

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No.

WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Board of Education (and its predecessor Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education) approved a regulation calling for a Statewide diploma requirement to be implemented in 2014; and

WHEREAS, One of the components of that requirement is the attainment of a score at the “Basic” level or higher on the eleventh grade New England Common Assessment Program (“NECAP”) standardized test; and

WHEREAS, Numerous groups (including the Providence School Board and the Providence City Council) have expressed concerns about whether it is appropriate to use the NECAP as a “high stakes” test; and

WHEREAS, Many of the same groups and others have expressed concerns about the impact of such a requirement on Rhode Island’s students today, which include approximately 4,000 students who did not attain a score of “Basic” or better on each component of the NECAP exam they took as eleventh grade students in October, 2012; and

WHEREAS, It has been known since February, 2013 that approximately 40% of Rhode Island’s students and more than 60% of Providence’s students are at risk of being denied diplomas this year based on the NECAP scores they achieved as eleventh grade students last year; and

WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Board of Education reaffirmed its commitment to the “high stakes testing” requirement last Spring and again as recently as this Fall; and

WHEREAS, Local school departments, including Providence, have redirected extensive resources to programs focused on NECAP test preparation for graduating seniors in response to this rigid policy, diverting those resources from other critical programs, thereby reducing other educational opportunities for all students, including the students who have gained test preparation instruction at the expense of other aspects of their education; and

WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Department of Education first responded to this crisis by creating a series of specific alternatives to the NECAP requirement that required extensive documentation by students and their schools, causing the redirection of additional resources from other worthy programs; and

WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Department of Education recently responded to this crisis by presenting a broader “waiver” policy whereby students who gain admission to a selective post-secondary academic program will be relieved of the “high stakes testing” requirement; and

WHEREAS, These exceptions and waivers will apply to enough students to undermine the “high stakes testing” rationale articulated by the Board of Education and Department of Education as recently as last Fall that a demonstration of achievement on the NECAP test is a critical determinant of whether a student has received an adequate high school education; and

WHEREAS, This broad “waiver” policy can be viewed as a form of “social promotion” whereby any student who is selected for admission to a post-secondary program is deemed to be adequately educated based on Rhode Island’s proficiency requirements, whether or not this is actually the case; and

WHEREAS, This “waiver” policy can allow students to “game the system” by applying and gaining admission to post-secondary institutions without actually planning to attend the school in question; and

WHEREAS, The “waiver” policy therefore amounts to a tacit recognition by the Rhode Island Department of Education and Board of Education that a NECAP testing requirement is not appropriate for Rhode Island in 2014; and

WHEREAS, There will remain many children are unable to qualify for a “waiver”, but whose academic achievement is no better or worse than other children who do qualify, including but not limited to such ineligible populations as children who plan to work after graduation, children who plan to attend the Community College of Rhode Island and children with individual education plans; and

WHEREAS, The population of children who cannot qualify for the “waiver” will be skewed towards the populations of disadvantaged children, including those in poverty, those with special education needs, and those learning the English language; and

WHEREAS, The children who do not qualify for a “waiver” are not necessarily and less deserving or well-educated as those children who do; however, the children who do not qualify for a “waiver” will lose the chance to earn a high school diploma; and

WHEREAS, The children who are denied a high school diploma on the basis of the NECAP “high stakes testing” requirement will be punished for a requirement that the Board of Education and Department of Education have tacitly recognized is not suitable for Rhode Island in 2014; and

WHEREAS, The children who do not qualify for a “waiver” will be branded with a mark of failure which might not be deserved and could have devastating consequences on their futures.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, That the Providence City Council urges the Rhode Island Department of Education and Rhode Island Board of Education to replace its 2014 “waiver” policy concerning “high stakes” testing with a decision to postpone the “high stakes testing” program until a time when all students have a fair and reasonable opportunity to achieve success on the test without the application of broad, arbitrary “waiver” policies.