

**Thomas Paternostro  
Distinguished Educator**

**Testimony on Pending Graduation Testing**

**Good morning! My name is Thomas Paternostro. I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the issue before us, at this critical time in our history. In order to establish a degree of credibility in what I am about to state, my educational experiences become relevant.**

**In September 1964, I walked into my fourth grade classroom and was introduced by the principal to the 34 children assigned to me that first year. Over the decades since then, I have been fortunate to have served as principal, superintendent for almost two decades, child advocate, supervisor of student teachers at one of our state universities, program manager for an Industrial Resource center for work force skill development, and currently as a distinguished educator, but most importantly with one single mission, “to make sure that children are our highest priority”. I was called to present testimony before a select committee of the US Senate prior to the adoption of the National School to Work Opportunities Act.**

**I am one hundred percent supportive of the proposed Graduation Competency Assessments. I will spare a repeat of all the data, studies, and statistics that are real and readily available and speak from the trenches of public education, “where the children are”. I do not understand the rationale of school leaders who resist the opportunity to improve their schools through effective evaluation of their student’s competency prior to graduation. The data is a powerful tool that will provide linkage to the root causes that contribute to system failure, ultimately leading to changes aligned to demands of the world beyond high school.**

**May I provide a very recent example? My wife of 44 years is a registered nurse. She is moving toward retirement later this year. In January, she was scheduled, as is the case every two years, to be tested on her knowledge and skills for advanced cardiac life support. I observed her for better than a month studying every night, preparing for this examination and hands on performance. She had no options but to pass this test, if she wished to stay employed.**

**If you are in a hospital, and experienced a cardiac incident, would you expect those who care for you to be competent? Failure is not an option! Should we expect less of our students who will go into the workforce, and be expected to compete universally?**

**In my judgment, we must change the current model of our secondary school delivery system, which is antiquated in organization, operation and delivery. We must move toward a system that is in sync with the demands of the world beyond the school and one that fits the learning styles of today's students especially through the use of technology. Our students today, for the most part, are being taught, exactly as they were when I first entered the profession. We must incorporate a model where both the curriculum and teaching methods are relevant. Students must be taught how to apply skills. It is time for every teacher and principal to incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for all students, in all teaching.**

**The current administration of our commonwealth has provided the necessary leadership and tools, through standard aligned systems, clearly defined eligible content, assessment models, training and support. When these systems are implemented by every school, in every classroom, every day, we will prepare our students well for any Graduation Assessments and they will succeed. Accountability through testing prior to graduation will unify curriculum across the commonwealth for all students, independent of their location.**

**Time does not permit details, however, I can share the stories of many youngsters who I have known, that were labeled as failures, as disruptive, and worst of all “without ability” by their schools, and have, with interventions, as briefly indicated above, graduated from their high schools and college, and today are productive members of our workforce.**

**Resisting competency testing is a smokescreen for resisting change. What more evidence do we need in our commonwealth when we look carefully at the data, especially the number of dropouts, or as I prefer, “push outs”. When I hear opposition because of potential cost, I ask you to “cost out” for all of us, the cost of school failure on the lives of youngsters we serve, on yearly prison tuition, on future family instability, on lost production for the American economy, and in our long term national defense.**

**Finally, I recall the days decades ago when the first report of our “Nation at Risk” was released. I was alarmed! Since then, there have been many additional reports with dire warnings concerning our future and secondary school reform. Time is running out, we must act now.**

**I appeal to this board to take bold action. The time for tinkering has ended. Making sure our graduates are competent, and holding schools accountable when they are not, is a necessary step, first in the lives of our youngsters and for the future of our country.**

**With these and other measures, the possibilities are unlimited. In our post 9/11 world, the dots linking our public schools to our economy and the future of our nation must be connected.**

**Thank You**

  
**Thomas Paternostro**