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PA STATE CONFERENCE OF NAACP BRANCHES; EDUCATION COMMITTEE
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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION VOTE ON HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

The State Board of Education vote today on the Keystone Exams Proposal is disappointing and we are saddened by it.

We believe this is a step away from what is good for Pennsylvania and away from what is best for our children. We believe this issue is deserving of rigorous and thorough discussion by the House of Representatives and a vote.

The high school diploma is the natural and reasonable expectation for attending twelve years of basic education and passing the coursework. Because of the differences in circumstances and the variations in the ability for local education agencies to effectively deliver equitable education experiences, we are deeply opposed to withholding the high school diploma based on one form of assessment; and especially when that has been constructed outside the local district.

Today, the State School Board has expressed what appears to be the will to create inequity in the high school graduation process. The local validation option creates a system whereby districts with the financial capacity to have local assessments validated can create multiple ways for students to demonstrate skills and to graduate. When faced with the choice; whether to spend funds on schools, staff, and supplies or for test validation, districts with limited funds will assuredly default to the state assessments.

Having no choice but the "end of course" state tests places students who are educated in overcrowded classrooms, using outdated textbooks, in facilities that are crumbling, in underfunded systems, in jeopardy. No matter what their class work achievements have been in a course required for graduation, failure to meet the state set cut off score will result in failure of the course and forces the district to withhold their high school diplomas.

The Maryland Bridge model, the project approach to supplementing "end of course" test scores, is not the answer. While the Board presents the statistic that only 28 Maryland students failed to graduate when using the Bridge; they do not mention the estimated 27,000 Maryland students who dropped out or otherwise failed to graduate in that same year.

The NAACP has asked proponents of the Keystone Exams, "What happens to students who leave school without the diploma?" We were told, "Some of them will go to prison."

The volume of research is clear. It shows the relationship between such exams and the increase in high school drop out rates. It shows the relationship between leaving school without a diploma and incarceration. It shows the disparate impact these exams have on students already labeled 'at risk'.

The NAACP has consistently opposed the sorting of students in ways that create a higher drop out rate. The research is specific. Students who leave school without a high school diploma have shorter life spans. They make on average \$10,000 dollars less a year than high school graduates. They tend to live in poverty and without health care. They tend to rely on public assistance. They are less able to educate their own children.

For 100 years, the NAACP has advocated for civil rights. That is why we are proud to stand today on behalf of the children of Pennsylvania and their families. We are grateful for the efforts of Representative Clymer on this issue.