

# POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

## Sensible graduation rules

Pennsylvania's Constitution grants the General Assembly power to make rules and regulations that lower-order governments like cities, townships, boroughs and school districts must follow.

Pandering legislators trying to please this or that interest group are constantly coming up with new rules and regulations for school districts to implement, no matter how costly or impractical.

Among the constantly moving targets school districts are expected to hit are testing and graduation requirements.

For years, at the high school level, juniors were required to take PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessments) tests in math and reading. In the 2012-2013 school year, these PSSAs were replaced by Keystone exams in Algebra I, Literature and Biology.

As of 2017, a student had to pass all three to graduate. No exceptions. It didn't matter what else you knew or didn't know. You had to pass the test or go through a complicated "project-based assessment" regimen to get a diploma.

And that was just the beginning. Our no-nonsense legislators were going to add more mandated tests in the coming years, including by 2021 Geometry, U.S. History, Algebra II, Chemistry and World History.

But shortly after the state established this requirement, it delayed implementation, twice, until (now) the 2019-2020 school year, while the Department of Education investigates alternatives to the Keystones.

The first alternative, passed last year, allows students in career and technology programs to graduate without having to pass Keystones.

Now, legislation to be introduced in the Senate will allow all students

to graduate without having to pass Keystones.

As Chris Camisac reports for Capitolwire, the new legislation "makes the Keystone Exams mostly irrelevant, as it seeks to allow students to both meet



Commentary by  
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local grade-based requirements and demonstrate competency through completion of one of several pathways: passing all three Keystone Exams; passing a variety of alternate assessments (such as a subject-

specific advanced placement, international baccalaureate, or an armed services vocational aptitude test), gaining acceptance in

a registered apprenticeship program after graduation, or attainment of a career readiness certificate (for career and technical education students); or presenting at least three approved pieces of "rigorous and compelling" evidence relating to a student's postsecondary or career objectives that reflect readiness for graduation."

Both the Pennsylvania School Boards Association and the Pennsylvania State Education Association have endorsed the proposals, and rightfully so.

The ivory tower theorists who come up with all these "make-or-break" tests claim they're reforming education, but all they're doing is wasting time and money as districts react to ever changing rules.

Standardized tests are a valid measure of some kinds of achievement, but not others.

Vitally important qualities such as the ability to think creatively, work with others, and solve problems in real world situations cannot be quantified in a paper or computer exam.

If we believe local school districts are best qualified to make educational decisions, that should include the flexibility to set graduation requirements.



Members of the Pottstown High School Class of 2017 at graduation.