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Commentary

# Graduation exams a waste

By Lawrence Feinberg

As a third-term school board member, I have followed the debate over proposed state graduation exams closely for the last 18 months. And I can't see how the exams would benefit the students or taxpayers of the school district of Haverford Township, where I serve, or any of the other school districts in Delaware County and the rest of suburban Philadelphia.

The proposed Keystone Graduation Exams would have the state spending about \$200 million in public funds on a program that has no proven benefit for students or taxpayers, even though it has been implemented in 24 states.

It may sound good to trumpet accountability as a reason to support this proposal, but where is the accountability if there are no data showing that the pro-

gram does any good? There are no data demonstrating that students who perform well on high school exit exams go on to perform better in college or the workplace, or that such exams improve education in any way.

It is clear, however, that the exams would provide an enormous benefit to the out-of-state company that would be awarded the \$201 million contract to develop and administer them. The principals of that company have contributed generously to the governor's campaigns.

In a recent letter to the Patriot-News in Harrisburg, State Senate Education Committee Chairman Jeffrey Piccola said: "A number of superintendents from large and small districts statewide have shared their enthusiasm and endorsement for the Keystone Exams."

But after a year and a half of controversy and discussion, only 30 of the state's 500

superintendents signed on to a letter to the legislature supporting the exams. If only 3 of 50 senators supported a proposal, it would not be considered an endorsement.

There is no question that many of our high school students are graduating without the skills they need for college and the workplace. The question is how to best address that shortcoming.

More mandated testing is not the answer. Graduation exams would be an enormous waste of taxpayer dollars that we can ill afford, as well as just plain bad public policy with no basis in research.

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