New Jersey
Urban Youth
Research Initiative

*Graphics designed by Francisco de Jesus*

# *The New Jersey Urban Youth Research Initiative:*
# *Report on the Statewide Survey on New Graduation Requirements*

## August 22, 2009

**The New Jersey Urban Youth Research Initiative:**
**Statewide Survey on New Graduation Requirements**

In 2008, a New Jersey coalition of education and community based organizations met to design a process for youth participation in the New Jersey debate on secondary education reform and high school graduation standards. Researchers and educators from the Education Law Center, CUNY Graduate Center and Saint Peter's College reached out to the Abbott Leadership Institute, NJ Community Development Corporation, Henry Snyder High School, Project Grad and ASPIRA to formulate a plan for youth research and action in the cities of Jersey City, Newark and Paterson. From this initial advisory meeting (which also included educators from Rutgers and New York University), the New Jersey Urban Youth Research Initiative was launched.

With start up funds from the Schumann Fund for New Jersey, youth from the New Jersey Urban Youth Research Initiative (NJ UYRI) collected data within their schools and across cities. They conducted interviews and assessed science equipment and course offerings throughout three major urban communities to determine schools' capacity to satisfy graduation requirements and to document state-wide perceptions and evaluations of the new graduation requirements.

In Phase I of the research, youth researchers documented institutional capacity as well as the range of students', teachers', and community members' views of the new graduation requirements. After analyzing the interviews and inventories, the youth met with New Jersey educators, lawyers, activists and researchers and decided it would be important to survey a broad sample of critical constituents in New Jersey to assess their Perceptions and Evaluations of the New Jersey High School Graduation Requirements.

Phase II of the research involved the design and dissemination of the 2009 survey, distributed state wide at educational meetings and on the Internet (see http://www.spc.edu/NJUYRI).

This report is grounded in the findings of Phase I and the survey results from Phase II, blended with varied popular education materials produced by the youth researchers to reflect state-wide enthusiasm for rigorous education and concerns about the new graduation requirements.

### *The Political Context for the Research: Changes in Graduation Requirements*

The students conducted their research during a year of public debate leading to the State Board of Education's (SBOE) final adoption of new graduation requirements in June 2009. The requirements phase in a series of "college prep" course requirements emphasizing advanced math and science courses as follows:

- Phase I requires Algebra I, Lab Biology and 4 years of college preparatory English for all new freshmen who entered in September 2008,
- Phase II adds Geometry, Chemistry, Physics or Environmental Science, and an "economic/financial literacy" requirement for new freshmen in September 2010
- Phase III adds a third lab science course and a third advanced math course for new freshmen in September 2012

The SBOE also authorized creation of a new category of state assessments called "competency assessments." These are envisioned as end of course exams, some or all of which would be required to earn a high school diploma.

Concerns about the impact of the new graduation requirements and the capacity of districts to help all students reach them were reflected in the introduction of "New Jersey Secondary Education Redesign Review Act" in the New Jersey legislature. The proposed legislation (S2574/A3692) would allow the new graduation requirements to begin phasing in. However, before any new high stakes graduation tests could be imposed, the State Department of Education would be required to certify that all students have access to the qualified teaching personnel and academic support necessary to prepare for them. The Department would also be required to report publicly to the legislature on the impact, costs and progress of the Phase I mandates before proceeding with Phases II and III.

### *Creating the Urban Youth Research Initiative*

In order to create research teams that were both deeply embedded within their communities and collaborative across, the research teams were formed within local community based organizations/school. Each community organization recruited and facilitated a team of youth researchers. The three city-based teams would meet jointly at a series of weekend-long research camps, held across the year at Saint Peter's College, to build the New Jersey Urban Youth Research Initiative. The final camp culminated in an overnight research experience on the grounds of Saint Peter's College, in which the youth researchers were mentored by college students attending Saint Peter's. Participants in the NJ UYRI were expected to contribute to city-specific data collection as well as cross-city data collection, and to the analysis and write-up process. For their participation, which included a final paper on the process of research, they earned three college credits from Saint Peter's College.

The NJ UYRI research team involved youth from:

- Jersey City (4 youth researchers – three juniors from Henry Snyder High School and one sophomore who participated in ASPIRA from Dickinson High School);
- Newark (8 youth researchers – seven seniors and one sophomore representing East Side, Barringer and Malcolm X. Shabazz High Schools in Newark and Essex County Vocational-Technical School);
- Paterson (7 youth researchers with one freshman and 6 seniors from John F. Kennedy, Eastside, International, and Rosa Parks Arts High Schools, Passaic County Technical Institute and the Youth Build Program.

Youth researchers were enrolled in a college course *Current Social Problems*. As part of the course, students were taught a range of research and college study skills. They learned to use Blackboard to check announcements, access assignments, and post their comments. More importantly they were taught to produce and consume research: how to read policy documents and understand graphs and charts; how to create and analyze surveys; conduct interviews with peers and adults; and how to triangulate data from varied sources. The bulk of the research training took place in the research camps. To prepare for these camps, youth researchers met with research coordinators in between camps at each of the local sites.

Four youth research camps were held, including one overnight intensive methods and analysis institute.

* The first day-long camp at Saint Peter's College took place in January 2009 and focused on framing the policy issues. Youth research teams presented the skills and knowledge they brought to the collaborative, listened to a presentation about the graduation policy change from the Education Law Center, heard from former Assembly Education Chair Craig Stanley, and worked in groups to examine data from the NJ School Report Cards making comparisons across districts, and documenting questions and observations. From this work, three data gathering tools were developed: a *survey* based on the issues and questions youth raised (Appendix A), an *equipment inventory* form, and an *inventory of courses* offered (examples in Appendix B). Youth researchers used the inventory tools to document the capacity of their particular school to offer the math and science courses proposed in the new policy.

* During the March research camp, youth shared the results of their equipment and course inventories. They learned about ethical issues of conducting research and gaining consent from participants. They constructed interview protocols for parents, peers, administrators, graduates and teachers. They practiced their interviewing skills, by interviewing our guest speaker, Dr. Josephine Hernandez, President of the New Jersey State Board of Education. Additionally, they interviewed other guests at the camp, including members of each of the target participant groups. Another youth research group, Students Supporting Action Awareness from New York City, presented their experience with survey construction and administration. The youth and adult researchers offered feedback on the survey constructed based on the issues raised in the first camp.

The final survey was posted on Survey Monkey and distributed at educational meetings. Youth researchers continued conducting interviews between the March and June camps. (Appendix C for interview protocols)

* The June camp was an overnight camp that focused on data analysis and creation of research products. On the first day of the camp, results from the quantitative portion of the survey were presented to the youth along with a facilitated workshop on statistics. They learned SPSS and how to calculate means, percentages and cross-tabulations. In the afternoon we took up the work of coding the open-ended responses to the surveys, documenting outstanding quotes, and matching up these open-ended responses with other data they collected thus far. The data collected on Survey Monkey was converted to SPSS for more advanced analysis. After discussing themes across the groups, the youth moved to creating products, presenting their first drafts the second day. Using the data as a reference point, one group created poetry, another designed and video-taped a skit, a third developed post cards and graphics as part of a public education awareness campaign. Additionally, all the youth devised a slogan or "bumper sticker" summarizing their analysis of the data and the policy.

Overall, these camps consisted of small group work, large group discussion, lectures and presentations, video and some type of creative and recreational activity. The Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI), one of the partnering community organizations, facilitated the ice-breakers at each of the camps.

* During the last camp, August 2009, researchers finalized products and presented their findings to a broad audience of policy makers, activists, educators, youth and media representatives. Over the course of the year, the data and products have been shared across the sites. The partnering organizations have used these materials for their own organizing/campaign efforts. The August session is an opportunity for data to be presented cross site, as an aggregated urban youth analysis of the new graduation requirements.

### *Results of Survey*

The survey was developed and piloted by a team of youth researchers working with educators and community activists to refine the language in order to capture the varied positions on the new graduation requirements. Via in-person and Internet completion of the instruments, a total of 283 respondents completed the survey.

The sample includes 49% educators (teachers, school board members and administrators), 32% community activists, 9% parents, 2% students and 7% other. Half of the sample live or work in Abbott districts (47%), while 24% are from non-Abbott districts[1] and the remaining 29% identify themselves as working across NJ. In terms of

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[1] Abbott districts are NJ's 31 poorest urban districts as designated in New Jersey's landmark school funding case. For background, demographic and school information, see www.edlawcenter.org

geographic representation, respondents come primarily from urban communities in Northern New Jersey, including Paterson, Newark and Jersey City but also from Mountain Lakes, Plainfield, Perth Amboy, Hamilton Township, Englewood, and others. A number of respondents were from county-wide vocational schools.

*Key Findings*:

Three major findings emerge from the analysis:

- **General support for end of course examinations but not diploma denial for students who pass their courses but do not pass the end of course examinations**

Over half of the respondents (56%) *support end of course examinations* as a requirement for graduation, while 19% are "not sure" and 31% disagree or strongly disagree. However, only 13% of respondents believe that students who pass their courses but *do not* pass the end of course examinations, should be denied diplomas.

- **Great concern for schools' lack of capacity to deliver a thorough and efficient education sufficient to meet the requirements, particularly in the Abbott/urban districts**

Respondents voice substantial concern about *schools' lack of capacity to provide the educational programs and the support required to meet these new standards*. Teachers, administrators, parents, students and advocates cite significant concerns about the lack of equipment, staff, facilities, and other resources required to adequately prepare youth to pass the proposed course mandates and examinations, particularly in the urban districts.

- **Substantial concern for the equity implications of the new graduation requirements for students who are English Language Learners and students in special education**

Most respondents across districts and status expressed concern that the new requirements will *raise the drop out rate, lower the graduation rate and widen the achievement gap*.

**Perceptions and Evaluations of End of Course Examinations as State-wide Policy**



*General support for the goals, but concerns about schools' capacity and teachers' awareness*: Urban and suburban respondents report substantial support for end of course examinations. Across districts and across status, half of the respondents agree that end of course exams should be required: 54% of the non-Abbott respondents and 54% of those from Abbott districts; 47% of teachers, 48% of activists and 44% of parents.

However, when asked if "teachers are aware of these changes" only 24% of respondents believe that teachers are aware of these proposed changes; this figure drops to 18% in Abbott districts. Interestingly, only 13% of teachers, 19% of administrators, 27% of parents and 30% of activists believe that teachers are aware of these changes in graduation requirements. Teachers' lack of knowledge was confirmed by youth interviews with educators.

*Strong concerns about schools' lack of capacity to educate all students to high levels:* Respondents were asked to assess whether their schools have proper equipment, enough space and enough certified teachers to educate all students to high levels. On these questions, respondents report a great deal of concern about schools' lack of capacity, particularly in the Abbott districts:



- My school has proper equipment, e.g. science labs, books, etc: 26% agree or strongly agree. A full 63% of non-Abbott respondents agree or strongly agree compared to 8% of Abbott respondents.

- My school has enough space: 27% agree or strongly agree; 47% of non-Abbott respondents vs. 18% of Abbott respondents.

- My school has enough certified teachers: 30% agree or strongly agree, including 33% of teachers, 31% administrators, 31% of activists and 27% parents. There appears to be widespread recognition of this problem. Yet 56% of non-Abbott respondents, compared to 15% of Abbott respondents, agree that their schools have enough certified teachers to deliver the proposed curriculum.

*Concerns about equity*: Respondents on the survey across districts and categories are greatly concerned that the new graduation requirements will increase drop out rates and

reduce graduation rates, particularly for English Language Learners and students in Special Education.

- The new requirements will increase drop out rates in NJ: 52% agree or strongly agree

- The new requirements will increase graduation rates: 15% agree or strongly agree

- The new requirements will improve education for English Language Learners: 22% agree or strongly agree

- The new requirements will improve education for students in Special Education: 17% agree or strongly agree

*Overall assessment of the new graduation requirements*: Overall, approximately one third (31%) of respondents believe the new requirements will improve schools and instruction, one third are unsure and about 36% disagree or strongly disagree that the new requirements will improve education.

## The Uneven Distribution of Capacity and the Equity Imbalance

Despite the relatively comparable levels of support for, and concerns about end of course examinations across Abbott and non-Abbott districts, when the data on capacity and equity are disaggregated by Abbott vs. non-Abbott respondents, the uneven distribution of concerns about district *capacity to educate all students to high standards* is stark.

## TABLE 1: Perceptions and Evaluations of New Graduation Requirements

|  | ABBOTT RESPONDENTS | NON ABBOTT RESPONDENTS |
|---|---|---|
| **SUPPORT FOR STANDARDS** | | |
| Support end of course exams | 54% | 54% |
| **ISSUES OF CAPACITY** | | |
| My school has equipment | 8% | 62% |
| My school has space | 18% | 57% |
| My school has enough certified teachers | 15% | 56% |
| Teachers are aware of new requirements | 18% | 26% |
| **EQUITY CONCERNS** | | |
| Exams will improve graduation rates | 18% | 7% |
| Exams will increase drop out rates | 42% | 64% |
| New requirements will improve education for ELL students | 23% | 19% |
| New requirements will improve education for students in special education | 17% | 15% |

Respondents from Abbott and non-Abbott districts agree that standards are important, but differ sharply in their assessments of the degree to which their school districts have the capacity to deliver an adequate education to meet the standards.

Ironically, respondents from non-Abbott districts express greater confidence in their schools' capacity to deliver a curriculum that will satisfy these requirements and yet report greater concern about inequity and potential drop outs than respondents from Abbott districts.

### Potential Benefits of End of Course Examinations

In an open-ended format, respondents were asked to list benefits of end of course examinations. Five categories of responses were coded. Most comments reflect the hope that end of course examinations will create and enforce high curriculum standards across the state. Yet 14% of respondents used the "benefits" question to elaborate on their concerns (numbers do not add to 100% due to double coding):

Creating Statewide Curriculum Standards: 29%

*"There would be more consistency across the state, especially important for transfer students"*
*"Raising the content of courses and holding all curricula to high standards"*

Opportunities: better skills and preparation for college and future opportunities: 24%

*"Our children will transition into postsecondary education/adult life as productive and responsible citizens"*
*"The students would be prepared for college and not spending college tuition to learn what they should have learned in high school."*

Establish high expectations for all students: 24%

*"Tax paying public may have higher regard for public education"*
*"Currently a large percentage of HS graduates do not possess necessary academic knowledge. We need to do more with the silent majority of students and stop being happy with the successes of the top few."*

Better supports for students and teachers: 14%



*"Schools would find money in the budgets to provide more/better materials and supplies. Teachers would be better trained."*
*"If the mandates were fully resourced, students may receive a higher level of education IF they were not as rigid in how mandatory they are and IF the ways learning was assessed were not merely standardized tests but also verbally or experientially based."*
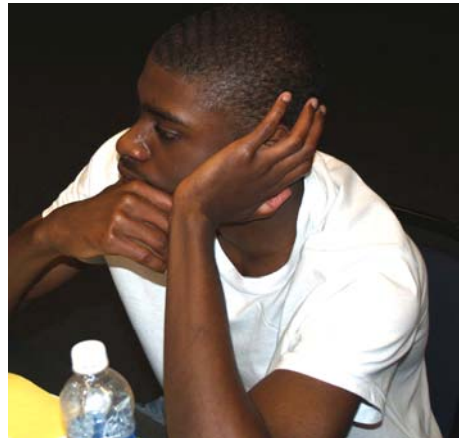
None/Nothing positive: 13.8%

*"Conditions in large urban and rural districts will continue to suffer for lack of teacher preparation and another poor test to be given to students developed by groups who know nothing or care about these students. It's only about the contracts to sell these tests to the poor deprived school districts. This is institutionalized racism at its highest."*

**Potential Negative Effects of End of Course Examinations**

After they were asked about the benefits of end of course exams, respondents were asked about potential negative effects. These comments were coded into three categories, most

concerning adverse consequences for drop outs, a widening achievement gap and a shift to rote-memory teaching and learning:

Drop outs and increased achievement gap: 42.2%

*"Students, particularly those with learning gaps due to mobility or social issues, may drop out."*
*"Increased drop out rates, increased gap between rich and poor, a continued decline in the amount of actually literate individuals being pushed through, a continued decrease in the sense of self worth on those students who do not test well or learn in the manner which is taught."*

Schools won't pay attention to those not going to college: 22%

*"Those students who are incapable of mastering academic subjects will inevitably be left behind. Without proper instruction, those students will eventually drop out or be pushed out by the educational system."*

Lack of equipment: 22.9%

"If we don't have the equipment or the teachers, we will just be punishing thestudents."

Too much testing: 14%



*"Teachers and administrators are already overwhelmed by the demands put on them via the NJ ASK and HSPA; another set of state mandated assessments at each grade level in high school only further lead to 'teaching to the test' and not providing students with a well rounded educational experience, which has diminished, as teachers are less able to take advantage of 'teachable' moments and to relate the skills to a real life application for fear of not covering the material within the time frame dictated by the district/state timeline."*

**Change is Needed: Abbott and Non-Abbott Districts**

With two different survey measures, respondents were asked to identify which reforms they consider essential to improving New Jersey's schools. First, they were asked to rate a series of pre-determined reform strategies and then, in response to an open ended question, to provide their own ideas for meaningful and needed reforms.

When asked what needs to be done to improve schools, respondents expressed concern about the quality of education and equity issues in New Jersey public education. In terms of policy recommendations, respondents ranked the following as priorities:

1. support of educators and students;
2. track the impact of changes on graduation and drop out rates;
3. assure that facilities and community programs support student achievement and
4. provide multiple pathways to meet standards.

**Table 2: Importance of School Improvement Strategies**

| Question: "There are many different ways to improve schools. Please rate how important each option is." | |
|---|---|
| Options: | % Responding Very Important |
| 1. Support teachers | 86% |
| 2. Support students who don't do well on tests | 77% |
| 3. Track impact of changes on dropout/graduation rates | 71% |
| 4. Provide community programs to support academic and civic engagement | 66% |
| 5. Make sure science equipment is up to date | 61% |
| 6. Provide alternative assessments | 58% |
| 7. Improve college access | 57% |
| 8. Develop new curricula | 41% |
| 9. Make sure students who don't pass tests do not earn diplomas | 13% |

If we use 50% endorsement as a cut-off for popular support of state reform policy, the data provided in Table 2 suggest that most respondents believe that reform begins with:

* support for educators and youth;

* an equity analysis of facilities (e.g. science equipment) and an equity analysis on the potential impact of the new graduation requirements on drop out and graduation rates, and

*development of alternative assessments and strategies to improve college access.

The data in Table 3 suggest that these policy priorities are magnified in the Abbott districts:

**Table 3: Policy Priorities**
% Responding Very Important

|  | ABBOTT | NON-ABBOTT |
|---|---|---|
| Support teachers | 91% | 82% |
| Support students | 83 | 68 |
| Track impact of graduation requirements | 74 | 55 |
| Provide community programs for engagement | 82 | 44 |
| Make sure science equipment is up to date | 74 | 55 |
| Provide alternative assessments | 66 | 49 |
| Improve college access | 82 | 44 |
| New curricula | 49 | 34 |
| Make sure students who do not pass exams do not earn diplomas | 16 | 10 |

Educators, parents, activists, students and administrators who completed this survey agree that New Jersey's State policy should focus on support for educators and students, in schools and communities. An extremely small minority supports withholding diplomas **from students who pass all their course requirements but do not pass end of course exams.** While all support measures are rated as highly important, respondents from Abbott districts are more concerned about supports in school and community, facilities, college access and tracking the impact of graduation requirements than respondents from non-Abbott districts.

**What do students need in order to succeed?**

We asked respondents to contribute open-ended responses to the question of what students need in order to succeed. The open-ended responses confirm what the close ended suggest: Support educators and youth.

<u>Redesign the school curriculum and pedagogy to be more relevant and rigorous: 42%</u>

*"More time, better teachers"*
*"Teachers need support to design classes that are interesting and relevant to students'*
  *interests"*
*"After school support, team teaching model, visual learning and hands on learning*
  *rather than learning from a book, team peer learning, etc"*
*"We need to stop 'preparing kids for exams' and teach them to read, problem solve,*
  *collaborate and inspire their curiosity about the world."*

<u>More qualified/certified teachers and redesign how teachers become certified: 24%</u>

*"What we really need are teachers that know how to teach math and science and not just*
  *have subs all the time."*
*"Teachers who are proficient in the subjects they teach and are capable of successfully*
  *passing that information onto their students. Tutoring or additional instruction for*
  *those who need it may also prove to be a necessary supplement."*

<u>Early warning/support: 24%</u>

*"Saturday and summer programs, after school tutoring"*
*"Immediately adopt thematic small learning communities and*
  *some form of advocacy or mentoring programs to ensure that*
  *students are not falling through the cracks. Ramp up*
  *instructional improvement efforts to begin raising the levels*
  *of academic rigor during classroom instruction."*



<u>Better support for students from schools, families, mentors and</u>
<u>community programs: 10%</u>

*"School districts provide community programs to educate*
  *adults about test content and train community members to act as support for students in*
  *their community"*

<u>Improve facilities and materials: 5%</u>

*"Most districts would not be able to afford the increase in staff, classroom space*
*(particularly science labs) and textbooks"*

<u>Have more realistic expectations of urban districts and higher expectations for urban</u>
<u>students: 5%</u>

*"… imposing additional unrealistic requirements will result in less success and more*
  *failure."*

**"Got education?" Final Words from Youth Researchers**

Having reviewed all of the data, the youth researchers offer readers some final thoughts:

*Raise Standards, Not Stakes*: Deliver rigorous education by strengthening our schools and educators – not encouraging push outs. If you need to test us, don't use the end of course examination to determine whether or not we graduate!

*Get tough on accountability, Hold the State accountable*: Make sure that the State of New Jersey and our school districts equitably fund and educate all youth with high level courses, facilities, books and materials

*Design for success, don't redesign for failure*: Create schools that will educate all – don't implement high stakes tests that will inevitably swell the drop out rate.

*The road to hell is paved with good intentions:* Study the impact of end of course examinations on students, by district, race/ethnicity, immigration status – before you create permanent policy change

*Redesign with us, not against us:* Include youth and community voices in making such important policy changes. We are the youth and want to have a say in our education:

*Throughout the process of this research camp, I have developed skills on researching and have information on the new graduation requirements. I have contributed my knowledge and opinions to this research camp. I hope we made a difference and succeed in what we are trying to do.* Jameka Carter

*Ever since my freshman year of high school, I simply followed the requirements I needed to acquire in order for me to graduate. With this program, I have learned a great deal of information that can help me anywhere that I may go. I had the chance to work with and forge friendships with various people all across the state. As well as telling this information to other people in order for them to know what these changes mean for them, and what they can do to voice their opinions towards it. This program was worth more than the hard work, knowing that my research will be used to help show how these current changes in the high school curriculum will affect schools, and what must be done in order to provide positive outcomes for both schools and students.* Francisco De Jesus

*I hope that with all the effort that we're putting into this project, we get something done. We want to feel proud of what we're doing and we like to help our community. We are the voice of those who don't want to speak. I hope the outcome of this will be positive and I hope that people will really get the message that we're trying to give, or at least, I hope that people will take the time to think about it again and think about the consequences that this change will have on everybody.* Ericka Sanchez

*I believe through this Initiative I have learned a great deal about the current disparities in education, but also a lot about myself. I hope that this project will actually help the State revise these plans because they should now be aware of the developmental effects it will have on these Abbott districts. Despite their popular beliefs we do value our education even if it isn't one of much value. Knowing that with SFRA and High School Redesign that this gap that already exist has the potential of getting bigger, will not affect just the students in Newark but those in all thirty one Abbott districts in New Jersey. They say we are that we are the future leaders of tomorrow and that no child is left behind, but for every dollar that disappears and for every book that never reaches an urban class room we are definitely being left behind.* Victoria Scott

**Although we are just students from different schools, I came to realize that we all had the same purpose in this whole thing. Our purposes are to make wrong right and to make right better. Many times people try so hard to help others, but don't really think it all the way through…Here we are students, we have a voice, because it's not affecting any one else, but us students. So we the students are going to speak out and be heard because although they mean well, it's not okay. I wish and hope that the State Board of Education can go in the schools and sit and talk to the students and see, what the students think about this.** Yahne Sneed

*Imagine who I could be with equal opportunity!  Remember why we [immigrant students] came here*!! *Help us realize our dreams!*

Research Team Members:

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Kaleena Berryman and Kandi Berryman, Abbott Leadership Institute
Sweety Patel, Henry Snyder High School
Theodore J. Best, Community Development Corporation


Michelle Fine, Distinguished Professor, CUNY Graduate Center
Stan Karp, Education Law Center
David Surrey, Professor Saint Peter's College

## Appendix A
### Graduation Requirements in Public Education Survey

*We are a group of youth researchers, working with Saint Peter's College, CUNY and the Education Law Center, conducting research on NJ's proposed graduation requirements. We are looking at the conditions of our schools, the resources available, the school report card data, and the opportunities to learn math and science in our schools. We want your opinions about the proposed requirements. Your honest answers will help us with our research study. Please tell us what you think.*

**Role or Position**: (circle all that apply)

Teacher          Community Activist          Administrator          School Board          Other:_____
                                                                     Member

**Your School District:**_____

### NJ's Proposed Graduation Requirements
*The Department of Education has given preliminary approval for proposed changes in NJ graduation standards that would increase the academic requirements to earn a high school diploma. All students would be required to take Algebra I, Geometry, a third year of advanced math, 4 years of college-prep English, and Biology and two other lab science courses. New end-of-course exams would replace the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) as a requirement for graduation. Students would have to pass up to 6 exams to earn a diploma.*

1. When did you first hear about the proposed changes?
   - □          I have never heard of these proposed changes
   - □          Over the last two months
   - □          More than two months ago

2. What have you heard about these changes?
_____

| Circle the rating that best applies to the statement. | Strongly Agree | Agree | Not Sure | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. State end-of-course <u>exams</u> should be required for graduation. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 2. Everyone gets an equal opportunity with the new requirements. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 3. Teachers are aware of these changes. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 4. My school has the proper equipment to carry out these changes (for example: science equipment, textbooks, computer software) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5. My school has enough space or classrooms to meet the proposed requirements. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 6. My school has enough certified teachers to meet the proposed requirements. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 7. The new requirements will improve instruction in my school. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 8. The new requirements will make public education in NJ better. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 9. The new requirements will increase dropout rates in NJ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 10. The new requirements will improve graduation rates in NJ. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 11. The new requirements will improve education for English Language Learners. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 12. The new requirements will improve education for Special Education students. | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

| There are many different ways to improve schools. Please rate how important you think each option is? | Very important | Important | Not Sure | Somewhat Important | Not At All Important |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1.** Better preparation and support for teachers | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **2.** Make sure science equipment is up to date | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **3.** Make sure students who don't pass the tests do not earn diplomas | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **4.** Develop new curricula | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **5.** Provide supports for students who don't do well on the tests | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **6.** Track the impact of these changes on graduation and dropout rates | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **7.** Improve college access | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **8.** Provide community programs to support student academic and civic engagement | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **9.** Provide alternative ways to meet state standards | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| **10.** Others: | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

## Open-Ended Questions

*Any information you are able to provide will be of great value. Thank you!*

1. What might be some of the results that emerge if this proposal were adopted?

| Positive | Negative |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |

**2.** What support would students need from their schools to succeed in the proposed courses and exams?

**Appendix B**
Course & Equipment Inventories

| Survey of Courses Offered | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name of Course** | **Name of Teacher** | **Level of Course (AP, Honors, General, ESL, College Prep, Special Ed)** | **Number of Students Enrolled** | **Grade Level(s) of Students Enrolled** |
| | | | | |
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| | | | | |
| | | | | |

| Department where inventory is being conducted: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Equipment Inventory** | | | |
| **Equipment/Materials/ Software/Textbooks** | **Quantity** | **Functionality** | **Appearance** |
| | | Scale of 1-10 (1-3=POOR, 4-7= FAIR, and 8-10=EXCELLENT) | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## Appendix C
Interview Protocols

## Teachers
Interview Protocol

1. In what school district do you teach?

2. What grade(s) and subject(s) do you teach?

Knowledge/opinions about the proposed changes

3. What have you heard about the High School Redesign proposal/plan by the Department of Education? [Show them or read them description]

4. How do you feel about the ability of all students to succeed with new graduation requirements?

5. In your opinion, do you have the tools and resources to implement these new requirements? Can you give me examples of what you have or what you would need?

Impact on teaching

1. How would the end-of-course (EOC) exams affect your teaching practices?
    a. What do you think would happen if this plan failed?

2. How would you help students who are not succeeding to improve?

3. How can instruction change to reach all students?

4. What is the role of technology in your teaching practice?

Alternatives

5. If you were in charge of the redesign plan, how would you go about preparing students for their future?

6. As alternatives to end-of-course exams, how can students demonstrate understanding of subjects taught?

**Parents**
Interview Protocol

1. How many school-age children do you have?

2. What grades and schools do your children attend?

3. If your children graduated, when and where did they graduate from?

Knowledge/opinions about the proposed changes

4. What have you heard about the High School Redesign proposal/plan by the by the Department of Education? [Show them or read them description.]

5. How do you think your child will/would do with meeting these new graduation requirements? Or if your child graduated, how do you think he/she would have performed?
    a. Probe further:
        i. How do you think your child will perform on the tests?
        ii. How do you think taking up to 6 tests will **affect** your child? Other students?

6. What do you think the school should do in order to prepare your child for these tests?

School/Parent relationships

7. How involved are you in your child's education?
    a. What obstacles keep you from being involved in your child's education?
    b. What does your school do to encourage parent involvement?

8. How does your child's school communicate with you about your child's performance? About changes like these in graduation requirements? About the content of their education? About events at school?
    a. How would you like the school to communicate with you?

Alternatives

9. If you had a say, what would you like to see in the High School Redesign plan to help prepare your child for his or her future?

10. As alternatives to end-of-course exams, how can students demonstrate understanding of subjects taught?

**Peers**
Interview Protocol

1. What school do you attend?

2. What grade are you in? When do you expect to graduate?

3. How old are you?

<u>Knowledge/opinions about the proposed changes</u>

4. What have you heard about the High School Redesign proposal/plan by the by the Department of Education?

5. Some students are excited, some are confused, some are scared about the transition from taking one exam (the HSPA) to multiple end of course exams. How do you feel about the idea of replacing HSPA with up to 6 end-of-course exams?
   a. How prepared do you think you are to pass state end-of-course exams in Science? In Math? Explain.

6. How do you feel about the ability of all students to succeed with new graduation requirements?
   a. Do you feel certain groups of students will be affected more negatively or positively than others? Explain?
   b. How do you think the drop out rates will be affected with these changes?
   c. In suburban districts, students pass HSPA at high rates (90% pass average) in urban districts it is low (30% pass average). Why do you feel students in urban schools have such a difficult time passing the HSPA?

<u>Personal experiences</u>

7. How do you feel about your high school experience so far?
   a. What resources or support have been helpful to you so far?
   b. What is lacking or missing in terms of the support you get in school?

8. To what degree do you think you have attained the skills and knowledge you need to be successful after high school? What has contributed to this or gotten in the way?

<u>School resources</u>

9. In your opinion, does your school have what it needs to prepare you for these courses/tests? Probe for: equipment, classroom space, qualified teachers.

10. In a typical day, in what classrooms do teachers /students use the available technology for learning?
   a. What gets in the way of students being able to benefit from technology in the classroom?

Alternatives

11. If you were in charge of the redesign plan, how would you go about preparing students for their future?

12. As alternatives to end-of-course exams, how can students demonstrate understanding of subjects taught?

13. What are your plans after graduating high school?


**Graduates**
Interview Protocol

Your high school experience
1) What high school did you attend? When did you graduate?

2) How do you feel about your high school experience? How did you do in high school?

3) Looking back at your high school experience:
   a. What was helpful?
   b. What was lacking?/ What kind of preparation or support were you missing?
   c. Was it hard to find extra tutoring help?
   d. Did you learn what teachers taught you?
   e. Were you prepared to take the HSPA? Or SRA?
   f. Were there distractions? How did they affect you?
   g. Did you find support from your extra curricular activities/sports; did they help you with your grades?

Preparation
4) How did your high school education prepare you for college or work?
   a. Did you feel as prepared as students from other high schools? Why or why not?

5) How were the conditions of the textbooks/classroom?

6) What are you doing now?
   a. What are you plans? Future goals?

7) Did you receive the proper help from guidance counselors? Did the school help you find a job? Did you apply to college?

<u>Knowledge/opinions about the proposed changes</u>
8) What have you heard about the High School Redesign proposal/plan by the by the Department of Education? What do you think? (after distributing handout)

<u>Alternatives</u>
9) If you were in charge of the redesign plan, how would you go about preparing students for their future?

10) As alternatives to end of course exams, how can students demonstrate understanding of subjects taught?

**Principals and Administrators**
**Interview Protocol**

1. Some of us recently took the HSPA, and based on our observations many students found the exam difficult and felt nervous taking it; our concern is that we would have to do this every year for a number of tests. In your opinion what do you think about the change from HSPA to the end of the year exams?
   a. How effective do you believe this system will be, considering the already low passing figures for the HSPA?

2. Many of us work very had to prepare for the HSPA attending early morning tutoring sessions or staying after school. What is the state's plan to prepare students for the end of the year course exams?
   a. What other programs will be developed for students to help assist them in meeting these new graduation requirements?

3. How do you think schools have to change to be ready for the changes that will be part of the high school redesign plan, so no child would be left behind?

4. Why do you think there's an achievement gap between urban and suburban schools?
   a. How will the high school redesign plan increase or decrease the gap?

5. What will happen to the students who don't pass?

6. What was considered in developing these graduation requirements?

   a. Was student input taken into account?

7. As alternatives to end-of-course exams, how can students demonstrate understanding of subjects taught?