

Senator Guess Tries Again with an Improved High Stakes Exam

Senator Gretchen Guess

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In an effort to ensure we implement the High School Qualifying Exam wisely, I introduced a sponsor substitute to Senate Bill 248. The revision keeps the “high stakes” exam but minimizes the possibility of mistakenly failing students who know the material.

Out of concern for students who have diagnosed or undiagnosed learning disabilities, I introduced this legislation to provide a second rigorous method for students to show they know the material on the exam.

The purpose of the new SB 248 is two-fold: to ensure we have a high stakes exam and to clarify the legislative intent regarding severe cognitively disabled students. The bill allows students with severe cognitive disabilities (e.g., down syndrome students) to be granted waivers from the qualifying exam, with their local district deciding their graduation requirements.

This bill also sets forth an alternative for a student who fails the exam to demonstrate they know the material through a rigorous portfolio process in their senior year.

This portfolio process requires a student to demonstrate a 95 percent attendance rate, a 2.0 GPA, to prove they know the material on the exam through letter(s) from the student’s teacher in the area(s) failed, evidence the student is on track to meet district requirements for graduation, and the student has completed available remediation in the area(s) failed. The principal, superintendent and a state appointed review board all must certify accuracy of information and the portfolio demonstrates the student knows the material on the exam.

The portfolio system in this bill mimics a similar system in the state of Indiana, which has been very successful in ensuring an alternative means by which students can demonstrate proficiency.

The portfolio process is certainly the more difficult option for demonstrating proficiency but it provides an alternative method to ensure students who are deemed eligible for a diploma can read, write, and compute. If we are going to have a high stakes test, lets do it right.