

**The Patriot News****Raising competency****State's school boards must comprehend that students need to be educated, not just graduated**

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More than 80 school districts in Pennsylvania, including at least four in our region, have voiced opposition to a Rendell administration plan to require students to pass state-approved tests in basic subject matter in order to earn a high school diploma.

And if a school district doesn't feel it can adequately express why it opposes Graduation Competency Assessments, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association has helpfully provided a model resolution to do so. Maybe there should be competency tests for school board members who need a third party to tell them why they don't like something.

It's difficult to believe, given how far American education has gone down the path of standardized testing to appraise student competency, that we would still hear it said that "decades of research show many reasons why standardized paper and pencil test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students." That's part of PSBA's argument in its model resolution.

So are complaints about the cost of implementing the plan, which seems equally absurd, given the amount of funding the administration has provided, and seeks to provide, for basic education.

It may well be true that students today are overtested, though that doesn't seem to be a factor in the opposition to graduation tests. The difference is that these tests, in fact, will matter to students, unlike too much of existing testing.

And they will matter most significantly to those students who make the effort to study, learn and demonstrate their knowledge. That's because students who pass these tests will be given a piece of paper that -- unlike today's high school diploma -- actually means something, which is that they have proven that they know how to read, write and compute.

What the opposing school districts need to understand is that the educational status quo is no longer acceptable. They need to raise their own level of competency by graduating seniors who truly deserve a diploma. They need to graduate students who are ready for college or the workplace without remedial instruction to bring them up to an acceptable standard of basic knowledge.