

ALASKA LEGISLATURE COMMITTEE FILES 2001-2002 8672

10518 SENATE HEALTH EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES



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Signature of Camera Operator

12/4/2003

Date

2001-2002

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GRAD.

EXAM

2/24/01

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



*Interim:*

600 East Railroad Avenue  
Wasilla, Alaska 99654  
(907) 376-3370  
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*Session:*

State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182  
(907) 465-6600  
(907) 465-3805 Fax

## SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE SENATOR LYDA GREEN, CHAIR

### Agenda

**Saturday, February 24, 2001**

#### High School Graduation Qualifying Exam Proposal

**Testimony from:**

- School administrators
- Teachers
- Special education directors

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, VICE-CHAIR

SENATOR JERRY WARD, SENATOR GARY WILKEN, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS

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## SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE SENATOR LYDA GREEN, CHAIR

### Agenda

Monday, February 26, 2001

#### High School Graduation Qualifying Exam Proposal

Testimony from:

➤ School boards

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, VICE-CHAIR

SENATOR JERRY WARD, SENATOR GARY WILKEN, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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## SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE SENATOR LYDA GREEN, CHAIR

### Agenda

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- SB 120 PUBLIC SCHOOL EXIT EXAM
- SB 128 PUBLIC SCHOOL EXIT EXAM TRANSITION PERIOD
- SB 129 HIGH SCHOOL EXIT EXAM
- SB 133 PUBLIC SCHOOL EXIT EXAM
- Public Testimony

SENATOR LOREN LEMAN, VICE-CHAIR  
SENATOR JERRY WARD, SENATOR GARY WILKEN, SENATOR BETTYE DAVIS

# ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



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## SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

SENATOR LYDA GREEN, CHAIR

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**Alaska Association of School Administrators  
Resolution #10  
Extension of Effective Date for HSGQE**

Submitted by: Alaska Association of School Administrators

WHEREAS, Alaska's public schools have been educating more children to a high level of achievement than any time in the State's history; and

WHEREAS, all Alaskan educators desire to see improved achievement and accountability among students and staff; and

WHEREAS, the State of Alaska has implemented the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) on a very ambitious timeline; and

WHEREAS, there are many legitimate social issues confronting children are not solely educational based; and

WHEREAS, not all children will have had access to the necessary curriculum to adequately prepare for all areas of the HSGQE; and

WHEREAS, schools and students are making significant progress toward improved achievement; and

THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED that the Alaska Association of School Administrators recommend the effective date for fully implementing the HSGQE as requirement for graduation be suspended until all students have had a reasonable opportunity to access the curriculum required to be successful.

ADOPTED: Anchorage, November 8, 2000

Testimony  
Senate HESS Committee  
February 24, 2001  
By  
Darroll Hargraves, Executive Director ACSA

First let me say that I represent the Principals and Superintendents of the state. They believe in standards, quality schools and graduation diplomas that represent excellence and academic achievement by graduates.

School administrators have expressed with statements and resolutions the belief that a delay would make it possible for school districts to accomplish an alignment of the curriculum that is required for students to be successful.

We have seen some good come from the efforts to require the exit exam. Administrators tell me that students and parents began to pay more attention, as it became known that the Exit Exam was on the way. There are some problems surfacing that were not expected when the effort was initiated. These are the

problems that caused consideration of a delay in the implementation of the exam.

These problems were the very same problems Indiana and other states have encountered and some of them have revised the way they approach the issuance of diplomas.

It is apparent the State Policy Makers have read the future and they believe like Indiana that costly law suites are appearing on the horizon. I have talked with leaders in Indiana who believe that it was the threat of legal action that propelled the consideration and acceptance of the diploma they adopted.

#### Diploma Options:

- We can keep what we have now in the state.
- We could go to a diploma that denotes "Academic" or "Vocational".
- We could adopt the Indiana model or some revised model of it.
- We could consider two diploma options, one that reflected the state requirement that includes the Exit Exam and one that reflected local requirements, a state diploma or a local school diploma.

- ###



TONY KNOWLES, GOVERNOR  
State of Alaska

**GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON DISABILITIES AND SPECIAL EDUCATION**  
P.O. Box 240249 • Anchorage, Alaska 99524-0249 • Phone 907-269-8990 • Fax 907-269-8995

February 23, 2001

The Honorable Lyda Green  
State Senate  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 125  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Green:

Subject: High School Graduation Qualifying Examination

As the State Advisory Panel on the Education of Children with Disabilities, the Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education is gravely concerned about the impact of the High School Graduation Qualifying Examination on students receiving special education services. Although they have worked very hard during their school years, as it stands now they may very well be denied a high school diploma. In part, this is because their education usually has suffered from low expectations and limited exposure to the general education curriculum. Some students will be unable to physically take the exam because the accommodations they are normally provided in order to learn are not provided during the exam.

As you know, the Council has a history of working with legislators to implement effective legislation that improves the lives of Alaskans with disabilities and students receiving special education services. We have made some preliminary recommendations on your proposal, which are outlined on the following page and are convening a small group to further refine and develop them. We appreciate your leadership on this issue and look forward to working with you and the legislature to build on these recommendations and come up with proactive solutions that are fair to all students. Please let us know how we can help you in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Millie Ryan".

Millie Ryan, Acting Executive Director

**Recommendation:**

1. Modify the Phase I approach to require a "D" average. Although a "D" is not desirable, it is considered a passing grade. If a "C" average is required, it will unfairly penalize students expected to graduate in 2001-2002.
2. Ensure that a variety of remediation courses and approaches are available to students. All students, including those receiving special education services, can learn given accessible instructional materials and effective, individualized instructional strategies. Recent education research has demonstrated that changes in instructional strategies designed to address the needs of students with disabilities also benefit many students without disabilities.
3. Expand the number of endorsements that are available to students on their diplomas. For example, a student who passes the reading and writing exit exams but not the math exam should receive an endorsement in reading and writing. In addition to endorsements in reading, writing and mathematics, an employability endorsement should be awarded to students who meet the employability standards. The state has already developed employability standards but it is our impression that they are not implemented to any great degree, particularly with students receiving special education services.
4. Ensure that students receiving special education services have access to vocational and technology classes and curricula. Many students with disabilities can excel in these classes and graduate with a variety of skills to offer employers. Recent research has indicated that students with disabilities are less likely to drop out of school and are more likely to be competitively employed after high school if they have received adequate vocational/technology training in high school.
5. Until there is a solid research foundation for determining allowable accommodations and state accommodation policies determined by a broad group of stakeholders, decisions should be based on accommodations allowed in life and in the world of work. For example, it is not uncommon for adults to carry a checkbook with a calculator. If the use of a calculator is generally considered acceptable for them, why is it not allowed as an accommodation during the exam?

**Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education**



# NEA-ALASKA

*Affiliated with the National Education Association*

TO: Senate HESS Committee  
FROM: Rich Kronberg  
President, NEA-Alaska  
RE: High School Qualifying Exam  
DATE: February 23, 2001

Chairperson Green, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. I want to begin by repeating my earlier statement thanking Senator Green for raising significant issues around the exam. Specifically, we agree with Senator Green that there needs to be discussion of the following:

- ❖ Uniform reporting requirements for transcripts
- ❖ How to minimize disruptions to student learning created by administration of the test
- ❖ Developing appropriate means for special education students to demonstrate their mastery of the Alaskan standards
- ❖ Appropriate, and uniform, test preparation materials to acquaint students with the format of the test without compromising test security
- ❖ Development of a uniform "test instruction script" for test proctors to read to students taking the test
- ❖ A plan to deal with students who transfer into the state, particularly students whose parents are in the military.

We would suggest that these are important subjects for consideration by the legislature. In addition to these, we suggest that any discussion around the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam also needs to consider the following issues.

- ❖ Assistance to districts in aligning their curriculum to the Alaskan standards
- ❖ Making sure the test directions are clear and unambiguous
- ❖ Determining that the tests themselves reflect what we want all students to know and be able to do, and are not geared only for the college bound student
- ❖ Making sure that teachers know how to teach to standards, that principals and other supervisors have the knowledge to provide assistance in this, and that coherent programs of professional development can be accessed by all teachers
- ❖ Making sure that school districts have the resources to employ teachers and instructional aides to provide direct remedial instruction to students, either through quality after school tutoring, or through summer school programs, or both



# NEA-ALASKA

*Affiliated with the National Education Association*

- ❖ Making sure that information from the benchmark exams is provided to teachers so they can fine-tune their instruction and target that instruction to student needs
- ❖ Making sure that students have access to appropriate instructional material and technologies, including appropriate software and up-to-date textbooks.
- ❖ Making sure that teachers, and other educators, have the time to work together collegially to address the needs of our diverse student population.

In addition to these issues, there are two bottom-line essential ingredients that also need to be addressed if we are to provide students with an adequate opportunity to pass the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. The first issue is affording all students the opportunity to work with qualified, licensed instructional staff. While some may comment that this "goes without saying," the sad reality is that many of our students do not have that opportunity. We have not been able to provide all students, even in our urban districts, with fully qualified teachers. This is especially true in regard to teachers of special education and mathematics. Because of the key role our teachers play in the education of students, making sure that students have that opportunity ought to be our most important consideration.

A corollary issue that also needs to be considered is making sure that there is consistency in a district's instructional program. It is impossible to ensure consistency when 30% of the teachers and half of the site administrators turn over each year. Retaining our teachers for more than a year or two, particularly in rural Alaskan districts is a critical need that must be considered in any discussion of the high school exit exam. We need to have discussions on teacher retention and the factors involved in promoting it. This includes discussions of housing for rural teachers as well as ways to promote cross-cultural understanding.

Let me close by once again thanking Senator Green for putting key issues on the table for discussion and thanking the committee for the opportunity to raise additional issues for legislative consideration. We look forward to working with the members of the committee, and individual senators on ensuring the success of Alaska's most important resource, our children.



# Alaska State Legislature

Please enter into the record my testimony to the SHES  
 committee name  
 committee on HSGQE dated 2-24-01  
 bill/subject

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am in support of a differentiated diploma. Students who have disabilities in the areas of reading, math, and written language will be denied a diploma under the current HSGQE law. These students need to have an alternative method to show that they are able to be contributing members of society, enter post-graduate training and education programs, and the military. Without a diploma, many avenues will be closed to them.

All students need to have these opportunities. A recent court case that was decided in Oregon was based on the publication "Do No Harm", making the case for alternative opportunities for students with learning disabilities to show mastery of skills in a fashion other than a paper/pencil test.

I support your efforts to look at alternatives, and I know that many, many parents and students in the Mat-Su School District would support your efforts, judging by the number of difficult IEP meetings I have attended over the last year and a half where this has been discussed. Parents of learning disabled students are feeling quite hopeless.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. I would be there in person at our LIO, but am coaching 6 skiers who are Alaska's delegation to Team USA, for the Special Olympics World Winter Games which begins next weekend. I hope you all have a chance to come and observe the competition sometime between March 4-11.

*Lucy Hope*  
 Lucy Hope  
 P. O. Box 870887  
 Wasilla, AK

NEA  
 Representing (Optional)  
 Address  
376-4796  
 Phone No.

As I understand it, the primary focus of this teleconference is to gather input from educators around the state concerning the HSGOE. Judging by recent coverage in the press, the main questions seem to be: "Who should be required to take the test?" and "What should be the effective date of the requirement to pass the test?"

I believe both of these questions are the wrong questions to be asking. I believe the original intent behind enacting the legislation that requires passing the HSGQE in order to earn a high school diploma was to bring some accountability to public education and guarantee that all students in the state receive the type of education that will prepare them for successful participation in our society as adults.

I would recommend to you an online article published at:

<http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/ktho0101.htm>

that is titled "The Authentic Standards Movement And Its Evil Twin" written by Scott Thompson, the assistant director of the Panasonic Foundation, Secaucus, NJ.

In this article, Mr. Thompson does a much better job of stating the argument against "high stakes testing" than I can do. However, I would like to share a few comments from his article with everyone who is listening today.

First, Mr. Thompson says we need to distinguish between what he refers to as "high stakes, standardized, test-based reform" and "authentic standards-based reform." He says, "The defining distinction between them is their respective influence on the instructional core of schooling and on equity issues."

"When academic progress is judged by a single indicator, the common effect is to narrow curriculum and reduce instruction to test "prepping." What gets lost when teachers and student are pressured to make students better test-takers is precisely the rich, high-level teaching and learning that authentic, standards-based reform aims to promote in all classrooms and for all students."

Mr. Thompson also states, "We could realize significant progress in public education if the proponents of standards-based reform joined hands with the critics of high-stakes testing and effectively outlawed the use of high-stakes tests as sole indicators of student success. Moreover, such a move need not lead to toothless standards. It is possible to require all students to meet a set of rigorous standards in order to graduate from high school without using a single test as the means of determining whether those standards have been met. We should be interested in students who can produce high-quality work rather than students who have mastered the ability to take standardized tests. It is the former who will be rewarded in their personal lives after graduation, when test-taking skills will no longer be relevant."

Mr. Thompson's article is three pages that are well worth reading. I strongly recommend it to every legislator before any further action is taken on this issue.

In 1994-95 the State Board of Education adopted voluntary standards for what students should learn in ten core subjects. The State Benchmark and HSGQE tests address three of these areas. I would suggest you could better serve the welfare of the students by legislating the State Standards as a mandate in all ten areas and requiring the school districts to align their curriculums with those standards and show progress toward mastery of those standards by all students.

I believe the professional educators in this state are capable of assessing their students to determine their individual competence in reference to specific standards. It then should be a mandate to give remedial instruction to any student who is below grade

level in an instructional area. If we adopt this type of policy, I believe in five to ten years, we should be able to have all students achieving their maximum potential in all ten academic areas.

We will always have some students who are unable to achieve at the same level as more gifted students because of mental or physical handicaps, but these students should still be educated to achieve their potential. (Issues of "special" diplomas could easily be addressed by a one-page attachment that reports the student's level of achievement in each area of instruction.)

This should not be a non-funded mandate, however. We all know there will be a need for remedial teachers if we are going to give remedial instruction. (This need should decrease as students who began under the "old style" of public education graduate and are replaced by students who have received their entire education under a standards-based program.)

Extra teachers cost extra money. There is no way to avoid this fact. Part of this new expense could be covered by spending the money currently reserved for developing and implementing testing to hire remedial teachers who could actually help students achieve the standards we are trying to test.

C. B. (Charley) Epperson, Principal/Teacher  
False Pass School  
PO Box 30  
False Pass, AK 99583

Phone: (907) 548-2224  
Fax: (907) 548-2304

Testimony Regarding Exit Exam

Given By: Hans Bernard, Student Advisor to the Anchorage School Board  
18816 Roads End Cir.  
Eagle River, AK 99577  
(907) 694-9890

Good afternoon madam chair, members of the committee. My name is Hans Bernard and I serve as Student Advisor to the Anchorage School Board. As a student I can empathize with the current predicament the education community is in. I don't know how many times I have been given an assignment with a deadline that shortchanges the learning and benefit.

In 1997 educators were given an assignment in the form of an exit exam. The current deadline shortchanges the learning of all students and needs to be extended. The reasons for this extension include: revisions to the current exam, address the needs of special education and bilingual students, and to ensure for all students an opportunity to learn ... all so this test provides high school diplomas not job security for the judicial system. **NONE OF THE REASONS I HAVE JUST MENTIONED MEAN THAT WE DO NOT SUPPORT THE ACADEMIC STANDARDS WE HAVE SET FOR THE STUDENTS IN OUR STATE.**

It is in the best interest of all Alaskans to revise the test to ensure we are testing what we promised to. The department of education has recently begun this process by gathering teachers to review what the tests are testing, what they said they would test and what is believed to be the absolutely necessary skills to succeed. With the time extension this process could be completed in the most thoughtful and thorough way possible.

Realizing that not all students are the same it is imperative that time is taken to adjust to the needs of those students with learning disabilities and bilingual education issues Senator Green I appreciate your recent effort to address this issue in your legislative proposal.

The issue of opportunity to learn legal issues are potentially the most critical to the legislature, at this time, and is another reason to extend the deadline for this assignment needs to be extended. School districts need more time to continue the process of aligning their curriculum to the standards, identify those students who need remedial educational and provide it for them.

I feel confident that we can address the issues and thank you for engaging in the discussion especially with the conversations of recognizing students for taking the exam before it becomes a requirement.

I have just given you many issues to think about, some might see them as problems and they will be if the test is required for the class of 2002 but if the deadline is extended we can turn these problems into opportunities to better serve the students in our state.

**Subject: SB 133 Congrats!!**

**Date: Sat, 10 Mar 2001 09:44:03 -0900**

**From: "Eric & Kristi Holta" <kholta@gci.net>**

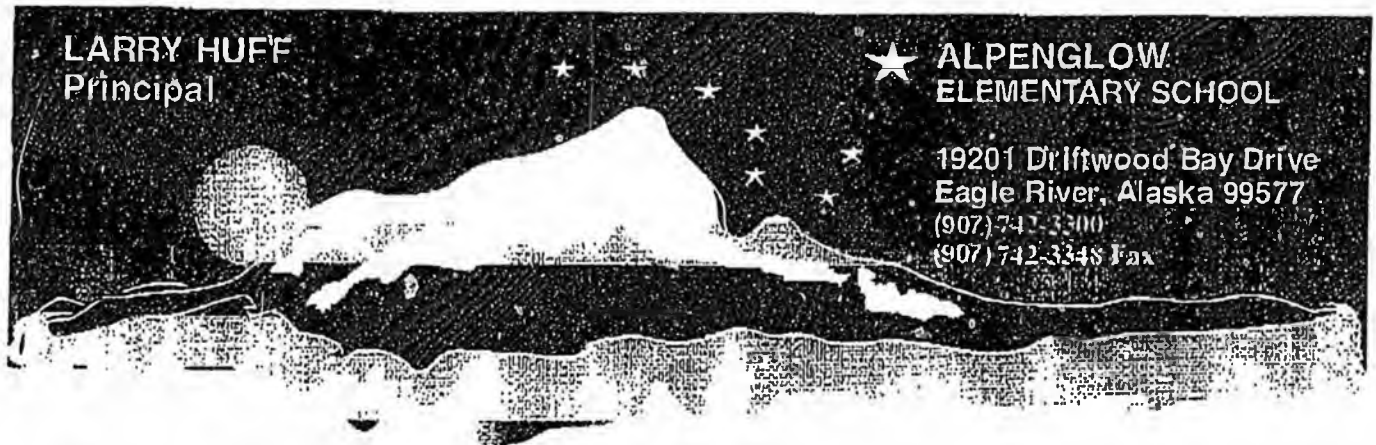
**To: "Senator Lyda Green" <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>**

Senator Green:

I've just read your proposal concerning the high school exit exam, how refreshing. Your work on this subject shows your deep commitment to quality education that is surpassed by none. The plan is impressive because it allows for setting high standards and at the same time recognizes that students operate on different levels of ability. It does not let kids off the hook just because they have a disability but allows for the development of individualized programs and goals. In addition it holds everyone (pupils, teachers, and parents) accountable for setting and reaching goals, no more excuses. I've reviewed quite a few plans from different states and this is by far the best. This plan proves that you can have your cake and eat it. Congratulations on an outstanding bill! I wish you luck with it becoming law. Don't hesitate to call if there is anything that I can do. Please feel free to share my thoughts with your colleagues. Again congratulations!

Sincerely,

Eric J. Holta  
688-1008  
[eholta@yahoo.com](mailto:eholta@yahoo.com)



February 23, 2001

Dear Senator Lyda Green,

I have been a teacher and administrator in the business of educating our children in three different states for twenty eight years. Only in education do we as a society continuously place the cart before the horse. If we are wanting to change the infrastructure of a system, we certainly would not want to start retooling at the end of the assembly line. Effectual change is "phased in" at the beginning of the process, not at the end. I adamantly feel that competency should be expected and demanded. However, to tell a student that they may not graduate because they haven't passed a competency test in math, for example, when the system had not been retooled for a complete cycle of students, is absolutely unfair and brings to question what is really being assessed. If we are truly assessing the students, we need to adequately address curriculum needs to match material present in the testing format. I chose math as an example because I feel the math test, from what I have seen of the format, is far over-zealous. It goes far beyond testing for "basic competency" relative to the majority of our work force population. What is your plan for explaining to a student and his/her parents how it is possible to make average grades in math courses throughout their school career but cannot graduate because they test poorly in math? Please give some serious reconsideration for allowing some phase in time to create a plan for success, not reacting to failure.

Sincerely,

Larry Huff  
Principal

DISTRICT OFFICE

# BERING STRAIT SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. BOX 225  
UNALAKLEET, ALASKA 99684-0225  
(907) 524-3611

24 February, 2001  
Senator Lyda Green, Chair  
Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee  
State Capitol Bldg.  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Senator Green,

BREVIK MISSION

DIOMEDE

ELIM

GAMBELL

GOLOVIN

KOYUK

SAINT MICHAEL

SAVOONGA

SHAKTOOLIK

SHISHMAREF

STEBBINS

TELLER

UNALAKLEET

WALES

WHITE MOUNTAIN

I will not be able to participate in the High School Graduation Requirement Hearing scheduled for Saturday, February 24, 2001. I wanted to share with you some brief comments about my concern over our current approach to testing. I preface all that I say with one overriding belief. I want the students that I work with to do better each and everyday in schools that are safe, respectful and full of purpose.

Our government is made up of three branches and with the exception of the executive branch, the remaining two are made up of multiple members with equal voices. I make this simple point to illustrate the fact that our community does not rely on one person, one source or one law to determine our future. Yet, today Alaska believes a single examination will provide us with all that we need to know about our children and young adults. Test and measurement experts have never designed their instruments to be used in exclusion of all other information. I believe the way we have designed the HSGQE is flawed. It is not able to effectively measure all that we need to know about the abilities of our youth.

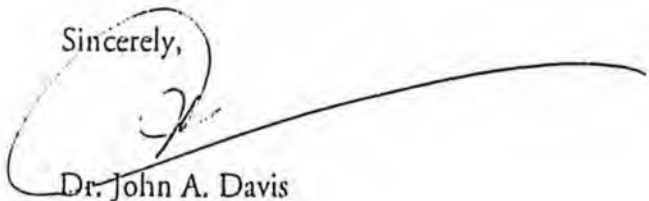
I do not suggest that the HSGQE should be eliminated. The information it provides to our district has been helpful and can continue to help guide us. But as a singular instrument, it does not tell me all I should know about a child or whether a child has the skill and competencies to be a successful community member.

What continues to concern me is that when we use one instrument, we allow that instrument to reduce our expectations of what we want as a community. When we fail to see unique talents and skills of individual children, we not only shortchange our children, we shortchange our community.

I want to applaud you as for recognizing that our current emphasis on the HSGQE is not enough and that it may actually move us in the opposite direction. Offering multiple opportunities to assess the abilities of our children does not suggest that we do not support high standards. It suggests that we are smarter than the dog that knows only one trick.

I appreciate your efforts to challenge our current practices. I realize that you run the risk of personal attacks from well meaning but misinformed people.

Sincerely,

  
Dr. John A. Davis  
Superintendent

Senator Green & Committee members

I would like to address the issue of students with special needs and the proposal.

I am a product of the Indiana public school system and wonder what category I might have fallen into. ~~Not as~~. More importantly, what effect on my determination to pursue career options would the knowledge of having #1 or #2 or #3 or #4 or #5.

Having worked through 12 years of education w/ a disability in a time when the disability was unknown would I have had to accept a diploma of Mastery of IEP or possibly a Diploma of Vocational/Technical mastery. I'm sure it would not have been a Diploma of Advanced mastery.

I have accomplished:

FAMILY & TAXPAYOR  
Disabled Vietnam veteran - honorable discharge  
Educator - teacher of special education<sup>School to work</sup> COORDINATION  
Administrator - DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION  
PRINCIPAL  
SUPERINTENDENT

Please do not categorize Diplomas. The IEP of children w/ disabilities has for 25 years driven requirements for graduation. NOT CARNOTIS UNITS NOT SEAT TIME, BUT AN INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN WITH GOALS & OBJECTIVES  
INCLUSION NOT EXCLUSION

Thank you.

B

LORON BERKOWSKI  
Supt. DILLINGHAM City School

PO Box 170  
DILLINGHAM 99576

**Subject: Proposed legislation re HSQE**

**Date:** Mon, 26 Feb 2001 10:41:50 -0900

**From:** Ron Erickson <hbdist@seaknet.ne.alaska.edu>

**To:** <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>

**CC:** <Senator\_Jerry\_Ward@legis.state.ak.us>, <Senator\_Loren\_Leman@legis.state.ak.us>, <Senator\_Gary\_Wilken@legis.state.ak.us>, <Senator\_Betty\_Davis@legis.state.ak.us>

Honorable Senator Green,

I was unable to participate in the teleconference session on Feb. 23, 2001 but wanted to provide you with input from my point of view on your proposals. First I would like to thank you for proposing a possible solution to the problems facing the State of Alaska because of the High School Qualifying Exam.

I have serious concerns about using a "C" as any criteria for graduation. Many school districts have different criteria for receiving grades. Some schools use only a 4.0 system while others such as Haines actually report + and - grades. Under our system a student who had a C- (73%) average would not be able to graduate under the "C" average rule while students in another school would be able graduate with this average. Although each school District may elect to have higher standards than the State requires this grading discrepancy would be very unfair unless the "C" is defined in the legislation.

I do not support a 5 level diploma. I could support a single diploma with endorsements but the diploma would have to mean that the student could meet minimum competency requirements in Reading, Writing and Math.

I would also like to see some aspect of the HSQE being required in the year 2002. We have spent considerable sums of money trying to align our curriculum and document that alignment. If the scores were phased in over a three year period with the school districts able to choose which sections to implement each year, I feel the Districts and the State would be better covered for litigation about whether the student had a chance to learn what was tested. The school districts know in which areas they are the most prepared and which still need more work. Every school should have alignment in at least one of the three areas. I believe the math cut score to be too high as it does not reflect a minimum competency or essential skills. I have enough credits for a PHD but do not believe that I could pass this test at this time. When I was in high school taking all the math courses I probably could but since graduating from high school I have not had to use significant algebra or geometry in my work or play.

Alternate approaches to a diploma may help the quandary with the special education population. I do not have a good answer to this problem but do know that if accommodations and/or alternative testing is not available to the special needs child, the parents and advocacy groups will be winning lots of lawsuits against the State and School Districts. I would advise waiving the test for students under IEP's until a reasonable solution which still hold. These students and the school accountable for high standards is developed. I would be glad to work on a special task force to help accomplish this.

Again thank you for your pro-active work in trying to find a workable solution to the problems with our current law. Oh yes one last thing. Adding layers of diplomas will only add additional areas for lawsuits.

Sincerely,

Ronald W. Erickson  
Superintendent  
Haines Borough School District

**Subject: proposed changes to Diplomas**

**Date: Sat, 24 Feb 2001 09:31:05 -0900**

**From: "Toni-Jo Dalman, Juneau School District, Juneau, AK" <dalmant@jsd.k12.ak.us>**

**To: Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us**

Senator Green,

I am the special education coordinator for the Juneau School District and I helped to develop the alternate assessment for the State of Alaska for students with severe cognitive disabilities. I am pleased to see your proposed changes for the issuance of diplomas. I would like to suggest just a few modifications.

I understand and appreciate the need for standards for students and have developed the alternate assessment with both standards and best-practice in mind. That said, I am somewhat concerned about the Diploma of Mastery of Individualized Education Plan. In this State we have a broad range of special education teachers and practices. If we were to simply define accomplishment by the individual plans currently written, there would once again be little accountability (and therefore no assessment of the level of expectation for our students).

I am pleased to see the thoughtful effort you have put forth in developing a fair and reasonable approach to the issuance of diplomas; I do believe that we need to provide our students with diplomas for varying levels of competencies. I would hope that for students with disabilities, we would continue to have the expectation that they will attempt to pass the HSGQE; but in the instance that they cannot pass "by virtue of their disability" we permit a variation based on that disability. For instance, students who can pass the math but who have such a severe reading disorder that they cannot pass the reading test, could be permitted to take a listening comprehension test to demonstrate mastery of that competency. I believe teachers and students should be expected to perform at a higher level, but that we need to provide an alternative process for demonstrating achievement of standards. I would continue to allow some of these students to receive a Diploma of Foundational Mastery, but have an alternative route to achieving it. This route would require teachers to justify and alternatively assess students on the SAME STANDARDS.

I do not want us to throw away the standards (some may need revising, but that is another story). The test (or portions of it) should only be dismissed when teachers are willing to justify why and willing to provide an alternative method of evaluating the students accomplishments in meeting the standards. [Please understand that these are students who have disabilities who could learn at the same level of understanding of others if they could have their books on tape!]

Under the definition of Diploma of Foundational Standards, I would suggest that we add a bullet for students with disabilities who can achieve this standard but who need an alternate format for demonstrating their knowledge, and will require passing a teacher-designed assessment that can demonstrate their skill. This way, the students with a specific disability (such as a bright child with a severe reading disability or a bright child with a hearing impairment, could display achievement of the same standards through an alternative means).

For students who take the alternate assessment, it would be fair for them to receive a Diploma of Mastery of Alternate standards (or competencies). These are students who have NOT been involved in the standard curriculum, who do not work towards the same performance standards as other students, and who have a functional life skills curriculum. They are not working towards minimum competencies. They have their own competencies.

Other students with disabilities who HAVE been involved in the standard curriculum should not be lumped in the same bundle (by simply mastering their IEP); they and their teachers need to be expected to meet a higher level of expectation, as noted above.

I know you will receive criticism for proposing a Diploma of Minimum Competency: you have my blessing. There are students who have cognitive delays, specific disabilities, emotional and environmental stresses, or unhealthy influences in their lives who need to stay within our schools rather than to be forced to drop out. The time and effort they put forth, and the time they spend with adults who care about them and with students who model for them, increases their chances for success in life. Not all success in life can be measured by academic achievement. But it is known that dropping out leads to failure and problems that all of society pay for dearly. Thank you for your efforts.

Sincerely,

Toni-Jo Dalman

P.S. It would be untenable in a large district to administer tests on in-service days. The teachers are needed to administer the tests.

**Subject: HSGQE Concerns**

**Date:** Thu, 22 Feb 2001 12:43:36 -0900

**From:** "Marina Bosick" <mbosick@kpbsd.k12.ak.us>

**To:** Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Ms. Green

I understand that there will be an audio conference concerning educators v viewpoints on the HSGQE this Saturday and that you will be part of the committee that is organizing this. I will be unable to be part of this conference on Saturday, but would like to express my concerns anyway. There are a couple of things that I would like for you to consider when decisions are made concerning this test.

1. The test begins with a class that has not been adequately prepared to take this test. Some students are already in the wrong math track to have the classes necessary to pass the test before the end of their senior year. Some have begun math with foundations and won't even be able to take geometry until their senior year. While many argue that that shouldn't be a problem, they don't understand small school dilemmas. It may be too late to get those math classes now for some because they coincide with other required classes. Many students in our small schools are having to take additional correspondence classes, just so that they can squeeze in that extra math class that will help them pass the test. In a small school, students may not have the skills they need to pass any parts of the test because they may have had a poor teacher. Because it is a small school, it's likely they have had that same teacher for the same subject for as many as three years, or more. Also along these lines is the fact that this class has not already been taking the benchmark exams that will alert educators to those who are at risk for not passing this test. The class of 2008 will have scores that can be tracked, but the class of 2002 doesn't. New elementary curriculum now address skills necessary for this test. The class of 2002 did not use these materials.
2. We are already looking at a decline in revenue for education as a result in drops in attendance. We are seriously competing with home school programs for students as it is. Many students plan to leave public state schools at the end of this year in order to not be in jeopardy of getting a certificate of attendance. We will lose more revenue as a result! Many are opting to just take their GED.
3. On a human level what will the repercussions of this test be? What are we creating by awarding a certificate of attendance? Has anyone even investigated what this will mean to this select group of guinea pigs? What will the limits of a certificate of attendance be? Will these kids get into college? Will they be able to get jobs? Are we creating a lower class of citizens? Are we limiting people in the successes they will be able to attain in life just because of one test? Not all people can take tests well, but that doesn't mean they can not be successful and productive citizens. There are many students in the class of 2002 whom are honor students, hard working kids that always strive to do their very best, yet for unknown reasons don't test well. Why can't their grades speak for them? People may argue that it will make educators more accountable, maybe so, but it's not the educators who are going through the turmoil of sitting through these three day test taking sessions over and over, slowly giving up hope on their dreams of their futures and with each session feeling like a failure.

4 By adopting this test we are not putting our money where our mouth is. I am a teacher. Last year we adopted this very expensive new test. This year we took a cut in staffing. I now have to teach three grade levels instead of two. With this many grades and higher student pupil ratios, we are still expected to produce kids who have to pass a test that many college educated people can't even pass. Ironic isn't it?

Many people, and myself included, feel that this test is all wrong. If we are bent on keeping it, perhaps we should be giving out merit diplomas

that recognize the students who do pass the test instead of giving out certificates of attendance and all that they may imply.

Thanks for your time, and I hope that you will consider these concerns that more of us share than you think. I don't think there has been a lot of public feedback at this point. I think many people don't have a child affected by this at the moment and are keeping quiet because they truly believe that it will come and go as so many things in education do. In the meantime someone needs to be concerned about the class of 2002.

**Subject: HSGQE****Date: Sun, 11 Mar 2001 18:45:12 -0900****From: "Malcolm Fleming" <malcolm@kpbsd.k12.ak.us>****To: Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us, Senator\_John\_Torgerson@legis.state.ak.us,  
Representative\_Ken\_Lancaster@legis.state.ak.us, tosborn@kpbsd.k12.ak.us**

High School Graduation Qualifying Exam Testimony  
 By Malcolm Fleming  
 March 11, 2001

The HSGQE is a great concept but some of its premises seem to be flawed:

1) College is not open, available, needed, or desired by every high school student. The current HSGQE does an excellent job of separating the potentially college bound student from all the other students, but so does SAT and ACT. So what have we accomplished by creating HSGQE?

2) We are hoping the HSGQE improves the quality of our high school graduates. My question is, do you pull at the top or push at the bottom? Our top students can easily pass the HSGQE so there's no need to fund programs to pull at them. Our bottom students struggle with the HSGQE so there is a reason to push them. Therefore greater resources are needed at the bottom. If we push the bottom and don't pull the top how does improve education, other than compress the mid range? We need to push the bottom and pull top at the same time.

May I suggest?

1) Keep the HSGQE in its present form and indicate the student's achievement on this test on their high school transcripts. Publish school results so individual schools and communities can see how they rate. Bragging rights have a way of motivating and focusing Americans.

2) Require transcripts to include attendance rates for each class the student takes. Employers seem to need responsible, dedicated, and reliable employees just as much as they need communication and logical thinking skills. Encourage employers to ask prospective employees for their high school transcripts during the employment process. None of my friends can ever be asked for a high school transcript except to attend my freshman year at college.

3) Make the 8th Grade Benchmark Test or the new "Essential Skills Exam" a high school entrance exam. Students must "pass" this test before entering high school classes. If a student passes the reading and writing sections maybe they could take 9th grade English and social studies classes. When they pass the math portion they can take algebra and geometry or other high school math classes. This would raise the bottom skills of students in high school classes and reduce the range of abilities students bring to high school. This would encourage the high school teacher raise their classroom performance expectations. Thus pulling the top students further, now that the bottom is better prepared to keep up in these classes. Remember, teachers are expected to teach all students in their classes and if the bottom is weak the top does not get much pressure. Of course, accommodations would be needed for handicapped students.

4.) Create a new pathway outside the regular academic high school for students to proceed through their secondary education career. This could be remedial classes for those trying to enter the regular high school program. Or, this could be classes focused on immediate employment skills with the idea that these students want or need to go to work and are not interested in academic education. Most of these classes would be vocational skills based that award certificates in quick succession. The goal is to train a work force for specifically skilled jobs. Make no

pretense that these students can do algebra or know what any thing about history. Their electives might include history or geometry classes.

5.) Our schools need the legislature's support to raise the standards. We are on the line and will rally to the challenges. On a whole I believe principals and teachers support higher standards. We see students slipping through just meeting the bare requirements. We know students can do better but we have had little or no support from society to raise standards. The mantra has been "a free and appropriate education for everyone." We are judged on our graduation rates but given no hard fast standard. Teachers and principals have had to be the bad guys when it comes to setting the standard. Yet we are told that retention, failures, and dropouts are unacceptable. So if we set the standard to avoid failure we are successful even if students fail to learn. We need the external force to set the standard so we can focus on hurtling the standard rather than defending it.

6.) Why not offer the HSGQE as a certificate of accomplishment? Measure the success of schools/districts on how many graduates have a HSGQE certificate. Focus on improving this score and the drop out rate. Punish or reward individual schools and districts for low percentage rates. Let high scoring schools advertise their success and compete with other schools. In business companies hire and fire CEO based on their profitability. Even failing companies manage to hire "hot shot" CEO's to turn the company around. Chrysler and Lee Iacoca come immediately to mind. As a principal, I have no problem making the passing of the HSGQE a primary priority of my school.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the HSGQE.

Malcolm Fleming, Principal  
Seward Middle/High School  
PO Box 1049  
Seward, Alaska 99664

907-224-3351  
907-224-3306 fax

# KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

148 North Binkley Street • Soldotna, AK 99669-7598 • Phone 907/262-5846 • Fax 907/262-9645

RECEIVED  
FEB 14 2001

February 9, 2001

To: Representative Con Bunde  
Senator Lyda Green  
Senator John Torgerson

From: Dr. Ed McLain, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction, KPBSD 

CC: Dr. Donna Peterson, Superintendent, KPBSD  
Members, Board of Education, KPBSD

Senator Jerry Ward  
Senator Georgianna Lincoln  
Representative Mike Chenault  
Representative Drew Scalzi  
Representative Ken Lancaster

Re: Information and Documentation related to the AK HSGQE and KPBSD Certified Diploma

Thank you for your work and leadership regarding the state High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. This memo is follow up to my phone conversation with Karen McCarthy on Friday, February 9, 2001.

The attached is information regarding the AK State HSGQE and the Kenai District Certified Diploma initiative.

The attached set of documents serves as a one-source overview of the status of the Kenai District Certified Diploma and its relationship with the current AK Benchmark and HSGQE exams and the AK Bench Mark and AK HSGQE cut scores

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District began its efforts to develop a certified diploma in the mid 90's with passage of board policy directing that all students must demonstrate established levels of competency in key content areas. The year after the Kenai District undertook its effort, the state legislature passed the HSGQE legislation. The state DOE began its work on the test and on the Quality Schools Initiative shortly thereafter.

There are significant points of agreement and differences between the two certification-of-competency approaches.

It is my hope that the material may be helpful in your current review and consideration of the AK HSGQE.

I have discussed this material at length with Senator Torgerson and other members of the Kenai legislative delegation. Please let me know if you have questions, or comments on the following documents, or on the relationship of the district and state assessment and certification efforts, or suggested steps for their development.

As background on my role in the study and development of state and district standards and assessments: I have been actively involved in the development and review of standards and testing at the state and district level in rural and urban settings, for over ten years. I co-chaired the original state math standards committee and have been on state oversight and review committees related to the state standards and the state assessment program continuously throughout its development. I serve on the state's technical review committee for assessment.

I was recently appointed to co-chair the state math content review committee. This committee is charged with examining the current math standards and the state assessment program - Benchmark tests, and the High School Graduation Qualifying Exam. We began this work on February 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2001.

AK HSGQE and KPBSD Certified Diploma. McLain. page 1 -

### “Target and Taught Skills and Content” versus “Essential Skills and Content”

For each of the skills or content in a discipline or field of study, we can ask the question – is this something we want our students to know and be able to do.... The answers to this question provide direction and content for our schools’ curriculum and instruction. Those skills and content are identified and described by content and performance standards. The *Alaska State Performance Standards* list and describe what we want our students to know and be able to do in reading, writing and math. The *Alaska State Performance Standards* identify the targeted and taught skills and content in our schools. The *Alaska State Performance Standards* are a guide to good instruction and solid curriculum.

**The “Essential Skills and Content” is a sub set of the targeted skills and content.** These are the skills and knowledge that a person would need to have or know to function at a basic or introductory level in our society.

To determine if a given performance standard or exam question reflected an **essential** skill or content,” a committee of community members, business people, and educators asked the following question: would you deny a diploma to a person if he or she did not have that skill or know that content?

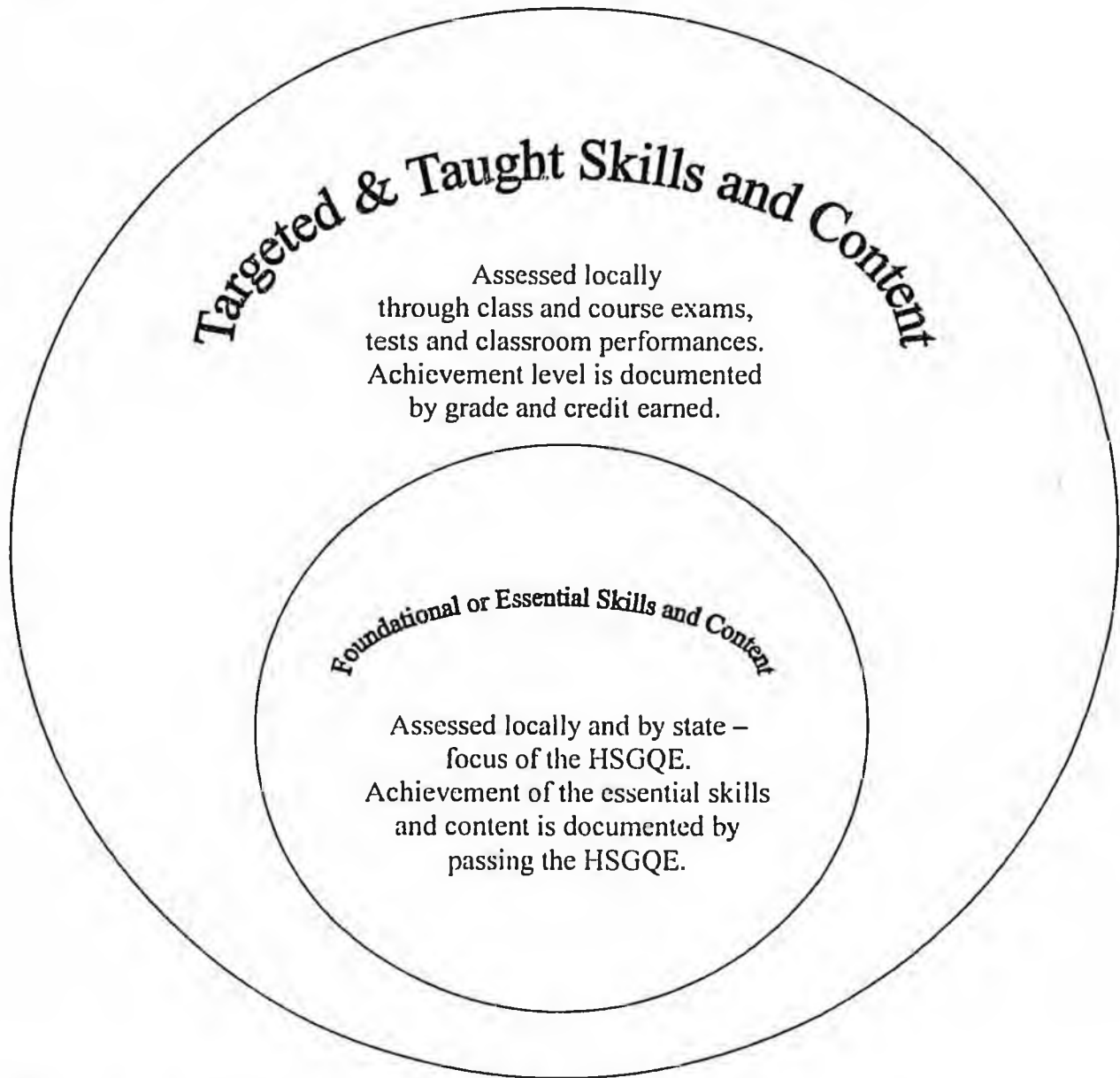
These are two different questions (1) what do we want our students to know, be able to do? (2) would you deny a diploma to a student if he or she did not have that skill or know that content?

These two questions are being confused with each other in the current AK HSGQE debate.

The following diagram provides an overview of the relationship of the targeted skills and content (described by the performance standards) and the foundational / essential skills and content.

## Essential Skills as a sub set of the Targeted and Taught Curriculum

State performance standards list and describe the “targeted and taught skills and content” in reading, writing and math. These standards describe what we “want our students to know and be able to do.” The state performance standards are a guide to good instruction and solid curriculum.



The “Essential Skills and Content” is a sub set of the targeted skills and content. These are the skills and knowledge that a person would need to have or know to function at a basic or introductory level in our society.

To determine if a given performance standard or exam question reflected an **essential** skill or content,” the committee asked the following question: would you deny a diploma to a person if he or she did not have that skill or know that content?

The following documents outline the District Certified Diploma and provide discussion related to its solution of multiple cut points – three levels of certified achievement:

I      **The first document presented is the KPBSD “flight path” showing the Benchmark Achievement Levels (attached #1) –**

This document presents the district’s foundational, proficient and advanced “flight paths.”

The document indicates that the **proficient level is the district curriculum target level**. The district advanced cut scores denote achievement above the proficient level. **The foundational level indicates performance or achievement that is below the target of proficient, but meets a certain “bottom line”** (perhaps similar in concept to NAEP “Basic” or “got to have” level of performance. The foundational level for High School is described or detailed in an attached district document.)

The first three large boxes indicate state Benchmark test achievement scores for proficient and advanced levels at the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. (The smaller box above the 4<sup>th</sup> grade indicates a KPBSD foundational skill indicator for the CAT 5 at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.) The fourth large box places the state HSGQE passing cut scores along with the KPBSD certified diploma foundational, proficient and advanced levels.

The NWEA level test score cut points indicated at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reflect demonstration of minimal foundational skills for graduation as described in the district document on foundational skills. While the foundational cut scores document the “got to have” level of performance required of KPBSD students, the “proficient” scores indicate target achievement levels for the District. This distinction is critical in that it (1) allows the district to maintain instructional focus on proficiency; (2) clearly informs the public and the student regarding level of skills or knowledge demonstrated by students; and (3) avoids confusion of “basic” foundational levels of skills or knowledge with the target of “proficient” achievement. A student may graduate with a demonstration of foundational skills, but neither the student nor the public is misled that the demonstrated skill level represents a “proficient” level of performance.

In November and December 2000, the KPBSD is working with an outside consultant to correlate / match up our in-district NWEA “level test” scores with the state benchmark test cut scores levels. This work may result in some adjustments or fine-tuning to our district proficient and advanced cut scores at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade point and guide placement at the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade points.

Relationship of AK HSGQE cut scores and KPBSD Certified Diploma foundational and proficient levels:

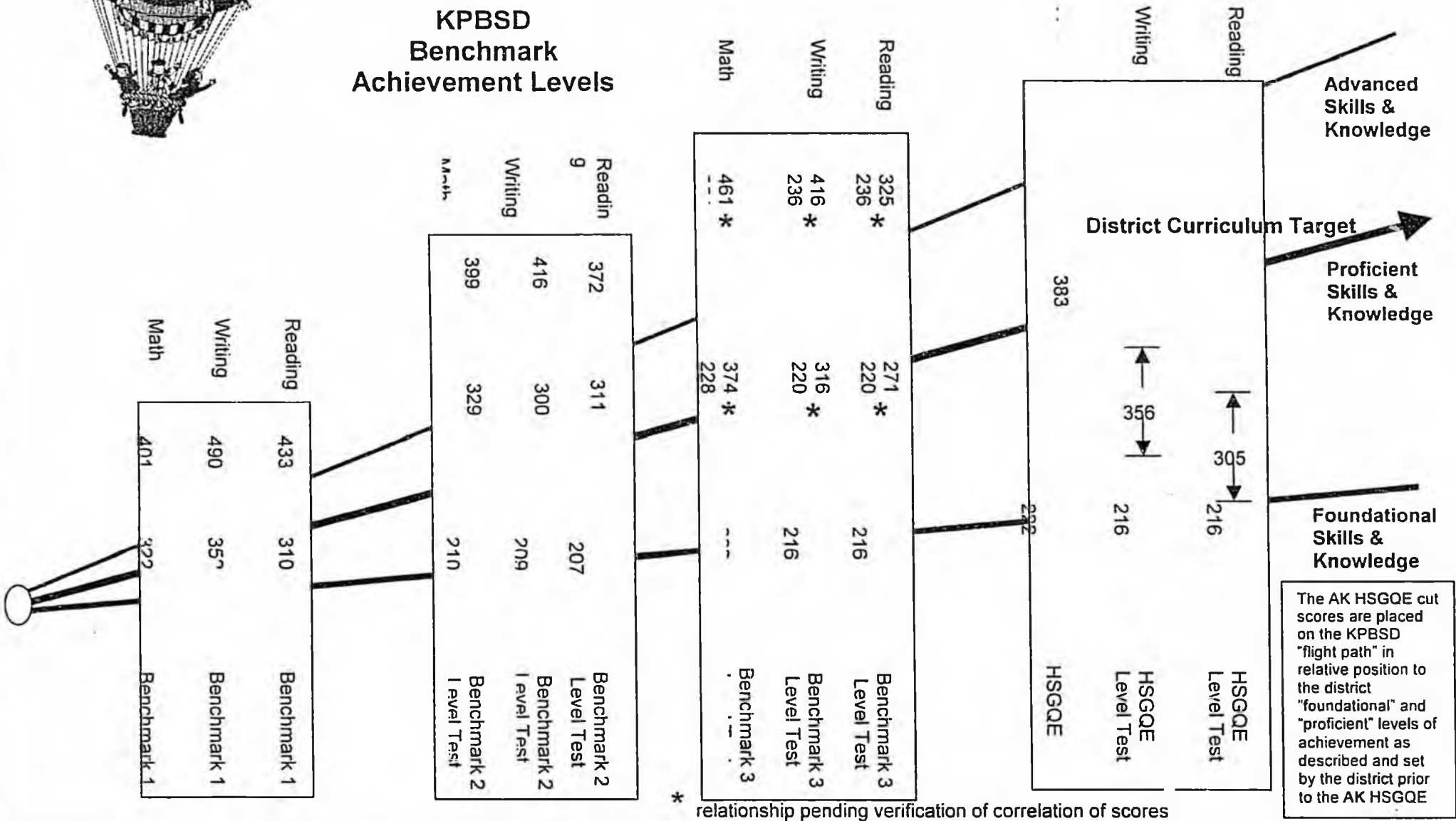
The AK HSGQE cut scores are placed on the KPBSD “flight path” in relative position to the district “foundational” and “proficient” levels of achievement as described and set by the district prior to the AK HSGQE cut score setting.

In light of the KPBSD description of foundational and proficient skills, it appears that:

- (1) The AK HSGQE cut score in Math is set at the district HS “proficient” level;
- (2) The AK HSGQE reading cut score denotes achievement slightly above what the district has set as a “foundational” level of achievement in reading;
- (3) The AK HSGQE cut score in writing appears to be slightly above the district foundational and proficient levels.



## KPBSD Benchmark Achievement Levels



\* relationship pending verification of correlation of scores

The AK HSGQE cut scores are placed on the KPBSD "flight path" in relative position to the district "foundational" and "proficient" levels of achievement as described and set by the district prior to the AK HSGQE

K    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    11    12

Note that the NWEA level test score cut points indicated at the 8<sup>th</sup> grade reflect demonstration of minimal foundational skills for graduation as described in the district document on foundational skills. The "proficient" scores indicate target achievement levels for the District.

**2 This document provides the KPBSD Description of the HS Foundational skill level (attachment #2 follows this page.)**

This KPBSD district document provides a summary overview of the foundational skill and content levels for the district certified diploma. The document also discusses aspects or characteristics of the foundational level skills and content. As is evident from this document, the foundational skill level is not a target or goal of the district for any student. It is rather a description of those skills and content that our district is saying represents a sound "foundation" for later learning and acquiring the essential skills and content – the foundational skills and content describe the skills and content a person has "got to have." They are minimums for a person entering into our society to be able to progress and grow.

As stated in the foundational skills document, the district envisions the very real possibility that these foundational levels may or will change. They may well need to be raised as the District - students, and staff - gain experience and skills and as the demands of society evolve or increase.

## Foundational Skills

1. The foundational skills are the minimum "competency guarantees" that should be made regarding our KPBSD graduates.

Defined skill level minimums are not a target or end goal for our students. Rather, the minimums represent the basis for a sound foundation for our students. Once these minimum guarantees are reached, students can pursue a full set of skills and content appropriate for their needs, strengths, and requirements for successful and full participation in our society. If a student does not reach these minimums in the appropriate time frame, something else needs to happen within the school. The intervention and remediation strategies should be geared to the student. Some levels of understanding inferred by the minimums are:

- a. Be able to read and understand (decoding and reading for meaning as minimums) a newspaper, job application, election ballot, basic (technical) instructions (how-to manual), Department of Motor Vehicles Rules of the Road booklet, restaurant menu, and literature for pleasure.
  - b. Be able to write a letter to a business, five-paragraph essay, résumé, application, catalog order, goal statement and plan of action, directions (reflecting logical thinking), critique or response to a reading, and do word processing.
  - c. Be able to perform such "real world" math skills as addition, subtraction, multiplication, division (and know when, how, and why to use each); use fractions and decimals, money, time; and understand and use liquid, solid, and linear measurement.
  - d. Acquire and demonstrate essential social studies skills and content. The student should know how government works or functions, know the rights and responsibilities of citizens, know how we relate to others in a social contract, and demonstrate a cultural understanding.
  - e. Acquire and demonstrate essential science skills and content including knowledge of the scientific process and the importance of science in society.
2. The defined skill level identified as "foundational" in the essential academic areas is not a target or end goal of competency. These minimums represent the basis for a sound foundation for our students in their high school and later learning and acquiring the full set of skills and content appropriate for the students' needs, strengths, and requirements for successful and full participation in our society.

Students would be able to obtain proficiency ratings and endorsement areas in addition to the minimum skills required for graduation. Endorsement opportunities should be developed in skill or behavior areas related to school, life, and work successes. Some examples might include endorsements for work skills demonstrated through community service, computer applications, and initiative or responsibility projects. Endorsement opportunities should also be available in content related skills for performance exceeding a pre-set standard of excellence. An example for a student showing an aptitude or interest in science might include course requirements completed with a B+ grade or better along with an additional project or paper demonstrating higher-level mastery of a topic. Questions regarding equitable opportunities for students and how and if the endorsements will be reflected on the transcript need to be addressed.

3. Initial assessment of a foundational skill or content should occur at a point closest to its instruction and be aligned with the appropriate grade level for that skill. For example, a sixth grade reading level should first be assessed as part of the sixth grade program.

There will be multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate required proficiency at varying points in the K-12 continuum.

Appropriate instruction and, when needed, intervention and/or remediation tied to the targeted skills must be offered to the student at appropriate points in their K-12 experience.

A student's journey toward graduation includes benchmark indicators. If targets are not met, an automatic process including intervention and remediation occurs at the school level. The five areas listed below may include the following spring benchmarks:

- a. Reading and Understanding: designated scores on third and sixth grade reading test.
- b. Writing: designated score on sixth and ninth grade AWA papers.
- c. Math: Computation test at fourth grade pre-algebra test at eighth grade.
- d. Social Studies: U.S. citizenship test at the high school level.
- e. Science: Foundational science test at the high school level.

**4. The foundational skills should not be seen as forever "fixed" at a given proficiency level.**

The defined levels of proficiency required to be demonstrated may be raised as the students, staff, and District gain experience, become more skilled, or the demands of society evolve or increase.

Care, sufficient notice to all involved, and appropriate adjustment in instructional support and materials need to be made as the proficiency assessment "bar" is raised for our students.

**5. Passing the "qualifying" assessment(s) or test(s) is not sufficient for graduation; rather it is a part of the total graduation requirement.**

Meeting the minimum skill requirements called for by the certified diploma is not the end product or target of our efforts. The responsibility of the District is to guarantee and provide an opportunity to learn and to uphold its diploma and accompanying curriculum, instruction, remediation, and assessment processes.

The total graduation requirement is as follows:

- a. Earning twenty-two academic credits in a course of study taken over a minimum of eight semesters.
- b. Passing a qualifying exam as prescribed by the State of Alaska.
- c. Demonstration of minimum skills as outlined below:
  - Be able to read and understand.
  - Be able to write to communicate.
  - Be able to perform basic math operations and understand liquid, solid, and linear measurement.
  - Acquire and demonstrate essential social studies skills and content.
  - Acquire and demonstrate science skills and content including knowledge of scientific process and recognizing the importance of science in society.

The goal of the District is for each student to graduate as "a well-rounded human being." Meeting the minimum skill requirements called for by the certified diploma is a part of this picture, but it is not the end product or target of our efforts. The responsibility of the District is to guarantee and provide an opportunity to learn and to uphold its diploma and accompanying curriculum, instruction, remediation, and assessment processes.

3 This document presents the KPBSD Assessment and Indicator Continuum

This KPBSD document outlines the indicators at 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and HS graduation envisioned for the KPBSD certified diploma for foundational, proficient and advanced certifications. The attached explanation page describes the options available for recording specific areas or levels of achievement by sites or the district for individual students.

The foundational level indicators are intended to trigger review by appropriate school and District staff of individual student scores or performance in the target content areas of reading, writing and math. The school will notify the student and parent when a student's performance is found to be below the foundational skill or content level for a the given grade level, or below the "proficient" level set by the state in their benchmark tests.

4 11/7/00 Draft KPBSD Assessment and Indicator Continuum			
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade	6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	High School Graduation
Advanced State Advanced Benchmark score	Advanced State Advanced Benchmark score Reading Level Test 231 Math Level Test 238 Writing Level Test 229 AWA 4.0	Advanced State Advanced Benchmark score Reading Level Test 236 Math Level Test 254 Writing Level Test 236 AWA 4.0	Advanced Pass HSGQE R W M Complete required course sequence Possibly GPA 3.5+ or 3.75+? AWA (none lower than 4) CAT 5 / ACT / SAT (top 10%?) (For above - 3 of 4 indicators or all)
Proficient State Proficient Benchmark score	Proficient State Proficient Benchmark score Reading Level Test 213 Math Level Test 215 Writing Level Test 214 AWA 3.0	Proficient State Proficient Benchmark score Reading Level Test 220 Math Level Test 228 Writing Level Test 220 AWA 3.0	Proficient Pass HSGQE R, W, M X yrs math / science (define courses) CAT5? Post Algebra test Reading, Writing ACT/SAT? Possibly GPA 3 – 3.5? AWA (none lower than 3.0?)
Foundational R, W, M State Benchmark scores? Reading CAT5 32 <sup>nd</sup> %ile Reading CBM 90 Math CAT5 32 <sup>nd</sup> %ile Writing CAT5 24 <sup>th</sup> %ile	Foundational R, W, M State Benchmark scores? Reading Level Test 207 Math Level Test 210 Writing Level Test 209 AWA 2.5	Foundational R, W, M State Benchmark scores? Reading Level Test 216 Math Level Test 222 Writing Level Test 216 AWA 2.5?	Foundational Required courses and credits Pass HSGQE Reading, Writing, Math Level Tests - R 216, M 222, W 216 Pass Science foundational test (Either stand alone or embedded) Pass Social Studies sequence (With embedded assessments) AWA?
Below Proficient State Below Proficient Benchmark score	Below Proficient State Below Proficient Benchmark score	Below Proficient State Below Proficient Benchmark score	Ineligible for graduation
Not Proficient State Not Proficient Benchmark score	Not Proficient State Not Proficient Benchmark score	Not Proficient State Not Proficient Benchmark score	Ineligible for graduation

Administration recommends the following as a draft outline for the design of the District Certified Diploma:

**The District offers a certified diploma:**

This diploma certifies that the student has completed the required course and credit requirements and has demonstrated competency in each of the five areas (reading, writing, math, social studies and science). Students demonstrate this competency by achieving scores at the foundational level or higher in each area

**The District awards general endorsements of an advanced or proficient level of performance:**

These are awarded to students who demonstrate competency at the proficient or advanced level across the five competency areas. An advanced or proficient endorsement represents a high level of performance and competence. Students earn these endorsements by achieving such indicators as: completing one of a prescribed set courses\*, maintaining a set GPA, securing high scores in designated tests.

(\*The District will need to identify specific course sequences to be considered, but examples of courses might include AP courses, advanced math, science or arts, third or fourth year world language etc.)

These general endorsements of advanced and proficient competency are analogous to "honors" diplomas or "regent" type diplomas or perhaps to the attainment of "eagle" scout in the boy scouts' hierarchy of recognition.

**The district and individual sites develop and offer individual endorsements:**

The individual endorsements recognize specific demonstrations of advanced or proficient levels of accomplishment. Examples might include business, health care, community service, technical or creative writing, advanced industrial design etc

These endorsements are analogous to "merit badges" or other such achievement bars and awards.

The general and specific advanced and proficient endorsements offer additional recognition and value added meaning to the district certified diploma.

The advanced and proficient endorsements provide incentive and recognition for our students who strive for and accomplish at higher levels of performance.

The current AK HSGQE is a minimum competency test. The cut point (or passing grade) is labeled "proficient." By contrast - The KPBSD Certified Diploma recognizes three levels of certified achievement – foundational, proficient and advanced:

A competency or qualifying test with only one cut score is by definition a minimal competency test – that is – however high or low one sets the bar, that bar is the minimum you need to pass.

The single cut score for each test (reading, writing, math) sets the minimum performance level for that test. The high stakes of graduation eligibility attached to getting over that bar places the focus of the student and public on that minimal level.

Identifying that minimal competency level as "proficient" versus "essential" or "foundational" or "basic" is causing confusion among the stakeholders involved in this test. Either the skill level is truly set at "proficient" which implies that students who have basic or essential skills or content will not pass. This would mean that students who can demonstrate mastery of essential skills would be denied a diploma.

The other possibility is that the level though labeled "proficient" is – in fact - lower than proficient – perhaps closer to basic – but mislabeled and not truly at a "proficient" level. In this case, the test results can be misleading for both the students as well as the public.

There are two separate and valid questions that could be asked by state or district education stakeholders:

- (1) What do we want students to know and be able to do (describing the targeted content – and level of performance)
- (2) What is essential for a person to know and be able to do in order to participate in our society and economy? (describing the minimum skills and content – those for which, we would deny a diploma to a student if they did not know or could not do...)

The NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress) assessment is a voluntary but generally accepted standard for rating demonstrated student achievement. In contrast to the state HSGQE with its one cut score, NAEP recognizes and distinguishes between four levels of skills and knowledge: advanced, proficient, basic and not proficient. The NAEP continuum recognizes that there is a level of performance that can be documented that is above proficient - that is "advanced." NAEP distinguishes two levels below "proficient" –they are "basic" and "not proficient." "Basic" level describes a minimal performance level.... Not up to the targeted standard of proficient, yet still reflective – as its name implies - of some "basic" skill and content acquisition.

These four levels of performance in NAEP allow NAEP to report information on the number and percentage of students at each of the four levels. Distinguishing four levels of student performance can be a useful accountability tool. Ex: Progress - or lack of progress - can be measured by changes in the percentages of students in each of the four groupings: how many students move from basic to proficient, from proficient to advanced? How do the percentages of students in each of the four groups change over time? Etc.

By contrast to the HSGQE, the Alaska state elementary benchmark tests use a four level structure.

As discussed above, identifying the cut off (passing) score as "proficient" compounds the problem. It opens the cut score setting task to a no-win dilemma.

The dilemma is inherent in setting the HSGQE test at the "proficient" or target level. It leaves no room for those students who demonstrate achievement which may be lower than the target of "proficient", but also still at a marginal or basic level.

Setting the passing score truly at the "proficient" level – which would be higher than basic - means that students who are marginally competent – that is have basic skills - will not pass and thus will not graduate.

By labeling the single cut score at the target level of "proficient," one could assume that there are students who possess "basic" or essential skills but not quite "Basic." These students have not acquired all that the school or system would aim for, or want as a goal for our students but they do, at least demonstrate a minimally competent performance level, set of skills or content.

Note by comparison to Alaska's test, Texas identifies its required test as a test of basic skills, and does not require a "proficient" level to pass. The public and the students are not led to believe that passing the test demonstrates "proficient" level of skills or knowledge. Basic or minimal competence is truly at a lower level than "proficient."

As contrasted with Alaska HSGQE requirement of "proficient" to pass, the Texas test of basic skills identifies its passing score cut point as a basic skill level. This basic level is not identified nor marketed as "proficient."

Setting the cut score low – that is at a "basic" level but identifying it as "proficient" – makes it difficult to maintain credibility with the public that the level is indeed "proficient." It makes it difficult for the system in designing its curriculum and setting targets for its students.

By contrast to the AK state HSGQE, the KPBSD certified diploma recognizes a foundational level and distinguishes that basic level from "proficient." This structure allows the district to certify the demonstrated skill and knowledge of its graduates and to provide useful information to the school and district stakeholders. We will be able to report and compare the number and percentage of students who graduate with foundational skills, number and percentage that graduate with proficient skills and advanced skills. The certified diploma neither misrepresents nor inflates the meaning of the foundational level or proficient level.

By providing certification at the three levels, foundational, proficient and advanced, the diploma provides the graduate and the community objective information based on demonstrated performance.

**Possible NEXT STEPS for District and / or State:**

**State identify foundational / essential skills and content; reset the HSGQE to assess those essential skills and content:**

Should the state not want to undergo the expense of developing a multiple level assessment program at the HS level- ex: differentiated diplomas - the state could re-set / re-focus the state HSGQE to assess foundational or essential skills and content versus the full set of skills and content contained in the targeted and taught curriculum and reflected in the full set of the performance standards.

**District clearly defined and described "foundational " levels:**

The development of a public and agreed upon definition of foundational levels of achievement in math, reading and writing was a critical primary step to the setting of foundational / essential cut scores for the district certified diploma. The descriptions acted as anchor points for the committee in setting appropriate and defensible cut points for the foundational level of certification. The descriptions helped the committee avoid the trap of confusing the task of identifying target content and performance levels with the task of identifying bottom line performance levels.

Unlike the "foundational" level, the "proficient" level in the KPBSD structure reflects a scope and level of achievement consistent with the target curriculum, the full set of performance standards. As such, a proficient level of achievement addresses the question of what are the target skills and content and the target knowledge level - what do we want our students to know and be able to do. The foundational level is set at the minimum - need to have - level.

**Should the state move to differentiated levels of achievement:**

The state would need to develop proficient and foundational cut scores:

Math - To do this, the state would need to add a foundational level cut score in math. The District will continue to refine its math proficient cut score.

Reading - State would need to add a proficient level cut score for reading; District will continue to refine its reading proficient cut score;

Writing - State would need to modify its writing cut score to provide both a proficient and foundational cut point; District will continue to refine its proficient cut score for writing.

**Rationale for Multiple levels - provide valuable information:**

This refinement is neither a "watering down" nor is it an artificial rising of the bar. Providing both foundational and proficient cut points provides useful information for all stakeholders: student, school, district, community, and state. The inclusion of both a foundational and proficient level further strengthens the assessment and reporting mode. The multiple achievement levels provide added inducement for students and refined information for school constituents.

Having multiple cut points (foundational, proficient and advanced) in each area will provide greater information for accountability (i.e. such information as number of students at each level can be gathered for schools and state). Breaking out the cut scores to foundational, proficient and advanced levels will provide supplemental and value added information for parents, schools and students (i.e., not just who passed, or what number passed the test - but also "who and how many at each level."

Multiple testing opportunities will be required to allow for students to raise their achievement level and provide a measure of achievement and growth

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Unsent Message

From: Hugh Dymont  
 Chris Benson

Subject: Fwd: HSGQE Testimony

To:

Cc:

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To: Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee  
From: Hugh Dymont - Bethel Alternative Boarding School  
re: HSGQE Testimony

This my eleventh year teaching English Literature and English Language Development for the Lower Kuskokwim School District. Six years ago the Alaska Department of Education and teachers from throughout the state, including myself, began a long process of articulating content area standards. Last year our sophomores became the first high school class required to take the Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE).

I have spent my career working with rural, Native Alaskan students. This testimony is in support of both the concept of the HSGQE and of Senator Lyda Green's proposed amendments to AS 14.03.075. This exam is necessary and good for my students; so too are the proposed amendments. If they are made into law, schools and students will still be accountable for their learning, or lack thereof, but reasonable accommodations will be made for students not currently able to pass these minimal standards.

There is a reason that for the first time my students must now prove their abilities in the three R's to someone other than their teachers before receiving a diploma. Simply put, Alaska's elected state legislature wanted to ensure something that the state's educational establishment could not. Namely, the legislature wanted to change the fact that thousands of Alaskan high school graduates, predominantly poor minorities, could not read, write, or do arithmetic at anything close to a 12th grade level.

Despite very good intentions and the millions of dollars being spent annually, Alaska's publicly funded school systems have not been able to ensure that their graduates could read, write and compute. Yet these skills are the foundation and a

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prerequisite to a person's ability to think well in a modern and complex society and economy.

A typical example is a student who just transferred to my school, an alternative school, whom I will call Evan. A 12th grader with no history of behavioral or learning problems, Evan had earned straight C's and B's for the last three years. Yet his reading and writing skills are at a 6th or 7th grade level. His math computational skills are lower. By May this young man will have completed all of the school district's course requirements and will receive a high school diploma; yet he has trouble making change (passing the HSGQE will not be required until December of 2001).

This is not an extreme or rare occurrence but rather something I have seen repeatedly in the eleven years I have taught in Alaska. The public, Alex and his parents, and the state legislature know that such learning deficiencies can easily condemn such a young person to the margins of our economic and political system. Without basic knowledge and skills, the Evans of Alaska will be unable to effect change in the world around them nor respond adaptively to a changing economy society.

The community college in our area has pointed out that many of our school district's graduates, even those with a 3.0-plus GPR, need to take at least a year's worth of remedial classes before they can attempt college-level courses. It's an unfortunate phenomenon and a serious political issue as well because at one point our school board and our former superintendent even discussed the idea of paying for our district's former students who needed to take remedial courses.

This situation must change and Alaska's public schools couldn't do it as a system without outside mandates; it's that simple.

I don't know how the standards movement is developing in other states, but I'm a supporter of what's happening in Alaska, warts and all. Ninety-five per cent of the students I teach are Yup'ik Eskimo. Ninety per cent of my students are poor and 70% score in the bottom quartile of nationally normed assessment tests of academic achievement. Some would argue that the playing field is not level for these students and they are right, it's not. Most of my students come from homes where Yup'ik is the first language, many come from homes affected by the ills of poverty, including substance abuse and familial or community tragedies. Yet despite the disadvantages, my students are expected to take the same test that those from more encouraging socio-economic backgrounds will take, and they should because my

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students can pass it.

Regardless of socio-economic circumstances, students all across Alaska are earning diploma's that presumably mean something. What does an Alaskan diploma signify? The standards of a school in one community are not the same as those in another community. Essentially, student grades are based on comparisons between the skill levels of students in the community and not on an articulated, statewide standard of achievement. Because of this, employers and post-secondary vocational and academic institutions know that an Alaskan diploma does not necessarily signify anything at all.

Despite linguistic singularity and troublesome backgrounds, my students can pass the HSGQE. I have had dozens of students make dramatic gains academically. These students invariably have one thing in common—they try hard. In twelve years of teaching in both rural New Hampshire and Alaska, I have never known a student fail to meet an academic challenge if they tried hard enough. This notion may seem naive, old-fashioned or simplistic, but barring legitimately diagnosed neurological problems or learning disabilities, it is true. My students can achieve academically when they are expected to and when they make a conscientious effort to learn. This is precisely what I have seen the HSGQE encourage in my students.

The HSGQE is a high stakes exam, but unlike in many Asian and European countries where a single test taken in adolescence can seal one's fate, the HSGQE, or portions of it can be taken up to five times in high school beginning in sophomore year. By law, students are allowed six attempts after they leave high school. Teams of teachers, administrators, and members of the public determined the cutoff scores, which seem to me, in the areas of writing and reading, rather modest levels of achievement. Moreover, between the third and eighth grades, three similar comprehensive assessment exams are administered to assess whether students are on track or need academic interventions.

I have seen the test that is given in this state and it seems reasonable. It is not the kind of multiple answer tests I took in high school in preparation for college admissions. The HSGQE requires writing of essays in response to "real life" scenarios, editing of mistakes from sample passages, short answer responses to reading excerpts, applied mathematical problems, descriptive writing of how mathematical problems are solved, etc. The test is essentially untimed in that one day per subtest is allowed; though on average only three to four hours are needed. Once a subtest is passed it need never be taken again.

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Tests are not a problem if the test is a good one, nor is teaching to the test a problem because the skills this test assesses are those that high school graduates should have. I have seen fear in my students' eyes when they talk about the HSGQE, but I've seen relief and pride and self-confidence as well when they pass portions of it. By implementing this testing procedure, the state of Alaska has said to my students, "Here's the bar. If you choose to, you can and will learn the real skills you need to get over it."

Some question the fact that there are provisions in the law that the state department of education can "take over" underperforming schools. There is a team of people, teachers and nonteachers, that comprise a committee called the School Designator Committee, which will issue reports on school and district student testing results (already reported in the local papers). One of the big issues has been whether the state would step in and take action if a certain percentage of students does not demonstrate proficiency. But this fear supposes an adversarial relationship between the state department and Alaska's school districts that I don't believe exists. In fact, it appears the state department is more interested in observing the growth in a school district's test scores than it is in "taking over" districts whose numbers may fall below some rigid percentage of passing students.

Is mandating such testing fair to an under-performing school faced with socioeconomic conditions that dramatically affect students' efforts? Is it fair to a hardworking teacher to be told that there is a better way that he or she must follow? These are difficult ethical questions, and I am uncertain. But I do know that it is not fair to award high school diplomas to students who have not achieved even eighth grade skill levels. As a teacher, I welcome reasonable testing procedures that help define the standards of student achievement on which Alaska's teachers and members of the public can agree.

In fact, I consider to continue awarding diplomas to students who have not mastered basic skills, to excuse low levels of achievement, a kind of unintended, but subtle form of discrimination. Only now that the results of the first round of testing are in have I heard the state seriously address the low level of achievement of its minority and native Alaskan students. Now we are really talking about education for "all" students. There is now real conversation and action by rural school districts' to somehow increase the levels of achievement of their students. It was Alaska's state standards and the HSGQE that were the impetus for this.

Unlike most states, our public schools are funded directly by the state using a funding formula that takes into account the higher expenses in rural areas. Except

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for in a few metropolitan areas, Alaska's school systems are not funded by property taxes, so we don't see the resulting disparity in amounts spent per pupil that exists in other states. Currently, we are spending between \$11,000 and \$13,000 annually per rural pupil. Anchorage and Fairbanks, which do raise educational dollars through property taxes, are supplemented by about \$3,700 per student by the state.

When students do poorly in Alaska, lack of funding is not the cause. While spending more money can't hurt, spending more does not necessarily result in increased student performance. Setting reasonable standards and motivating students to achieve them over a sustained period of time does. My students are studying harder than they ever used to now. Academic success and the resulting self-confidence is creating positive changes in their lives as well as in the general state of education in Alaska.

I'm optimistic about the possibilities but not naïve. If a high percentage of my students are going to pass the HSGQE, they will need to learn more. Thus, I expect my state legislature, which presumably wants the same thing, to increase funding for effective after-school and summer programming so my students are given the opportunity to learn more. The typical voter in Alaska should expect no less from the legislature. To date, we have been receiving funding for such programs, though it comes from a federal source. I also expect my students to try harder than they ever had in school, because to date, my students have not had to try hard at all. 78% percent of my school's sophmores and juniors have passed the reading comprehension subtest. This is above the state average. 45% of my students have passed the writing subtest, below the state average but far above the average percentage of rural Alaskan students. Two factors account for this, motivated teaching and motivated learning.

Fortunately for my student Evan, his school focuses much of its program on developing vocational skills, forthrightly addressing substance abuse problems, remediating academic deficiencies, and impressing upon Evan that he can succeed in almost any way he chooses. Helping Evan become a person who can read, write, and do arithmetic must also be accompanied, I believe, by helping him become a good person. I hope Evan will be someone who will stand up and be heard when needed, I hope he will eventually be a good husband and father and someone who can confront his own weaknesses when necessary. But this entails that Evan, like all good students, learns to forego immediate gratification in order to reach long term goals and the greater satisfaction that comes with them.

When I think of my former students, I am saddened by thoughts of those now dead,

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from violence and suicide, those who have been trapped in the cycle of substance abuse or child abuse, living lives of resentment and self-pity. Yet I also consider those students who are now Bush pilots, those studying to be teachers, the ones active in their churches and faiths, the young couples providing for young babies, those who are becoming *nukalpiaq* (master hunters), and those who are living simple, giving lives. These are not things that can be assessed in a single test, nor are they things that curriculums can be designed to teach well. These things are learned by example and a piece of this is learning how to meet reasonably thought out standards, be they standards of behavior or standards of academic achievement.

Hugh Dymont  
Bethel Alternative Boarding School  
P.O. Box 1858  
Bethel, AK 99559  
(907)543-5610

Stephanie M. Dredla  
P.O. Box 1106  
Nome, Alaska 99762

Dear Members of the Senate HES Committee:

I am a student at Leonhard Seppala High School (in Nome) who has recently transferred from Florida. The county which I attended school in, Manatee County, requires that all high school students pass the High School Competency Test (HSCT).

~~I graduate~~ I graduate this year, 2001, and have taken and passed the HSCT. My experience with this test is that it ~~was a~~ distraction from our academic work. The staff spent many class periods preparing us for taking the test ~~successfully~~. Doing this practice may have helped other students, but for me, I do not believe it made a difference in how I did score.

I feel that the idea of the exam is a wise idea, however minimal time should be spent on preparation and the main focus should remain on academics. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Stephanie M. Dredla

My name is Michael J. Jones (DOB 5/10/66). I am a teacher at Leonhard Seppala High School - the alternative high school in Nome.

My first impulse is to ask that as you, the Alaska Senate, continue to discuss the role of the state's high school graduation qualifying exam that you consider abandoning the notion of the exam entirely.

I realize that too much is at stake for that to happen; that enough time, money, energy, and research has gone into the creation and implementation of this exam. However, I also realize there continue to be enough questions regarding this exam that it would be irresponsible NOT to postpone its effective date.

I ask that the Alaska Senate support any measure that will postpone the effective date of the exit exam to 2006 or later. It is unfair to ask current high school students to wait and to just be patient while everyone else figures it out.

My primary question is this: Are authentic and reasonable alternatives to this exam being considered? No two students learn exactly the same way. No two students express what they've learned in the same way. As teachers are asked, urged, and required to develop alternative and authentic means of assessing student learning, it seems absurd to place such great importance on a high-stakes pencil-and-paper test.

I applaud Lyda Green's proposal in that it shows that some thinking regarding alternatives is happening -- that some attempt to develop alternatives for alternative students is being made. Senator Green's statement regarding the exam, as reported in this week's Anchorage Daily News, is correct: at this point "just postponing it will not do it." However, I fear that the multi-tiered diploma system proposed by Senator Green will create a type of caste system among Alaska high school graduates.

If the test continues to be required for students to receive a diploma, all diplomas must be equal. It is the test that needs to be adjusted. Real means of assessing student knowledge must be developed. As teachers, we are asked, requested, urged, and required to offer learning choices to our students. We must vary our methods of assessing student knowledge and performance.

I urge the Alaska legislature, the department of education and early development, schools, students, and parents to work together to develop alternatives to the test, alternative ways to assess our students' practical knowledge and the application of that knowledge - not alternative and unequal diplomas.

Michael Jones  
PO Box 1393  
Nome, AK 99762

**TO: The Alaska Senate Health, Education, and Social Services Committee; Sen. Lyda Green, chair**

**FROM: Michael Jones, teacher, Leonhard Seppala High School (Personal Mailing Address: P.O. Box 1393, Nome, AK 99762)**

**RE: High School Graduation Qualifying Exam; Senate Bills 120, 128, 129, and  
DATE: March 9, 2001**

Members of the Senate Health, Education, and Social Services Committee:

I support considerations that lead to postponing the effective date of Alaska's high school graduation qualifying exam to create time to ensure that the exam and examination processes are fair, non-biased, sensible, and will coincide with sound education ideologies.

The members of the class of 2002 have been left waiting in an unfair position while decisions regarding this test – and the students' futures – are made and unmade and remade. I applaud efforts of both houses of the Alaska Legislature to address the issues brought up by the mandated test. It is obvious that not everyone will be pleased with whatever legislation results from discussions this spring, and it is clear that the new and continuing questions surrounding the exit exam will not and cannot be answered by the time this legislature adjourns.

There are issues, however, that do need to be addressed in policy, if not in legislation:

- A more rapid rate of return of test scores is necessary for effective placement of students in appropriate foundational and preparatory courses.
- Content of the tests, and what numbers constitute passing scores, must be more firmly established.
- Alternative and authentic methods of assessment – alternatives to the traditional pencil-and-paper test – must be developed to conform with current teaching and testing methods if the test is truly to serve as a piece of good-faith education reform.
- Testing procedures and alternatives for the state's special needs students must be developed.
- Fiscal attachments acknowledging the expenses incurred by Alaska school districts implementing the exams need to accompany testing legislation.
- How do we address the program needs of students who:
  1. are at-risk and prefer to leave school than to endure another test; or
  2. fail more than once, give up, and leave school knowing that it doesn't matter if they are in school if they don't pass the test?

Senate Bill 120 lessens the high-stakes pressure associated with the test, but it still affects the class of 2002 by taking effect as law on January 1, 2002, after seven-eighths of the typical 2002 graduate's high school career has passed.

*Jones 1/2*

Senate Bill 129 also lessens the high-stakes pressures that members of the class of 2002 have been forced to endure. If the subject-area endorsements placed on a student's diploma don't mean anything in the long run, why create law that will make it mandatory to place such endorsements on diplomas?

Senate Bill 133 goes far in protecting for the rights of special needs students. I suggest this: take this one step further to allow alternatives and choices in method of assessment of all students.

~~Senate Bill 128~~ does allow for more time for issues surrounding this exam to be address more thoroughly and less hurriedly. However, I again ask: If the endorsement stickers on the diplomas don't really affect the student one way or the other, why bother with them?

Why not just delay the effectiveness date, cleanly, and outline what the State of Alaska must do to create a more authentic testing method on which to base our seniors' functional knowledge?

The State of Alaska has not been in the forefront of the creation and implementation of a high school exit exam. There is no reason that justifies rushing testing-related legislation when it is our students who will, initially, pay the price. I urge you to support postponement of the high school exit exam until it is more educationally sound and less politically correct.

*Michael Jones*

*Jones 2/2*

**TO :** Senate Committee on Health, Education & Social Services

**FROM:** Sharon W. Swope, Ph.D.  
Interim Superintendent, Dir. Of Special Education  
Nome Public Schools

**RE :** Legislative Proposal -- Graduation Requirements  
Senator Lyda Green  
Granting of Differentiated Diploma

As Director of Special Education and Interim Superintendent of Nome Public Schools I am addressing the Senate HESS Committee in support of the Two-Phased Approach as sponsored by Senator Green.

Every student deserves to be in an education system that expects all students to achieve at the highest levels possible. Ideally, the system provides the resources for all students to learn optimally and then insists on accountability for teaching, as well as learning. Unfortunately, we continue to graduate students without the basic abilities to read, write and compute.

We are advocating therefore for the HSQE to remain as a requirement but would ask that the committee consider just a few areas of concern such as the following:

- Is the testing program so sound that we can be assured we are measuring what we say we are measuring to such a degree we are going to deny a student a diploma?
- Do differences in test scores reflect real differences in student knowledge or are they the result of other factors such as scoring errors, bias of the raters or differences in how the test is administered?
- Have the cutoff scores been set accurately and with sufficient research to justify the choices?
- What is the correlation between student grades and test scores and have we had enough time to analyze this very important relationship?
- Isn't the HSQE really being used as a single source of information upon which graduation decisions are made?
- Does the structure of the test adversely affect Alaska Native and other non-Western students?
- Where is the concrete case law, the common questions asked and answered by the courts? (For example: the most recent January decision in Texas (*GI Forum et.al. v. Texas Education Agency et al., 2000*))

- How does the HSQE show achievement progress and/or problems over time?

In our opinion, there in lies the one consistent answer to the all of the above questions... TIME. We have not had adequate time, time to research or time to collect the appropriate data needed to inform such serious consequences and repercussions as an all or nothing denying of a diploma to students.

We are faced with a large percentage of students failing the exam. We are faced with disenfranchising a large number of students. OR we are faced with lowering the cut-off scores on the test. I submit none of these options are in the best interests of our students, particularly special needs, ESL, vocational or high-risk students.

Instead, I suggest we support the development of this incremental two-phase approach as put forth by Senator Green. A differentiated diploma system will continue to sustain the needed accountability while providing for the long term systemic changes needed to get results for ALL Alaska students.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views, and for your continued dedication and service to the students and families of Alaska.

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February 23, 2001

To: Senate HESS Committee

From: Carla Garrett  
Special Education Teacher  
North Slope Borough School District

Re: High School Qualifying Exam

Professionally, I do not feel the High School Qualifying Exam should be administered to special education students. They are not responsible to learn the information contained on the test in their area of disability, so it is not appropriate that they be held responsible for the information or lose the opportunity to obtain a diploma.

When a child has to struggle so much harder than their peers through their entire educational career to learn the material presented to them, I feel they deserve more recognition than a certificate of attendance. It is an insult to the effort they put forth to give them the message that they do not measure up, therefore, they do not get a diploma. Children who are already different dont deserve to be left out one more time. It affects their self-esteem, the life long goals they set for themselves and the level of productivity they accomplish as they approach and achieve adulthood. The decision to require this exam for the attainment of a high school diploma for special education students does not take into account the long-term ramifications for these peoples lives.

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07iiStandardize Testing

I am very apposed to testing any child that has not been taught on grade level with a grade level standardized test. If you stop and think about this, it does not make good sense. Why would I go through the process of writing an individualized education plan if I wanted the student to be tested on grade level standards? First of all he cannot keep up with grade level materials. Second, I do not use grade level materials to teach Special Education the student. My methods, procedures and assessments are not the same as regular Education, why would I test with a regular education standardized test? Again, it makes no sense. Third, what are these tests going to show and/or tell me about my student that I do not already know? I use many tests to show growth at his level. Why do I need another test comparing him to other students from around the USA? I am to teach him on his level, at his rate, towards his disabilities gaps, and with his best learning style. I just do not see the value of putting the student through a test that will do nothing for him or I. Why waste the time and energy going through this exercise in frustration and sometimes humiliation? IT MAKES NO SENSE!!!!

Margaret E. Bird  
Special Education Teacher  
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According to Special Educators.....  
Position Statement for Sped Students and the HSQE  
Senate HESS committee, Feb. 24, 2001

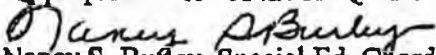
IDEA '97 clearly requires that school districts provide a free and appropriate public education designed to develop independent living and employment skills for children with disabilities ages 3 through 21. It seems to me that the fundamental issue that the High School Qualifying Exam presents to the special education student population is that of its "appropriateness".

The federal mandate, P.L. 94-142, since its inception in 1975, has called upon a team approach in the design of the child's educational program. The function of this team is critical to the success of the special education student as these teams are charged with the responsibility of identifying the unique needs and preferences of the child and setting up an appropriate educational program as determined by the child's post school outcome. The HSQE takes away this decision-making obligation of the IEP team. This is contradictory to the mandate of federal law and is a truly discriminatory practice for disabled children. It seems inherently unfair to expect disabled children to meet the same standards as their typical peers. Congress, in its wisdom, early on recognized that disabled children must be held to "individualized" standards. No single measure is ever the basis for determining eligibility or programs for special needs students. By making the HSQE the "measuring stick", we are setting our special education kids up for failure. Drop out rates will increase as kids realize a high school diploma is unobtainable. The outcome will be that kids with disabilities will exit school unskilled and unprepared for the world of work and lacking in the basic skills necessary for independent living. If students can't envision succeeding in our public schools, then who should they turn to help them acquire the skills necessary for life?

Any and all decisions regarding eligibility, placement and program are made by the IEP team. It is clearly the obligation of the IEP team to develop an educational program designed to promote student success. It seems only reasonable and rational that IEP teams would decide if the HSQE or some other instrument is an appropriate assessment instrument for determining if the child is prepared to effectively make the transition from school to work and life-long learning.

The varied cultures of the North Slope Borough appreciate diversity and believe that "All Children Can Learn". We DO NOT support the use of a single measure to determine if a student has earned a diploma which is symbolic of a rite of passage into the adult world.

As advocates for children with disabilities, we strongly encourage the State Education Agency and the State legislature to explore other options as they determine the "appropriateness" of the HSQE for the disabled student population.

  
Nancy S. Bufley, Special Ed. Coordinator  
North Slope Borough School District

29 yrs. Experience sped teacher, Special Ed. Administrator, Educational Diagnostician

My view on the High School exam is simple. Why are Special Education students expected to achieve at the same rate and level as the Regular Education students? If this is the expectation, and it seems to be, why is there a Special Education program in the first place? The state has jumped into this exam with both feet forward and both eyes shut. Have they learned nothing from what has happened in other states? I believe that it is unlawful to disregard the IEP and it's contents. The test and the manner in which it has been implemented will negatively affect a lot of lives. I agree with high standards, but I think there needs to be some preparation time in order to see how effective the test is doing what it is meant to do and that is improving education as a whole.

Slow down, work out the bugs, and make it fair to all students.  
SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS SHOULD NOT BE TAKING THE  
EXACT SAME TEST AS REGULAR EDUCATION STUDENTS.

Kevin Downs

North Slope Borough School District  
Special Education Teacher

Dear Senate committee,

In my opinion the Alaska High School Qualifying Exam is unfair to the student of special education. I feel this way for many different reasons. First and foremost it asks many of our students to perform at a level that they are incapable of performing in order to receive a diploma. Some of my students cannot pass this test. They have developed a number of different life skills that will help them in their futures that this test does not measure. There are some of our students to whom a diploma is a very important thing. It is a goal they have been working towards for their entire school career. Now the legislature is saying "You have attended school for twelve years (at the least). During those twelve years you have taken many tests; you have read many books; you have completed many projects; and you have gotten grades for all of your efforts. None of that matters now. What you have learned in school is unimportant if it is not on this test. If you do not pass this test you do not graduate!" This is a frightening thing. It is frightening because what the legislature is doing is making this test define the school curriculum. The purpose of a test is to focus the curriculum of an education. To evaluate where strengths and weaknesses lie and then to leave it up to the teacher(s) to remediate the problems our students are experiencing.

How many businesses and colleges are going to look at the scores from the High School Qualifying Exam? Colleges do not look at the scores on state standardized tests. They look at SAT and ACT scores. They look at grades on transcripts. They look at essays students have written as part of the application process. Where is the evidence to back up the assertion that businesses will look at these tests to determine if a person is the "right one for the job"? How much of the material on this test (particularly on the math section) is applicable to an everyday job?

Perhaps an analogy will help me present my perspective. Picture a person who is grossly out of shape, overweight and unfit. This person decides that they want to lose weight. How do they go about it? First they weigh themselves on a scale. If this person kept weighing themselves on scales that were more and more accurate without making any other changes in how they are living their life would they become more fit? No of course not. If all they did was weigh themselves again and again then they would only have an accurate idea of how much they weigh. Now if they changed their fitness and eating habits after they weighed themselves then they would see an improvement in their fitness.

All the High School Qualifying Exam is, all any test is, is a scale. Imposing this scale on the public schools without providing additional supports is not going to raise the level of education that our children receive. We have to change other things as well. We have to make our schools more fit as it were.

If you lower class sizes you will see an improvement because of the increased level of teacher student interaction. If you increase teacher training opportunities you will see an improvement in the education that our children receive because teachers will be teaching their classes with greater skill and knowledge. If you give teachers the opportunity to go to another classroom and observe and learn from another talented professional you will see an improvement in the level of education our students receive. If you increase the amount of resources our teachers can apply to their classrooms then you will see an improvement in the education our students receive because teachers are allowed to be more creative. If you increase teacher salaries you will see an improvement in the quality of education that our students receive because you will attract well trained, experienced, and talented teachers to our schools. This is not to imply that the teachers in our schools today are not well trained, experienced or talented, most are. Imagine if our teaching staffs were made up of only the best educators. Would not the quality of education in our schools have to rise?

The answer to the problems that are seen in education today cannot be solved by more testing alone. Testing should tell us what we need to fix. If you want to improve education, raising standards is not your solution. Give teachers the time, skills, resources, pay, and respect that they deserve as the professionals they are and you will see an improvement in the quality of education in our public schools. Simply raising the bar without giving our teachers and students the opportunities and training they will need to reach that new height is only setting yourselves, your students, your teachers, your schools, and your children for failure.

Thank you for your time,  
Andrew McDermott  
Special/Regular Educator  
Nunamiut School  
North Slope Borough School District

Saturday, February 24, 2001

To Whom It May Concern,

Hopefully this concerns all of us. The futures of ALL our high school graduates are at stake here. Many states have passed HSGQE and have failed to see the "bleak" future we have setup for our graduates. Let's make Alaska be the forerunner in having a fair and equitable diploma system for ALL students.

I am for the HSGQE! I think it is a wonderful and needed component to the high school graduation requirement. The problem is not whether it's a good thing or not, it's that it is incomplete! It doesn't cover ALL (and in Alaska's case the majority) of our children. What I see our legislators doing here is "graduation segregation". If you can't pass this test you are worthless and "YOUR FUTURE IS BLEAK". (This is a quote taken from the HSGQE pamphlet sent by the state).

We must have a system of testing students for graduation that is equitable to all students, not just our college bounds. We should have in place, before legislative enactment, a diploma system that incorporates the attributes of the individual student. If it means having several types of diplomas, so be it. It's a semantically doable problem. Differing degrees of academic and vocational diplomas might be a solution. A certificate of attendance means nothing and devalues the education that is received in 12 years that a child goes through school and learns at the best of his or her abilities but cannot and will not be able to pass the HSGQE due to a disability they have no control over.

I believe Alaska's educational philosophy for its children is on the right track. I feel we have to take the binoculars off and see the broader picture that encompasses ALL of our children and not just the norm.

Thank you,

Scott McKay  
Special Education Teacher  
North Slope Borough School District  
smckay@barrow.com

February 23, 2001

To Whom It May Concern:

As a Special Education teacher I feel that we are doing students with disabilities a huge disservice by requiring them to take part in the HSQGE without modifications. After all, isn't special education designed to make modifications for students that have difficulties doing standardized work? I believe it's ludicrous to make modifications for special education students for most, if not all, of their academic career and then expect them to pass an exam that is designed for mainstream students!

Students look forward to Graduation Day long before it arrives and much of the anticipation comes from getting something they have been promised since they have been in school. A sense of accomplishment and work well done all rolled up into a neat package called a diploma. Kids don't think of graduation as the beginning, but as the end of something they have been working towards since Kindergarten. We as teachers and parents tell our children that, "if you come to school, do your best, and try hard everyday you can be proud of your accomplishment and graduate with your diploma!" How can special education students be as proud of a 'certificate of attendance' as other students of their diploma? When, in actuality, Sped students have struggled and worked as hard, sometimes harder, than their counterparts that receive their diploma?

We've put children into Special Education to enhance the skills they have and to help them acquire new ones as well. However, testing them as mainstreamed students will only discourage and inhibit the time, energy, and progress the children have put into their educations. The 'blanket' HSQGE completely destroys all that the Special Educators and their students have worked so hard to accomplish!

As educators, how can we continue to build our students self-esteem and self-worth in their studies, when the test gives the students nothing but a guarantee of failure. I think we need to think hard about the repercussions that the HSQGE is going to have on students in Special Educations. If leaving a large number of students feeling demoralized, unsuccessful and inadequate is what we are after, then we have found the perfect way.

Let's take this opportunity to not make some huge, innovative change, but simply put practices that are already in place, into effect for the HSQGE. If a student is in a special education program as of the first 'official' HSQGE, then they should be weighted accordingly.

Concerned,  
Kylee Twilling  
Special Education Teacher  
Wainwright Alaska

February 23, 2001

567 Main St. Bldg. #3  
Wainwright, AK 99782  
Seawink3@aol.com  
(907) 763-2039

The Honorable Mr. Bunde  
Chairman House Special Committee on Education  
State Capitol, Room 501  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Chairman Bunde, Representative Joule, and esteemed members of the House Special Committee on Education:

My testimony takes the form of questions. Questions that grew to haunt me long before testing was an issue, questions that terrify me even to put into words, yet until we acknowledge the problems how can we do anything about them? Questions that ensued from my teaching in the Aleutian community of Sand Point for one year, 5 years in Teller on the Seward Peninsula, and now 4½ years in Wainwright on the North Slope.

How did we become God enough to tell students they are a failure before they have a chance to begin their independent lives?

How did we suddenly abandon the things that are real indicators of a student's future?

Such things as:

Was the student willing to work hard?

Did the student attend school regularly?

Did the student have some self-motivation to try new things or improve things on his/her own?

Could the student get along with others and make decisions?

Did he or she try and try again?

How is it that teachers who spent hours and hours working with a student have NO valued voice?

Why is it that parents have NO valued voice either?

What is it about "standardized test" that seem to sort more along the lines of cultural differences rather than ability to succeed?

What do I tell the student who cannot divide on paper but can take a snow machine apart, repair it without the replacement parts and have it back together and running well? **What test, test this amazing knowledge?**

**What about the student who has the knowledge to survive in the cruel and unforgiving area we live?** I certainly hope if I ever crash land in a plane I am lucky enough to encounter the student with "that" knowledge and not one who only passed the HSQE.

**What do I tell the child whose mother has confided to me she drank during her pregnancy?**

**Why is there no Master's program specializing in FAS/FAE anywhere for regular education teachers** as many affected students are not diagnosed, yet I must teach them and can not do so effectively having NO background in working with brain-injured children. Is there only on the job training for this?

**What do I tell the diagnosed FAS/FAE students who cannot pass the test yet have incredible talents, insights and knowledge to offer society?**

How do I make them understand when I tell them, they have truly taught me the most valued of all lessons at an incredibly high price to themselves?

**What do I tell the student who does not qualify for special education who has overcome amazing setbacks and knows what he/she can do and can not do and what he/she must ask for help with and yet will never pass the math test?**

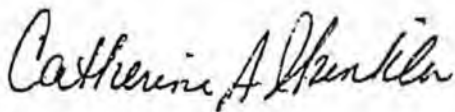
Why has there been NO diversity in the evaluation?

**Why must this be made into a power struggle** rather than something that could benefit more students? **Why is there not a certification for each area passed? Not an all or nothing slam against the wall?**

Why is the time of life you and I remember with fond memories to be turned into nightmares to haunt our young people far into the future, if there is a future?

**How does one survive another suicide of a child?** Three of my former students in the past year chose to die at their own hand rather than live. If we as educators build them up to believe the world is full of possibilities only to have you tell them they are failures, why would they want to survive?

Thank you,



Catherine A. Winkler  
Bush Teacher  
Alak School  
Wainwright, AK 99782

**Subject: High School Graduation Qualifying Exam--Legislation Proposal**

**Date: Wed, 7 Mar 2001 12:41:42 -0900**

**From: "Sherman Minter" <sminter@shungnak.nwabsd.schoolzone.net>**

**To: <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>**

I have seen a draft of your proposal and wanted to write to say how strongly I agree with your thinking. I support the idea of offering a variety of diplomas and a variety of ways to get there. The details would require a lot of work but could have a huge impact on education in Alaska. If we offered a vocational diploma, we would, of course, need to offer a complete vocational program, which is now lacking in our area of the state. I know it is controversial but the idea of regional high schools in the bush has great appeal to me because those schools could offer vocational programs, art programs, music programs, and technology programs which are now essentially unavailable to our students. I support high stakes testing and standards, but I also believe that more choices are essential to success. Thank you for your efforts and good luck with the legislation.

Sherman Minter  
Principal  
Shungak School

2/24/01

The special education directors of Petersburg support the exit exam. The exam has encouraged our district to align our curriculum with the standards. However, we feel a diploma should not be solely based on the exit exam. We support Senator Green's multi-tiered proposal. Our main concern is with "the remediation courses that will need to be taken and completed" in order to receive a diploma. Will additional funding be available for these classes? i.e. to hire someone to teach these classes or to pay for a current teacher to teach summer school.

Special Education Directors,

Christine Wallace

*Christine Wallace*

Bridget Wittstock

*Bridget Wittstock*

**Subject: exit exam**

**Date:** Thu, 08 Mar 2001 09:43:16 -0800

**From:** "Judy Kearns-Steffen" <kearnsj@mail.ssd.k12.ak.us>

**To:** Lyda Green <Senator\_Lyda\_Green@legis.state.ak.us>

3-2-01

Ms. Hauke and committee members:

In pursuant to my testimony on February 24, I would like to make the following statements concerning the HSGQE. I am definitely in favor of phasing in the implementation of the exam, and a full implementation year of 2004 is a good target date.

**PHASE I**

In Phase I of Senator Green's approach, I agree with all of the ideas including that the exit exam scores be shown on a student's transcripts. The only problem that I see with recommendation sections, is that there is not money in most districts to implement the necessary services. But, this is certainly a step in the right direction, and I applaud the work and dedication that has gone into this process.

In the additions: #2 It would be difficult to have exit exams administered on inservice days because the teachers are all required to be at the inservices. The persons administering the tests have to be certified teachers, and if others, who are certified, are found and hired to administer the tests.....who will pay those people? I don't think the comfort level would be the same, if people outside the school staff, administered the test.....and there would most likely be problems with discipline. #8 The developmental plan for transfer students is good. We have this problem in Sitka because of the integrated CORE math program. It does not correspond with the exit exam, in that it takes four years of CORE for the students to get all of the concepts tested, and those students transferring in, or those who opt for only 2 years of math, usually don't do well on the exit exam.

**PHASE II**

Numbers 1, and 2 could be combined into one diploma with exit exam scores noted. College preparation could be noted as well, but this is not necessary, because the transcript of courses taken, indicates the level.

Number 3 may be able to be combined with 1 and 2 also, with the notation of Vocational/Technological added to the diploma.

Number 4 would be legal because of the use of the words IEP. This is a confidential piece of a student's academic record, but the concept has merit. Make sure that there are educators, and at least one special educator or special education administrator on the committee to rewrite this proposal. A notation about an exemption from the exit exam would be an indicator of a special student.

Number 5 is great the way it is. This should appease those who don't want "just a certificate of attendance". There are students who barely fulfill the basic requirements, but, again, the transcript of such a student indicate such.

Hopefully, this input will help consolidate the plan of action, and make it possible to enact with minimal extra duty contracts having to be implemented by individual school districts.

Judith Kearns-Steffen  
Keet Gooshi Heen  
Special Educator  
kearnsj@mail.ssd.k12.ak.us

Senator Green and members of the Committee, thank you for looking into options for students. My name is Mary Wegner, and as the Sitka School District Special Education Director I have been concerned about the lack of options.

As I see it, the whole point of high standards is for the high school diploma to have some kind of meaning. However, we have to balance this need with appropriate educational opportunities that meet the needs and goals for ALL learners. In order to do that, we need to implement some type of accountability system that will allow students of differing abilities to achieve their goals.

People not involved in the education community don't realize the broad spectrum of learners that are in the schools. The resulting tendency is to focus on college bound students only. We need a system that motivates all students to achieve to their highest potential without stigmatizing them or taking away their dignity. A high stakes exam that only allows a certain percentage of students to receive a diploma inevitably leaves the remaining students feeling as if they have failed.

I am grateful that Senator Green has started the discussion to look at options. A tiered diploma system is something to consider; however, there are some problems with this proposal.

1. A diploma that identifies a student as being in special education is a violation of federal law. We simply cannot have a special education diploma. In addition, the education community is not allowed to share with the general public that a person is or has been in special education. An IEP diploma would breach this confidentiality right of the students.
2. Just what does a "C" grade mean? The whole point of moving to a standards-based system is to eliminate a potentially arbitrary grade and instead focus on student mastery of specific skills. In the Sitka School District we are working towards a district-wide standards-based report card, and this criteria of a letter grade seems contrary to the whole standards movement in Alaska.
3. What about students who move out of Alaska? The categories established in this proposal would have no meaning to someone outside of Alaska.
4. As a point of clarification, I am assuming that the exit exam scores that will be listed on the transcript will be the highest scores earned by the student.

One possible option to Senator Green's proposal would be to have an Honors Diploma for students who achieve passing scores on all three portions of the exam. All other students who meet the school's graduation requirements would then earn a diploma. This would focus on the positive rather than the negative and it would be much easier for schools to manage. Perhaps a team of educators including special educators and parents could work with the legislative body to help to draft another option.

There is no easy solution, and current high school students are really caught in the middle. I realize that there is resistance to looking at deferring the implementation of the exit exam, but as an educator I would ask you to please consider this as a viable option. Students who are currently in elementary and middle school in the Sitka School District have had the benefit of numerous intervention strategies early on unlike the current upper middle school and high school students.

In addition, I encourage you to continue with the work on developing appropriate exams and/or accommodations for the learning disabled and developmentally disabled population.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

2/24/01

Public Testimony for Senate HESS Committee in Support of Senator Green Proposal

Chairperson Senator Lyda Green

Hearing regarding Exit Exam held Saturday, February 24, 2001, by audio conference

Statement:

My name is Steve Cathers. I am Superintendent of Valdez City School District. I am also President-elect of the Alaska Association of School Administrators. I am speaking on my own behalf, and my comments do not necessarily reflect the views of the Valdez Board of Education or AASA. I am also the parent of five school-age children.

First of all, I support standards and the Qualifying Exam. There have been significant changes in student seriousness and in classroom content and methods because of high stakes testing and state-wide standards. The challenge before us now is to continue in the direction of school improvement and avoid technical pitfalls which might derail our forward momentum.

Regarding the "Indiana" plan proposed by Senator Green, I support it in general. It offers a critical opportunity for fairness to students who have legitimate reasons for not passing the Qualifying Exam. While I do not think it is the only possible solution to mounting problems with implementing the Exam next year, I think it would address the most serious problems. Anyone who says there are no students who will be unfairly discriminated against under the current law, is oversimplifying both education and legal rights issues. The notion that the current system will "fix itself" if we proceed blindly without any change is wrong. There are constituents in my district who are braced to sue the state and the district over Special Education issues.

Darrol Hargraves and I audioconferenced yesterday with the Executive Officer of the Indiana Association of School Administrators, Roger Thornton, about problems they have experienced with their implementation of Senator Green's provisions. His opinion is that they have implemented high stakes testing smoothly because of the waiver option in their law. It should be noted that many of the provisions in Senator Green's proposal, according to Mr. Thornton, were not in the original Indiana bill but were developed as regulation by the Indiana Department of Education. He indicated the Indiana bill only required there be a waiver option for certain reasons including Special Education and Vocational education.

Critics of Senator Green's proposal will no doubt say it unacceptably lowers standards and relies on a subjective measure, student grades. My first reaction was the same. However, after speaking with Mr. Thornton and considering the plan further, I feel it is a creative and meritorious idea which shows insight into educational realities. I do not feel it would necessarily lower standards. The plan does not offer a waiver indiscriminately. It is very specific in its requirements.

The grade and attendance requirements are only two criteria and if teacher and administrator recommendation is needed as it is in the plan, there is every opportunity to screen out students who are not good candidates. Grades, while subjective, are much more reliable than many believe. There is a stronger correlation between high school grades and college success than there is between test scores and college success. Grading practices have also changed from

what they were even ten years ago. Teachers now need to be able to document and objectify grades much more than ever because of successful suits about sloppy grading. I would suggest to the committee that if grades and attendance are to be used toward a waiver, that they need to be phased in so that perhaps they only apply to the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades next year, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades the following year, and all four years of high school in the third year. Without that, I foresee some due process challenges tying up many districts and the state.

Another significant feature of the bill is that it requires remediation in every case. That is a commendable goal and speaks to the intent of the Qualifying Exam directly. In some cases alternative assessments are required. To not allow that practice, at least in certain circumstances, begs a legal challenge. I would like to suggest that remediation efforts must be promoted statewide regardless of what direction the legislature takes on the Qualifying Exam issue.

To tackle the larger question of what is the correct way to improve our state's schools, I say emphatically, there is no silver bullet! All districts, the state department, and the legislature must work together to improve education in the state through a multitude of efforts. Without shame I offer the record of Unalaska City Schools as one of many examples in the state of significant improvement and high achievement. The board and staff of Unalaska City School District has taken many energetic and bold steps during the last five years to make student achievement its top priority. As a part of that effort, I can say what I believe were factors in their success. The result for Unalaska has been enviable Benchmark and Qualifying Exam scores and being named this fall as one of the top 100 districts in the nation by an independent research group as published in Offspring Magazine. Unalaska was the only Alaska district to receive this honor (see attached article).

How did Unalaska do that? I believe it was a combination of hard work, staff commitment, effective staff development, curriculum development and alignment, close supervision of staff, a strong student discipline system, and targeted remediation. Though it was painful at times, a number of mediocre teachers were nonretained over several years' time; I believe a willingness by the board to nonretain teachers who are not the best was a factor for Unalaska. I also believe it enhanced the status of all good teachers.

A strong commitment to remediation was made five years ago in Unalaska and summer school was implemented. Though summer school began with preschool, and then included elementary school, for the last two years summer school has been offered for all ages of students in order to target deficient skills. Other remedial activities such as weekend "Exit Exam Boot Camp" were offered with a targeted skills approach also. Needless to say, it is not easy for a small district to fund this kind of program and it must be done at the expense of other programs. A deliberate quality schools program could fund those kinds of programs.

Finally, I do not believe school improvement will happen without strong school leadership. Research indicates that, and my personal experience leaves me no doubt that nothing will change without key leaders driving it. I urge you to support school leaders who work largely in isolation from collegial support and often for less daily pay than the teachers they supervise. I fear the administrator shortage that now looms before the state's school districts. All quality school efforts will fail if that is not addressed. Thank-you.

## Steve Cathers

From: ggiles@asb.org  
Sent: Thursday, December 21, 2000 7:32 AM  
To: ggiles@asb.org; ggiles@asb.org  
Cc: ggiles@asb.org  
Subject: AASB E-News, Dec. 21, 2000



body.htm

### AASB Weekly E-News

News you can use... for Alaska's school board members and administrators. Tel. 907-586-1083 Fax 907-586-2995, Carl Rose, Executive Director; Greg Giles, Editor, ggiles@asb.org. Visit the AASB web-site at <http://www.aasb.org>. To unsubscribe send an email requesting the same to aasb@asb.org.

This bulletin is distributed by email only. School districts should copy the E-News for board members not online.

December 21, 2000

Christmas Issue (next issue to appear the first week of January):

- Magazine praises Unalaska schools
- Superintendent's association honors school board members
- Schools must use filtering software
- Professional development workshops well attended
- School boards asked to select AASB legislative liaison
- Resolutions available on-line
- Quick surveys on fees for facility use, use of quarter credits
- Professional development falls short of improving teaching;
- Riley offers toolkit to improve efforts

### MAGAZINE PRAISES UNALASKA SCHOOLS

A national parenting magazine has named the Unalaska City School District as one of the top 100 districts in the country. The magazine, called "Offspring," cited the district for strong student achievement and generous public spending in the classroom, according to J.R. Romanko, one of the authors of the piece. Romanko said the magazine looked at more than 15,000 districts nationwide before making the selections. The Unalaska district was one of 13 cited in the western United States, and the only one in Alaska. "It speaks highly of the community," said Darrell Sanborn, the Unalaska superintendent. "You look at the students and the parents and the teachers -- the support has always been there in Unalaska." Romanko said the Unalaska district ranked higher than 99 percent of the districts studied in scores on college entrance tests, and in how much money was spent in classrooms.

### SUPERINTENDENT'S ASSOCIATION HONORS SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

The Alaska Association of School Administrators presented its annual MacKinnon Award to two school board members last month at its annual convention in Petersburg. Rick Kniazowski, Unalaska School Board, and Cynthia Henry, Fairbanks Northstar Borough School Board, were named recipients of the Don MacKinnon Excellence In Education and Human Services Award. The award is given to school board members "who have worked to achieve the high standards and ideals in public education that is

# VALDEZ CITY SCHOOLS

## Special Education Services

P.O. Box 398 Valdez, AK 99686 (907) 835-4735 Fax 835-2047

February 24, 2001

Sen. Lyda Green  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Sen. Green:

As a Special Education Director and School Psychologist, I sincerely appreciate your efforts on behalf of Alaska's children to ensure that the High School Qualifying Examination is implemented in an appropriate manner. Like you, I have many concerns regarding the timing and implementation of this exam, and I have very grave concerns that Alaska's children are being handled very much like a "political football." These children are not footballs, they are the future citizens, parents, and wage earners of our country. Those children denied a diploma because of a political agenda will not disappear, but will continue to place demands on our society because they will not be provided the means to contribute to our society.

While I sincerely appreciate your efforts to modify and change the exit requirements, I believe that the suggested changes may not be those necessary to ensure success for students, and may indeed cause more problems they will solve. Please allow me to express some of my specific concerns:

As a former educator in the State of Idaho, I have had direct experience with "C average" and "90%" attendance requirements. Past experience has shown these to be extremely difficult to implement uniformly, difficult to monitor, and did not contribute to higher levels of student achievement. Just a few of the problems include:

1. Which courses to include? Core courses only, and what constitutes a "core" course. Does this limit and exclude students from courses where they could be successful? Do advanced placement courses count differently than remedial courses, band, or typing?
2. Does a "C" in Mr. Smith's Algebra class denote the same content mastery as a "C" in Mr. Jones' Algebra class? Grades are very often not a measure of learning, but a measure of production. They are subjective statements about what one teacher perceives to be a student's achievement at a given time. I strongly believe that using a

3/7/01

Public Testimony for Senate HESS Committee

Chairperson Senator Lyda Green

Hearing regarding Exit Exam

Statement:

My name is Steve Cathers. I am Superintendent of Valdez City School District. I am speaking on my own behalf.

The legislation regarding the Qualifying Exam, up to this point, has had a positive effect on schools and students in the state. It has provided an incentive for students to try harder and for schools to be focused. At this point we need to make this accountability system part of state-wide continuous school improvement process. It is in danger of becoming discredited by unresolved real issues of fairness and undesired results.

The worst case scenario, in my opinion, will be that the group of students denied diplomas will correlate too closely to the group of students already identified as handicapped, bilingual, or economically disadvantaged. Another result which could discredit the process will be found in numerous anecdotal cases of students who are successful in the business world as employees or employers who were previously found inadequate by the State of Alaska because of the Qualifying Exam.

I support Senator Leman's bill SB128 in its effort to allow time to resolve these issues yet not lose the accountability we all desire. I wish to point out, though, that other fixes must take place during the two year delay. They are as follows:

1. The Special Education guarantee by federal law of appropriate education is not yet provided for in any bill. I believe our school district will be sued over this issue as it stands now. I have had conversations with the individuals who are prepared to file this suit. The devastating impact of districts all over the state defending this type of suit will harm quality education rather than improve it. Senator Green's bill does provide a solution which should be explored further. I feel her idea for separate diplomas may have merit, especially if it is a part of a system of several multiple diplomas which I will address later.
2. The math portion of the exam must be reworked so that it is relevant. When the standards for the Qualifying Exam were first published, the Unalaska Board of Education passed a resolution objecting to the math standards as being inappropriate. It is to be expected that there will be adjustments to any standardized test as its validity is established. That needs to happen with the math portion of this test.
3. Honest inquiry must take place regarding whether all students have had equal access to quality education. If a school is identified as needing improvement, will the student in that school be punished by withholding their diplomas while the school improves? This study should take place using the disaggregated data which just became available this year at the Education Summit.

4. A further step is needed to increase graduation requirements so that passing the minimal standards of the Qualifying Exam is not the only measure of student success. Bright students may be "dumbed down" by our system if we do not challenge them far more than with a test of general competence. To this end, I propose we offer different kinds of diplomas, sometimes called career pathway diplomas. The day of the generic, pass/fail diploma is passed. The world is now specialized. The work place requires both basic skills and some foundation in specialized skills which vary from one industry to another. This makes sense. Students are diverse and some diversity in our diplomas is warranted. An academic diploma could represent readiness for college. A technical diploma could represent preparedness for a skilled labor career along with its specialized technical training. Graduation standards for each should be different but equally rigorous and challenging. Different diplomas and graduation requirements would address the vast differences that exist between students in their aptitudes and career plans. This change would include and prepare students for the real world of work instead of rejecting and stigmatizing a portion of our students who are not college bound but are very much career bound. Within this structure might be a place for a separate but equal IEP diploma.
5. Remediation needs to be supported through increased funding levels. Options such as summer school and after school tutoring must become commonplace around the state for us to produce high achieving students. This will not happen with inflation-eroded school funding.
6. Student behaviors and school discipline must continue to be addressed in order to prevent failure due to interference and disruption by other students. Much can be done in this respect through strong leadership and community resolve, but legislation to specifically allow removal of disruptive students without costly bureaucracy and unnecessary litigation should be a part of school improvement. Schools should be allowed to focus on instruction and learning.

Thank-you for hearing my testimony.

standard or criterion is a more meaningful measure of learning than grades will ever be. The problem is not with standards, but how to measure mastery of standards.

3. Attendance is an issue that educators struggle with every day, not only in Alaska, but in all of the USA. The problem begins when we hold students accountable for situations over which they, and the school, may have no control. Parents have the greatest control over this variable, and it is unfair to deny a student a diploma because they are required to miss school by parent needs. Again, this is a very complex issue, and not a simple quick fix.

On a more proactive note, I believe there are some actions the legislature could take to better ensure that competency standards are implemented appropriately. Among these:

1. First and foremost, I believe that the Math Standards on the HSQE need to be reviewed by a committee which does not consist of only math teachers. I do truly question whether subject matter teachers are best able to determine what typical wage earners and business employees need to be able to do mathematically in order to be functional persons in our society. This committee needs to have representatives of government, business, and industry on it to provide a more balanced perspective of what is basic math competency.
2. I believe that the legislature has taken a very simplistic approach to determining what is passing, and what is not. When taking the GRE Exams for graduate school, there were many options that schools used to determine competency. Some schools used an arithmetic average of all areas, so that if a person had strengths in one area, those could help compensate for weakness in another area. Some schools discount the lowest score, and so on. The point is should a student who is highly proficient in Reading and Written Language be denied by because they were minimally proficient in math? What about the student who only misses the Math cut score by one or two points, but tops the test in other areas? Should they be denied a diploma? How does such a policy serve anyone's interests?
3. I was very impressed by the suggestion for indicating proficiency on the diplomas; if a student passes the competency, they deserve recognition for doing so. If they do not, future employers may be made aware of this by checking the diploma.

In summary, it becomes apparent to me that the State of Alaska has many issues to address with high stakes testing before denying any student a document as important as a diploma. Until the legislature can say that they provided every possible resource and avenue necessary for all children to receive an appropriate education, it is criminally unjust to deny any student a diploma.

Sincerely,



Janette Peterson, M. Ed., Ed. S.  
Special Education Director/School Psychologist

# Kennedy & Co. LLC

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March 6, 2001

**To: Senate Health, Education and Social Services Committee**

**Re: high school graduation qualifying exam**

We wish to enter this formal testimony regarding the proposed changes to the high school graduation qualifying exam. We regret that we will be unable to attend the teleconference tomorrow (3/7/01) at 1:30.

We strongly favored the original legislation but realize with our litigious society changes are needed.

We have read the draft of proposed changes and concur with them. Senator Green, you and the committee should be commended for championing a more workable standard for all high school seniors. We strongly disagree with the Governor's recommendation to defer the high school graduation qualifying exam until 2006. We like the timetable being implemented now.

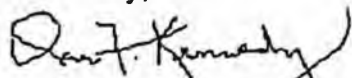
It is unfortunate that testing is required at all. However, "what gets measured gets done." A member of the high school education labor union (i.e. teacher) lamented to me yesterday that it is a hassle to administer the exam. We say "Tough!"

My third grade daughter, Rachel, sat for the exam last week. It was a focused and worthwhile challenge for my 9 year old. My son, David, sat for the third grade test last year. His strong benchmark scores qualified him for the ExtraLearning Program (ELP) at Cottonwood Creek Elementary School.

The private sector (i.e. the customers of the educating government) demanded the high school graduation qualifying exam. We the customer finally obtain fundamental, quality education. The teachers and school system are held accountable.

We recommend adoption of the proposed changes from your committee.

Sincerely,



Dan F. Kennedy, CPA MBA  
Kennedy & Co. LLC - certified public accountants, Wasilla, Alaska

## An Alternative to Exit Exams

Testimony presented by Phyllice Bradner Matson

I urge this committee to consider that an exit exam as outlined in the current legislation is not the best way for the state to meet its two most important education goals. One: to guarantee that every student who passed all the required high school classes receive the diploma that he or she earned. And two: to ensure that each graduate know the basics of reading, writing and math before receiving that diploma.

A better approach would be to identify those math and English classes that represent the benchmark skills required for graduation and substitute the exit exam with standardized final exams in those classes in every middle school and high school in Alaska. If a student cannot pass the standardized final, that child must repeat the class or take a remedial class until the final exam is mastered. This method would not only measure a student's understanding of the subject, but provide a remedy for the student to learn the subject before graduation.

Students who have learning disabilities and special needs are most likely using the 504 and IEP accommodations in the classroom, and those students should be able to take the standardized finals in the same manner that any of their other tests are administered under the guidelines of their individual programs.

Again, I urge this committee to recommend eliminating the exit exams and instead to institute a policy that demands that each student truly pass each basic math and English class before moving on to the next level.

It is also extremely important to recognize that not all graduates will be going on to college. A high school diploma is essential for young people to secure most entry level jobs. We must be realistic about what level of skills will be necessary for graduates to lead useful and productive lives and not set the bar too high above those levels. Those students going on to college will have other measures of their college readiness in the form of SATs and entrance exams. We must not forget our obligation to provide students who are not college bound with the tools they will need for a successful life. That includes fundamental (not necessarily advanced) literacy and math skills, and a viable high school diploma.



# Alaska State Legislature

Please enter into the record my testimony to the Senate, Health, Education, Social Services  
committee name

Committee on Exit Exam Testing, dated March 12  
bill # / subject

Signed: Sharon Rusinganya  
Testifier

Representing (optional)

47135 E. Poppy Lane, Seldotna  
Address

262-2758  
Phone number

I am here because I am concerned about the EXIT Exam and the effect it is having on my <sup>15 year old</sup> twin sons, Justin and Bryan. My boys were diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome which is recognized as a developmental disability. People with AS have average to above average IQ's and usually have learning disabilities or difficulties in one or two areas.

Justin and Bryan are very knowledgeable in Natural Science, Geography, History, Political Science, Military Science, ~~and~~ grammar and reading. However, they have a math disability, poor reading comprehension, and difficulty with abstract reasoning and writing. It doesn't matter how hard they try or how much work they do, they will not be able to pass the Exit Exam because the areas tested are the areas in which they have a disability.

Justin and Bryan are fully aware that they cannot pass this test and have often questioned the futility of continuing with school when they won't graduate with a "real" diploma. What a disservice this is to those children that cannot pass this test ... not because of lack of trying but just because their brains function in a way that is not "average" and yet their strengths will go unrecognized. What message does this give to our children?

There is a difference between those who can ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> won't and those who can't ~~and~~ <sup>but</sup> would.

Would a waiver equal a "devalued" diploma?



# Alaska State Legislature

*SATES*

Please enter into the record my testimony to the \_\_\_\_\_

committee name

Committee on HSGQE - SB133, dated 3/10/01

bill # subject

## Letters to the Editor

### High school exit exam falls 'equal consideration of interest' argument

Recent articles and opinions on the state of Alaska High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) have focused on the need for performance standards, fairness, legal problems, and delay or not to delay. Today, the Legislature is struggling to modify the HSGQE. I submit that these discussions are misdirected and that the HSGQE should be dropped as unethical under the "equal consideration of interest" argument.

Before I continue let me say that those who passed the HSGQE legislation are not unethical. They believe that it is the right thing they are doing and therefore are operating under an ethical standard. I am just submitting that they did not consider a key ethical standard in the debate.

The basic principle of equal consideration of interests does not require equal or identical treatment; it requires equal consideration of each student's best interest. Equal consideration for different students may lead to different treatment and different rights.

Our society has historically provided equal consideration of interest in the educational environment. Students with special abilities or disabilities are not treated equally with other students, but their interests are given equal consideration. A student who needs extra help is allocated greater resources to meet that student's educational needs. Students who excel in physical abilities are provided opportunities in sports. Within the classroom, teachers evaluate each student's abilities and knowingly provide learning opportunities to meet the need of each student.

This is also demonstrated in a variety of testing and intervention plans. Course offerings provide a diversity of opportunities. Parents become involved as advocates of their own child's interests and have the opportunity to define an educational path, which meets those interests. Historically, high school diploma requirements speak to required courses and curriculums but allow flexibility in assessment and presentation in the classroom to meet each student's needs.

The HSGQE legislation does not give equal consideration of interest to each student. It treats all students as equal — a position that is not defensible. Like it or not, we must accept that all students are not equal. They come in different shapes and sizes; they have different intellectual abilities and learning styles; they come with different capacities to experience pleasure or pain.

As the ethical writer Peter Singer notes: "There is no logically compelling reason for assuming that a factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the amount of consideration we give to their needs and interests." Each is a student with a capacity to learn and develop. To require a single series of tests to pass high school does not recognize these differences and interests.

Instead, today we hear from some individuals, including school board members and public officials, that there is an acceptable failure rate. Is the interest of the student who fails being given equal consideration when we publicly accept a failure rate? If the HSGQE passage rate were 20 percent would there be discussions of a delay in testing? I maintain that no discussion would take place. Today, students are dropping out of high school because they fear they cannot pass the HSGQE. Is each student's best interest being given equal consideration when we force students to leave school for fear of a single test?

I submit that we are heading down a path that can only lead to harm. With the HSGQE we changed the philosophical approach to education — a system which is punitive instead of educational, one which costs society far more than it will benefit, and one which does not

give equal consideration to the interest for each human being.

We have an ethical obligation to consider each student's best interests and provide an educational path for that student. To knowingly do differently is unethical.

Kenneth E. Tarbox  
Soldotna