, for the simple fact, that if this is part of the ADP State Plan (a public document) and the Governor’s administration attempts to proceed forth with the Graduation Competency Assessment model as currently planned and in the event, as suggested by Achieve, Inc. someone thinks for a moment, the PSSA, will be diminished at some point in time or replaced, it appears that would not be the case, if the PDE is working with state system colleges and universities to use the PSSA as a placement exam....so, policymakers need to ask the question, where would the “streamlining” of costs and tests be? The GCA model clearly adds numerous more tests regardless.

Fact Ten: The above facts are excerpts specifically pulled from the Achieve’s report, often in their own words. My only commentary was listed in the paragraph below fact nine. But, don’t take my word for it, if you’re unsure, please take the time to read the report yourself at www.achieve.org/measuresthatmatter.

If I can be of further assistance to you or your caucus in providing you material and/or information, please do not hesitate to contact me at anytime. Thank you!

