

It is long past time to re-examine the graduation requirements for high school students. What has been particularly damaging to many students is requiring some form of what amounts to a college entrance exam, in the form of a standardized test, as part of the graduation requirement. SAT and ACT are falling out of vogue due to the revelations of the recent Varsity Blues sting but this is something low income students and families have known for a long time: people with money can not only afford private test tutors for their children, they can even buy their way into the university system.

Furthermore, not all students want to head to a university. Why is requiring a student who wants to attend a trade school and learn welding or a cosmetology school to become a hair dresser to take one of these tests necessary?

This doesn't even begin to touch on the inherent bias in these assessments, most particularly against English learners, and requiring the Smarter Balanced Assessment in lieu of the aforementioned tests does nothing to solve this problem. I urge you to read this report from The Hoover Institution at Stanford, California. Quoting from the report: "... SBAC is a biased, language-heavy test that discriminates against English Learners." <https://www.hoover.org/research/troubling-saga-smarter-balanced-test> California has dropped any form of standardized testing as a graduation requirement and in 2015, retroactively awarded diplomas to about 30,000 students who had been denied those diplomas, some of whom had graduated a decade previous to the passage of the bill that finally allowed them a diploma. Not surprisingly, many of those students were English learners, students of color, and students living in poverty.

Not having a diploma is damaging to a student's ability to move forward and be productive in our society as well as lead a comfortable, satisfying life. EVEN IF it is "only a few" students, this system individually damages many. In California, "only" 6% of students did not pass the standardized test once required for graduation between the years of 2006 and 2015. That amounted to nearly 250,000 individuals. <https://edsource.org/2015/governor-signs-bill-allowing-diplomas-for-students-who-failed-exit-exam/88698> (Note: Since the publication of this article, no "exit exam" has replaced the one that was eliminated for graduation. That question, asked in this article, has been answered.)

Students deserve to be recognized for all the efforts they have put into 12 years moving towards graduation and the four years they spent in high school earning their required credits. We need to also recognize their own agency in making decisions about their next steps, whether that be to a college, a trade school, a business venture, or something else. Let's take a new look at what it means to graduate from high school and keep in mind that all our students are individuals. There are far better ways to assure that individuals reach their maximum potential than standardized tests.