



## State should invoke graduation exams

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**The Issue:** A resident asks the Daniel Boone School Board to oppose the establishment of high school graduation tests in Pennsylvania.

**Our Opinion:** Unlike tests designed to evaluate teachers' performances, tests to determine student proficiency would be appropriate.

There seems to be two groups of people in the education community. Both groups are advocating the importance of tests, but their tests are designed for strikingly different purposes. One group, which includes President Bush and all those who support his No Child Left Behind Act, advocate tests to evaluate the performance of teachers in the classroom. The other group, which includes members of the Commission on College and Career Success, a panel of educators, business representatives and advocates appointed by Gov. Ed Rendell, advocate tests to evaluate student proficiency in certain subjects.

In February the commission recommended urging Pennsylvania to require all state high school students to pass a test before they could graduate. Such a test would be similar to the Regents Examinations in New York. As we have said on more than one occasion, testing students to evaluate the proficiency of teachers is a bad idea. Even the best teachers can struggle to meet standards when faced with large class sizes, disinterested students and uninvolved parents.

Testing students before they graduate for proficiency in English, math, writing and perhaps one or two other subjects is a completely different issue. Last week Thomas K. Schadt, a retired teacher, asked the Daniel Boone School Board to oppose the idea of a state proficiency exam.

"I'm worried," Schadt said, "That a high school student with perfect attendance and grades, and never a discipline problem, may not pass a state-required graduation test. Then what about summer, work and college plans." If there were such a student — with perfect attendance and perfect grades but unable to pass a graduation test — that would speak volumes about the state of education in our country today. It would indicate that students — or at least this student — are given inflated grades and passed on to the next grade without having learned the skills they need to enter college or the workforce. Indeed a student who couldn't pass a graduation test would struggle mightily in college, provided he could get admitted.

District Superintendent David H. Robbins expressed frustration with state and federal mandates such as testing, and it is easy to understand his frustration. But also frustrated are business leaders throughout the commonwealth who say they have to teach too many young employees basic skills that they should have learned in high school, if not sooner.

As things stand now in Pennsylvania, students must show they meet state proficiency standards, but they can do so by either scoring proficient or advanced on the 11th grade Pennsylvania System of School Assessment exam or by showing proficiency on an equivalent local assessment.

Members of the state commission said the local provision doesn't assure a statewide graduation standard. The commission members recommended instead that graduation hinge either on scoring proficient or advanced on the 11th-grade test or on passing a collection of state-created tests that would cover math, English, American history, economics and government.