

Senate Education Committee

Keystone Exams and the Use of Graduation Requirements

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Standardized tests such as the Keystone Exams impact immigrant students in ways that their counter parts may not be affected. Such impacts include, but are not limited to, language proficiency, test structure, and family responsibilities. In terms of language proficiency, the inability to understand the English language creates even more anxiety, resulting as an additional barrier to successful test taking. As a result, the students perform poorly and student achievement, teacher evaluation, and school accountability are skewed. Particularly with newly arrived immigrant students with English as a second language, the first few years teachers do an incredible job in helping students develop the English language skills. Undoubtedly, teachers play an essential part of students' language development and self-esteem. Unfortunately, such efforts are not measured by the Keystone Exams.

Even for students who may arrive to the United States of America with some level of English language, the test structure may differ from their home country. Not only are students faced with the fear of the unknown test, but also carry the burden of having to perform well without fully mastering the language of the test. Additionally, immigrant children tend to find themselves caring for younger siblings; therefore, having little to no time to prepare for the exams. Too often, children of immigrant parents live in a household in which both parents work long hours. Parents repeatedly verbalize that they truly care about their child's education, after all, safety and educational opportunities is what drives their decision to immigrate. Simply, they either have long work hours and are not able to help their children with school work and/or lack the proper education to even know where to begin helping. Typically, in these household situations, what parents do instill in their children are the values of hard work ethic and perseverance. Neither of which the Keystone Exams measure.