

Testimony of Alison McDowell to the Philadelphia City Council in Support of the Resolution Calling for An Examination of Standardized Testing

My name is Alison McDowell. I am the parent of an 8th grader at Masterman and a member of the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools and the Caucus of Working Educators. I appreciate having an opportunity to discuss the harm caused by standardized testing, and would like to thank Councilman Squilla and members of the Education Committee and their staff for the care and attention they have given to this issue in recent months.

In 2017 (starting with this year's sophomores), students will have to pass three Keystone Exams (Algebra, English, and Biology) to receive a diploma. Even if they have passed all their classes and completed all the requirements, they cannot graduate if they don't pass all three exams. If the requirements had been in place this spring, a senior in West Chester, PA ranked 15th in her class and accepted to Johns Hopkins would not have been able to go, because she would not have graduated.

Currently, 55-60% of students in the state are failing the exams. 80% of those who take the test a second time do not pass. Students who fail twice must do an online "project" that takes 14 or more hours to complete. No one knows how many students are passing these "Project Based Assessments." It is unclear how such projects could even be administered in schools where hundreds of students must take them and computer facilities are woefully inadequate.

In Philadelphia's neighborhood high schools, only 5% are passing the Biology Keystone. As a result, in two years thousands of students in Philadelphia and throughout the state will not be able to graduate if we don't act now. School districts in the suburbs or organizing politically around this issue, and we must do the same.

Over the past decade, standardized testing has grown to be a multi-billion dollar industry. This year the state of Pennsylvania will spend \$58.3 million dollars to administer and grade the PSSAs and Keystone Exams. Students will lose hundreds of hours of meaningful instruction preparing for and taking standardized tests.

In addition to selling tests, companies like Pearson profit from the sale of textbooks aligned to the tests they sell, books and online test-prep materials, and materials to provide remediation when students can't pass the tests.

When students fail tests there are consequences. A school may be closed; a teacher may be laid off; a child may not be allowed to advance to the next grade or even to graduate. This is why these are called high-stakes tests.

No one is allowed to see completed tests or talk about them. Not teachers or parents or even students who hope to learn from their mistakes. They are protected by copyright.

Testing companies profit by developing products that label children "failures," They

create tests that require schools to buy their test-prep in order to pass. They create tests that are hard to pass, so students have to take them multiple times and are subject to remedial instruction programs. Currently the Philadelphia School District lacks funds for up to date textbooks AND remedial instruction.

Standardized testing disadvantages vulnerable communities including special needs students, emergent bilingual students, and students living in poverty.

In Pennsylvania parents can refuse to have their children take standardized tests if they cite an objection based on their religious beliefs. You don't have to say your religion or the nature of your objection. We are encouraging parents to starve the testing companies. Refuse these tests. Reclaim our schools.

As the parent of a Philadelphia public school student and a citizen who is very concerned about Keystone exams and their place in the school to prison pipeline, I encourage you to vote in favor of Resolution 140997.