

Scranton Times

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Stop Senate bid to kill grad tests

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Politicians often know a great deal about cost and little about value. So it is that the state Senate might vote, as early as today, on a foolish bill that would preclude the development of graduation tests that would enhance the value of every public high school diploma issued in Pennsylvania.

The Senate Education Committee voted Monday, 10-1, in favor of a proposal that would prevent the use of state funds to develop graduation tests in 10 subject areas. Exams, covering math, science, English and social studies, would enhance the value of diplomas by ensuring that students actually are competent in the subject areas. All students would have to pass six of the 10 tests in order to receive a diploma.

Such testing also would enhance the accountability of school districts, school administrators, teachers and parents for their roles in education.

One of the rationales for the ill-considered law is that it supposedly would diminish the influence of local school boards. Well, heaven forbid that a student in Scranton or Erie be expected to achieve the same level of competence in a subject as a student in State College or Harrisburg.

The premise on which the Senate Education Committee passed the bill was bogus. Senators claimed more legislative input was needed on the standards. But, unlike the House Education Committee, the Senate panel did not conduct a public hearing to gather the data it claims is necessary. And if the bill passes, it will pre-empt the long and detailed review process now being conducted by the state Board of Education, which also plans hearings — hearings at which the senators themselves are free to testify.

This measure isn't about improving public education in Pennsylvania. It's about individual senators satisfying local political considerations in an election year. When this bill gets to the floor, a majority of senators should vote to enhance the value of diplomas and of education accountability.