

PA ready@21

NEW POLL SHOWS MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS BACK EXIT EXAMS

In recent days, the State Board of Education published its proposed regulations regarding high school graduation requirements in the Pennsylvania Bulletin, beginning a 30-day public comment period. For months we have heard about a great number of school boards across the state adopting resolutions opposing the proposal. But has anyone asked the public's opinion? We have.

Poll results from Susquehanna Polling and Research that show a majority of respondents – **58 percent** – support proposed 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. Also in the poll, voters were informed that Pennsylvania community colleges report that about half of incoming freshmen must take at least one remedial course in math or reading prior to taking college-level courses. **Eighty-two percent** of respondents 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.

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. 401 school districts graduated at least 30 percent more students than demonstrated proficiency; 280 school districts graduated at least 40 percent more students than demonstrated proficiency; and 148 school districts graduated more than 50 percent more students than demonstrated proficiency.

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The State Board of Education is proposing regulations that would revise high school graduation requirements to establish consistent statewide measurement of the minimum knowledge and skills that a public high school diploma signifies as well as a system of academic supports to help students achieve.

All young people in Pennsylvania should have the opportunity and education to build productive and successful lives for themselves and their families. Pennsylvania should hold all its high school students -- regardless of where they live, their race, income level, or future education or work-related aspirations -- to the same standards and assess them through comparable, validated tools.

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