Legislation Text

File #: 140997, **Version:** 0

Calling upon the School District of Philadelphia and the School Reform Commission to analyze the financial and human impact of standardized testing, to identify strategies to minimize its use, and to request a waiver of the Keystone Exams from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to adopt assessments that better serve local needs and priorities.

WHEREAS, Standardized testing has dramatically increased since 2002's No Child Left Behind Act imposed federal mandates requiring the testing of every student in reading and math from 3rd grade to 8th grade and again in high school, implemented in Pennsylvania through the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests; and

WHEREAS, In addition to federally-required tests, states have layered on additional assessments, including in Pennsylvania new requirements for Keystone Exams that will be required for high school graduation as of 2017; and

WHEREAS, On average, students in large urban school districts take a total of 113 standardized tests between Pre-Kindergarten and 12th Grade, with students in 11th grade forced to devote as many as 27 days or 15% of the school year to testing and yet many more hours to test preparation; and

WHEREAS, Since 2002 spending on standardized tests has skyrocketed, with the Keystone Exams projected to cost hundreds of millions even billions, without the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania providing any corresponding or dedicated funding to local districts for these costs or for the necessary supplemental education to help struggling students; and

WHEREAS, The over-reliance on high-stakes standardized testing interferes with educators' efforts to focus on students' development in areas such as problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking, thus undermining skills needed to excel outside of the classroom; and

WHEREAS, There are indications that this increase in testing is causing children to experience stress, anxiety, and even in some cases even physical illness; and

WHEREAS, Minority and low-income students, special-needs students including those impacted by trauma and those with Individual Education Plans, as well as students who do not speak English as their first language, are disproportionately harmed by the overuse of standardized tests, particularly when those tests are used to determine ranking, admission, and graduation of students or to evaluate teachers and school staff as well as overall school performance; and

WHEREAS, The City of Pittsburgh engaged in a thoughtful process to evaluate how to minimize and mitigate the use of testing, and has adopted a plan that will cut over 33 hours of annual testing for students in certain grades; and

WHEREAS, Pennsylvania law provides the opportunity for local districts to request waiver of the Keystone

Exams as a graduation requirement and seek approval of alternative assessment strategies; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's ongoing and serious budget crisis as well as its high concentrations of minority, low -income, special-needs, and Limited-English Proficient students, justify the critical examination of state-mandated testing as applied to Philadelphia students and the development of a more streamlined, demographically-appropriate, and cost-effective testing structure for the Philadelphia School District; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Respectfully calls upon the School District of Philadelphia and the School Reform Commission to analyze the financial and human impact of standardized testing, to identify strategies to minimize its use, and to request a waiver of the Keystone Exams from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in order to adopt assessments that better serve local needs and priorities.

FURTHER RESOLVED, That an Engrossed copy of this resolution be sent to William R. Hite, Jr., Superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia, and the members of the School Reform Commission.