



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NEW POLL SHOWS MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS BACK EXIT EXAMS
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children Blasts Opponents for Perpetuating Myths
Survey shows 58 percent of PA residents polled support high school graduation competency assessments as way to ensure college or career readiness

HARRISBURG (May 14, 2008) – Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), an independent, nonprofit children’s advocacy organization, today released poll results from Susquehanna Polling and Research that show a majority of respondents – 58 percent – support proposed high school graduation regulations from the State Board of Education as a way to ensure all high school students graduate with a minimum level of knowledge and skills.

Poll respondents were informed that Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs), scheduled to take effect in 2013-2014, would replace traditional end-of-course final exams and that remediation courses would be required for students who do not pass the tests initially. Despite resolutions from school boards across the Commonwealth opposing GCAs, supporters outnumbered opponents by nearly a 2.5 to 1 margin. Support was equally strong among Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives and voters who are the age of parents with school-age children. The poll was conducted May 1-7 and included 800 registered voters.

When asked if they believed these new regulations would take away local control from school boards, only 24 percent indicated they were opposed to exit exams for this reason.

“Media reports about anti-GCA resolutions being passed by school boards would have us believe the majority of Pennsylvanians do not think GCAs are a good way to prepare our youth for the future, but nothing could be further from the truth,” said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of PA Partnerships for Children. “In fact, a strong majority polled indicated they see the value in making sure high

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school students are prepared for college or career. Opponents to this measure issued a press release yesterday stating the majority of Pennsylvanians polled are opposed to using 'a test' to determine who graduates from high school. Ironically, the pending proposal is not about one test but a series of end-of-course exams that would be administered over a student's high school career.

"This debate has been a very challenging one as well-intentioned people find themselves very divided on the issue at hand," Benso added. "But, consideration of the proposal has been seriously hampered by some misinformation that seems to continue to permeate the debate. All concerned parties should commit to continuing this dialogue in a manner that puts only the interests of Pennsylvania's children first."

Also in the poll, voters were asked this question: *Pennsylvania community colleges widely report that about half of incoming freshmen must take at least one remedial course in math or reading prior to taking college-level courses. Should the state do more to assure that high school graduates are better prepared for college and career?* Eighty-two percent responded favorably and said they agreed the state should do more to assure high school graduates are better prepared for college and career.

In data reported to the PA Department of Education this month by Pennsylvania's 14 community colleges, about 53 percent of first-year community college students (who were 18 to 21 and recently received traditional high school diplomas enrolled this past fall semester) required remediation. This represents more than 15,000 students. Rates of remediation in some schools were well in excess of 50 percent and only four of the 14 community colleges reported a rate of much less than 45 percent.

"We do harm to our students when we allow them to graduate from high school without the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in postsecondary education or the workforce," Benso said. "When students and parents have to pay for non-credit bearing remedial courses in college, it's a waste of time and money for knowledge that should have been gained in high school."

Under current regulations, one of the requirements to graduate from public high school in Pennsylvania is that students must demonstrate achievement of the state standards by scoring proficient or above on the 11th grade Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) or a local assessment that is aligned to the state standards. Thousands of students in Pennsylvania are not doing well on their PSSAs which could spell difficulty in life after high school.

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In 2007, 44 percent of high school students failed to demonstrate proficiency on the PSSA in 11th grade or the 12th grade retake. More than 470 school districts graduated at least 20 percent more than scored proficient or advanced in reading and math.

In January, the State Board of Education adopted proposed changes to the state's high school graduation requirements. The regulations call for the creation of 10 Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) - three in mathematics, two in English/language arts, three in social studies and two in science – and a student would need to pass six to graduate from high school. The GCAs would not necessarily mean more tests for students; in fact, they could replace traditional final exams that high school students take already. The State Board has ensured local flexibility in its proposal by allowing school districts to use any combination of assessment instruments to determine whether their students are proficient in each discipline. In addition to the PSSA and GCAs, districts could use Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) exams, or keep using their own local assessment but have them validated through an independent review.

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Final Top Line Survey Results
PA Partnerships for Children - Spring 2008 Statewide Poll
Sample Size: 800 Registered Voters
Conducted: May 1-7, 2008

INTRODUCTION: We are conducting a survey of attitudes and opinions concerning some important issues facing Pennsylvania today. May we have a few minutes of your time to complete the survey?

Q2. Pennsylvania community colleges widely report that about half of incoming freshmen must take at least one remedial course in math or reading prior to taking college-level courses. Should the state do more to assure that high school graduates are better prepared for college and career?

1. Yes	656	82%
2. No	115	14%
3. Undecided	29	04%

Q3. The state has recently proposed new guidelines that would revise high school graduation requirements to require that high school students meet certain statewide standards to prove they are proficient in basic skills like reading, math, science, writing and social studies in order to graduate. These assessments, scheduled to take effect in 2013, would replace traditional end-of-course final exams, and remediation courses would be required for students who do not pass them in order to graduate. Supporters of these new regulations believe they will help ensure that all students graduate with a minimum level of knowledge and skills, while opponents believe they would take away local control from school districts. (ROTATE ARGUMENTS)

Which viewpoint best represents your own?

1. Support/best way to ensure kids graduate	463	58%
2. Oppose/take away local control	189	24%
3. Undecided	108	13%
4. None/other	39	05%

Now, I just have a few more questions for demographic purposes and we'll be through...

Q4. Are you registered to vote as a Republican, Democrat, Independent or something else?

1. Republican	321	40%
2. Democrat	389	49%
3. Independent/other	71	09%
4. Refuse	20	03%

Q5. What is your approximate age according to the following brackets: 18 - 29, 30 - 44, 45 – 59 or 60 and over?

1. 18-29	29	04%
2. 30-44	143	18%
3. 45-59	324	41%
4. 60+	290	36%
5. Refuse	14	02%

Q6. Do you consider yourself to be conservative or liberal when thinking about your social, economic and political views? (**TEST INTENSITY**)

1. Very conservative	147	18%	Total Conservative: 49%
2. Somewhat conservative	248	31%	
3. Very liberal	75	09%	Total Liberal: 30%
4. Somewhat liberal	168	21%	
5. Moderate	134	17%	
6. Undecided	11	01%	
7. Refuse	17	02%	

Q7. What is the last grade you completed in school? (**DO NOT READ CHOICES**)

1. K-8	3	00%
2. Some high school but did not graduate	13	02%
3. Graduated high school	207	26%
4. Technical or vocational school (2-year degree)	46	06%
5. Some college	134	17%
6. Graduated college (4-year degree)	214	27%
7. Graduate/professional school	169	21%
8. Refuse	15	02%

Q8. Is your main racial heritage of Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian American or another background? (**CHECK ALL THAT APPLY**)

1. Caucasian	709	89%
2. African American	40	05%
3. Hispanic	7	01%
4. Asian or Pacific Islander	7	01%
5. Native American	2	00%
6. Other	16	02%

7. Refuse 23 03%

Q9. What was your total household income for 2007 according to the following income brackets – less than \$15,000, \$15 to \$30,000, \$31 to \$50,000, \$51 to \$75,000, \$76,000 - \$99,000, \$100,000 to \$200,000 or over \$200,000?

1. Less than \$15,000	34	04%
2. \$15,000 - \$30,000	76	09%
3. \$31,000 - \$50,000	148	18%
4. \$51,000 - \$75,000	145	18%
5. \$76,000 – \$99,000	113	14%
6. \$100,000 - \$200,000	122	15%
7. \$200,000+	22	03%
8. Undecided	10	01%
9. Refuse	131	16%

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE SURVEY. HAVE A GOOD DAY.

Gender:

1. Male	384	48%
2. Female	416	52%

Area:

38	(05%)	1. Northwest [Erie, Crawford, Mercer, Venango, Warren, Forest]
83	(10%)	2. Southwest [Lawrence, Beaver, Washington, Greene, Fayette, Westmoreland, Indiana, Armstrong, Butler]
101	(13%)	3. The "T"/Central [Jefferson, Elk, McKean, Cameron, Clarion, Clearfield, Centre, Cambria, Somerset, Bedford, Fulton, Franklin, Huntingdon, Blair, Potter, Tioga, Bradford, Susquehanna, Wyoming, Sullivan, Lycoming, Clinton, Union, Snyder, Northumberland, Montour, Columbia, Mifflin, Juniata]
98	(12%)	4. Northeast/Lehigh Valley [Luzerne, Carbon, Monroe, Schuylkill, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Northampton, Pike, Wayne]
133	(17%)	5. South Central [Perry, Cumberland, Adams, York, Lancaster, Lebanon, Dauphin, Berks]
170	(21%)	6. Southeast [Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Bucks]
87	(11%)	7. Allegheny County
89	(11%)	8. Philadelphia

The margin of error for a sample size of 800 is +/-3.46%
