

Joint Press Release From the Institute on Education Law and Policy at Rutgers, Education Law Center, the CUNY Graduate Center and Newark's Project GRAD.

Study Finds 40% of Alternative Test Students Go On to College NJDOE Must Keep Door to Graduation for Thousands of Students

New research shows that 40% of the Newark students who earned diplomas through the State's alternate High School graduation test went on to college or other post-secondary study.

The findings come on the heels of [reports](#) that only a small number of the more than 10,000 students who took a new version of the alternate test in January passed both the math and language arts sections, raising serious concerns about the administration and scoring of the test by the NJ Department of Education (NJDOE) and its private test vendor, Measurement Inc. These students now face uncertainty over whether they can obtain a diploma.

Several education groups today are urging NJDOE to take immediate action to ensure that these students are not denied the opportunity to obtain a diploma this June.

“Our research on post-school outcomes indicates that it would be a major mistake for the State — and a negative life-altering experience for thousands of young people—if the Department used the scores produced by this year's Alternative High School Assessment (ASHA) process to deny diplomas to students who have successfully completed their coursework and met all other requirements for graduation,” the groups wrote in an April 19 letter to Education Commission Bret Schundler and State Board President Josephine Hernandez. The letter was signed by educators and researchers from the Institute on Education Law and Policy at Rutgers, Education Law Center (ELC), the CUNY Graduate Center and Newark's Project GRAD.

“The fact that 40% of the students in this study are continuing on to post-secondary education is a strong indication of the value of keeping the alternative path to a high school diploma,” said Stan Karp, ELC Director of Secondary Reform. “We need to take action to prevent pushing these students out of school, especially in light of the serious problems with the January test administration.”

In recent years, about 12,000 seniors graduated through the alternate test, known as the SRA. This year, the NJDOE replaced the SRA with the AHSA. While the content was not changed, scoring was turned over to a North Carolina commercial test vendor, Measurement Inc., at a cost of \$1.1 million. NJDOE told the Board that certified NJ teachers would be do the actual scoring, but it now appears that 70% were scored by non-certified MI employees.

Preliminary results sent to schools last month show that only 10% of about 4,500 students passed the language arts portion, and 34% of 10,000 students passed the math portion of the ASHA.

In the April 19 letter to NJDOE, the groups cite new research that studied post-high school outcomes for nearly 10,000 students who graduated between 2003 and 2008 from Newark, the state's largest district. The study found that:

- 40% of alternate test (SRA) graduates went to college after earning a diploma.
- Nearly half of all Newark graduates enrolling in post-secondary institutions were SRA graduates. Without the SRA, Newark's college enrollment would be cut in half.

The groups are calling on NJDOE to immediately review and address the problems with the January administration of the alternate test.

“Given the high stakes, the extremely low passing rates, the absence of any pilot to test and verify the new procedures, and the substantial questions that have been raised about the scoring process, we think this round of assessment should be set aside or treated as a pilot,” the groups said. “There are major issues that should be addressed collaboratively by educators, the Department and the testing vendor before the AHSA results can be credibly used to make graduation decisions about individual students.”

In 2007, the NJ High School Graduation Campaign estimated that in 2007, 19,000 young people failed to graduate at a cost in lifetime earnings of \$4.9 billion. That same year, NJDOE reported that 11,474 students used the SRA to earn their high school diplomas.

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