



**Pennsylvania  
Partnerships for Children**

Joan L. Benso, *President and CEO*

Michael J. Breslin, *Chair of the Board*

116 Pine Street, Suite 430 – Harrisburg, PA 17101-1244

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kathy Geller Myers  
717-236-5680  
717-903-3716 (cell)  
[kgmyers@papartnerships.org](mailto:kgmyers@papartnerships.org)

**Graduation Requirements in Pennsylvania Fail Students  
*Proposed New Statewide Assessment Would Create Greater Accountability*  
PPC Urges PA to Make Diplomas Count for all Youth**

**(HARRISBURG), Sept. 5, 2007** – In “Ensuring Success for All High School Graduates,” Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today recommended that the Commonwealth take steps to assure that all Pennsylvania high school graduates have the academic foundation they need by improving our statewide accountability system. PPC urges the Commonwealth to develop and require that every student take a series of statewide end-of-course exit exams called Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) that are aligned to state standards in English/language arts, math, science and social studies to graduate from high school. The proposal should be phased in by 2014.

One of the requirements to graduate from public high school in Pennsylvania is that students must demonstrate achievement of the state standards either by scoring proficient or advanced on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA *or* a local school district assessment that is aligned to the state standards. **In 2006, 45 percent of public high school seniors (nearly 57,000 students) who graduated in Pennsylvania did not score proficient on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade reading and math PSSAs or 12<sup>th</sup> grade re-take, or did not take the PSSAs – yet received high school diplomas based on local assessments.** The report shows that 461 of Pennsylvania’s 498 school districts that awarded high school diplomas in 2006 graduated at least 20 percent *more* students than scored proficient on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSAs and 12<sup>th</sup> grade re-take.

The report concludes that the state has a responsibility to ensure that all high school students receive a diploma that confirms their achievement to the state standards and creates the same opportunity for all students everywhere to be successful.

“Pennsylvania is a state with a long history of local control over education matters, but we have an obligation to our youth to take steps to assure that all students have met the Pennsylvania academic standards which prepare them for the next phase of their lives,” said Joan L. Benso, President and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC). “The disparity between graduation rates and performance on PSSAs is cause for alarm.”

(MORE)

ADD-1

To ensure students are proficient in the state standards and have the academic requirements they need to be successful in postsecondary education and careers, PPC recommends Pennsylvania eliminate the local assessment option and develop a series of statewide end-of-course high school exit exams, called the Graduation Competency Assessments (GCA). As a prerequisite for graduation, students should be required to take a series of GCAs and demonstrate proficiency on the state standards by either passing the GCAs or by scoring proficient or advanced on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSAs or the 12<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA re-take.

Benefits of the GCA include placing assessments closer to the point of instruction and creating a sense of relevance for testing and progress of all students; assessing smaller bodies of knowledge at one time; allowing students to begin taking the GCAs earlier and having multiple opportunities to retake and pass; and diagnosing specific areas of weakness allowing for targeted remediation.

PPC believes that school districts should be able to decide other graduation requirements such as course requirements, determination of whether students pass courses and other elements such as graduation projects, but that all our youth pass a common set of exams prior to graduation. Replacing the local assessment with GCAs would build common expectations for all youth across the state and create uniform accountability for students in all school districts.

"We need to give kids a chance to achieve to the same high expectations and we believe school districts will rise to the challenge by increasing rigor and improving instruction as part of the reforms necessary to prepare our youth to succeed after high school," Benso said.

"For example, when a student completes Algebra I in one Pennsylvania school district, we have no way to be sure that his or her mastery of those critical math concepts are comparable to a student who has taken Algebra I in another school district," Benso added. "The purpose of the state accountability system should be to assure that all children, regardless of where they attend school, master the core standards."

PPC's report notes that the Commonwealth should take a more comprehensive approach to providing support to students, teachers and school districts by developing a model core curriculum; implementing a sixth and ninth grade intervention system; creating remediation for students who don't pass the GCA; and other reform measures.

Data used in the report shows that 25 states have or are phasing in mandatory high school exit exams which require students pass an exam or series of exams to receive a

(MORE)

ADD-2

high school diploma. By 2012, more than 70 percent of all American public high school students will be required to take and pass one or more exit exams to receive a high school diploma.

More information and a PDF of the report may be obtained by visiting [www.papartnerships.org](http://www.papartnerships.org) or by calling Kathy Geller Myers, PPC Communications Director, at 717-236-5680, [kgmyers@papartnerships.org](mailto:kgmyers@papartnerships.org).

###