

**COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS IN NEWS CONFERENCE ON PROPOSED
HIGH STAKES TESTING GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

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Steven Brown, Rhode Island ACLU: “It is intolerable to deny diplomas based solely on use of a standardized written test that was first and foremost designed to hold schools, not students, accountable. It is especially cruel to do so when the school districts themselves have failed to meet the Department’s own standards to ensure student success. A testing policy that creates a caste system by condemning 90% of racial minorities and economically challenged students in this manner is one that clearly needs re-examination.”

Veronika Kot, RI Legal Services: “Our groups all support high expectations for high school students, including for at-risk children. But high stakes tests do not promote high expectations or high achievement. They penalize and stigmatize those who haven’t received the supports they need to excel. High achievement is made possible when children with barriers to learning receive the specific, research-based interventions and supports they need to overcome those barriers early and throughout their education. If they are not now achieving to their full potential, it is because they have not received these supports.”

Karen Feldman, Young Voices: “This policy, as it is written, will be devastating for the young people I work with, almost all of whom will either receive the lowest tier of diploma or be at risk of receiving no diploma. We need to stop the rush to push through this poorly framed system. I ask that we keep the existing graduation system in place for another school year, and I hope we that we can sit down with the Regents, and together create a research-based system focused on what works to ensure high academic achievement and high rates of graduation.”

Fabiola, Young Voices Board member, age 16: “As a high school junior, I think this is way too fast, and we should slow this process down. I think few colleges would consider the RI diploma a good thing, since it says you are not proficient. I work hard in school, and get good grades, but I am a bad test taker. This policy, created without my input, is putting my future at stake. This is basically classing youth in categories and it is not fair or just.”

Anne Mulready, RI Disability Law Center: “Before the recession, 36.9% of working age people with disabilities were employed in Rhode Island, as compared with 77% of their peers. Their earnings were about 62.4% of those of their peers. The diploma system proposed by the Board of Regents, with its reliance on testing results and a tiered structure, is poised to push those earnings and employment gaps in the wrong direction. With only 10% of students with an IEP eligible for the lowest tier diploma, and 86% at risk for no diploma at all, students with disabilities will face enormous barriers to employment. A system that disadvantages 96% of students with IEPs is not consistent with the inclusion goals of our civil rights laws. The proposed diploma system needs to be revised to ensure that children with disabilities will have the supports they need to obtain equal access to a high school diploma.”