

To: All Pennsylvania Legislators in House and Senate

From: Kim Geyer of Mars Research & Retrieval Services, 724-799-1195,
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Date: June 12, 2008

Re: Article from the Los Angeles Times: Authors of Study on High School Exit Exam Release Results Which Question the Wisdom of Investment and Where to Place Investment? I thought with your current budget negotiations on the state budget and our Governor allocating \$15 million for the 2008-09 budget for six new tests for the GCA's, I thought you may find this article as well as study enlightening and applicable to your decision making here in Pennsylvania.

Interestingly enough, it kind of supports that notion that I expressed last August to and when testifying before the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, that if this reform was truly serious and sincere about helping students succeed academically, we'd be holding back those students who initially take the PSSA in the third grade and who do not pass with proficiency... in lieu of waiting until the 11th grade to remediate and create a climate which has frustrated students who are demoralized from numerous remedial efforts and numerous test taking opportunities in an effort to graduate from high school.

But, as you and I both know, this isn't about doing what's right for education or our students or schools.....this reform is motivated by self serving political interests and agendas.

Please feel free to pass onto those who may benefit from this information. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at anytime.

Sincerely,
Kim Geyer

Students likely to fail high school exit exam can be identified as early as 4th grade, study says

The authors use the findings to question the wisdom of spending millions to tutor older students struggling with the test.

By Seema Mehta, Los Angeles Times Staff Writer
June 11, 2008

As early as fourth grade, students who will be at risk of failing the high school exit exam -- a state requirement to earn a diploma -- can be identified based on grades, classroom behavior and test scores, according to a new study released Tuesday.

The findings, based on an extensive study of student achievement in San Diego schools, call into question the effectiveness of aiming significant efforts and tens of millions of dollars at struggling high school seniors and older students to help them pass the exam.

"From a political standpoint, such spending seems necessary. However, our results strongly suggest that these 11th-hour interventions by themselves are unlikely to yield the intended results," according to the report by the Public Policy Institute of California.

Instead, the authors suggested, "moving a portion of these tutoring dollars to struggling students in earlier grades -- when the students are still in school -- could be a wise choice. An ounce of prevention could indeed be worth a pound of cure."

Assemblyman Pedro Nava (D-Santa Barbara), who wrote **legislation that provides more than \$72 million annually for two years to tutor seniors who couldn't pass the exam,** said it would be unfair to reduce support for older students to pay for increased support for younger ones.

"I suppose they should sit down with the parents of these kids who are looking at failing the [exit] exam and persuade these parents that they don't need the money," Nava said. "Inherent in the conclusion of the report is that education needs help at all levels. We shouldn't be put in a position where we are pitting the outcomes of seniors against the future of preschoolers. That makes no sense."

State Supt. of Public Instruction Jack O'Connell said school districts ought to have greater flexibility in how they spend such funds.

"We need to have comprehensive intervention and not wait till 12th grade," he said.

Additionally, he said, the study underscored the need for universal preschool, as well as expanding the state's class-size reduction efforts.

The exit exam was created by state legislators in an effort to standardize the achievement of high school graduates across the state's 1,053 school districts. Students in the class of 2006 were the first who were required to pass the exam to receive diplomas.

From their sophomore through senior years, students have six chances to

take the exam, which includes math and English. **Students must score at least 55% on the math portion, which is eighth-grade level, and 60% on the English part, which is ninth- or 10th-grade level.** More than 93% of students pass the exam by the end of their senior year.

Educators said the study results are buttressed by earlier research that shows early academic achievement, **the mastering of basic math skills and reading comprehension, is a building block for future success.**

"We've recognized for a long time that performance in the earlier grades is one of the best indicators of success later in school and in life," said Chris Eftychiou, spokesman for the Long Beach Unified School District.

At Pasadena High School, guidance counselor Allison Steppes said she worried that social promotion and lack of parental involvement led to some students passing through elementary schools without mastering basic skills.

"I don't think we're doing enough at the elementary stages because it's ridiculous to get to 12th grade, take the [exit exam] six times and still not pass it," she said.

But she questioned the validity of a student retaking the test after failing it half a dozen times. **Steppes said she advised students who repeatedly failed the exam but finished 12th grade to get their high school degree at a community college, which does not require students to pass the exam.**

"I want the student to move on with life," she said.

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