



WEST CHESTER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Educating and inspiring students to achieve their personal best

Dr. James R. Scanlon, Superintendent of Schools

January 13, 2016

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania State Senate,

I am writing to ask you to remove Senate Bill 880 from the budget impasse and vote on it separately before the future of many of our state's high school students is negatively impacted. The bill delays the Keystone Exam graduation requirements for the graduating class of 2017, and requires the PA Department of Education to submit a plan for accountability within six months.

We are at a critical time for the current junior class that is most affected by the graduation requirement to pass a Keystone Exam in Algebra, English Literature, and Biology by June 2017. If students can't or don't pass a Keystone Exam, they must pass a Project Based Assessment (PBA) in order to graduate. The PBA is nothing more than a series of online assessments measuring the three areas tested in a Keystone Exam. The PBA is also graded by teachers not working for the West Chester Area School District. Last year we had six students participate in a PBA and it took four months to receive results for those six students.

The West Chester Area School District has 951 students enrolled in its junior class and at least 118 will need to begin the Project Based Assessment this March. They will be removed from their elective classes in order to have enough time to complete these assessments before the end of the school year. If we receive results in four months, we should know by September if these students will be eligible to graduate from high school. Here is a table of the number of students in each of our three high schools who now must take the PBA because they have failed one or more Keystone Exam since 9th grade.

High School	Biology	English Literature	Algebra
East HS	41	36	16
Henderson HS	38	33	25
Rustin HS	39	36	35
TOTAL	118	105	76

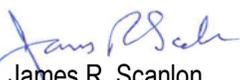
All three of our high schools score among the top 20 in the state, out of some 650 high schools receiving a School Performance Profile, over the past three years. We have worked diligently to help every student pass the necessary exams in order to graduate from high school, and we have spent more than \$1 million in staffing expenses over the past two years to provide resources to instruct students in remediation classes. Even with that help, we expect that 2%, or about 18 students, in the class of 2017 will not graduate due to this unfunded mandate. When the parents of those 18 students ask me why this happened, I will forward the names and contact information of our legislators and governor to respond to their questions.

All of these resources have been focused on the class of 2017 and we have not even begun to address the class of 2018 (current 10th grade students). Many of them also need to be instructed in order to re-take a Keystone Exam or to take the PBA. Where will the money come from to help them?

If a high performing district like West Chester is struggling with this requirement, how will the state handle an estimated 100,000 students not graduating next year because of an unfunded mandate that has very little relevance to certifying that a student is ready to graduate?

Please vote on SB 880 for its own merit and not part of the stalled budget discussion. It's the right thing to do for children in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,


James R. Scanlon
Superintendent of Schools