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## SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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September 11, 2015

Kevin Laverty  
Acting Executive Committee Chair  
State Board of Education  
PO Box 47206  
600 Washington ST SE  
Olympia, WA 98504-7206

Dear Acting Chair Laverty:

I am writing as a member of the State Board to ask you to consider my opinion about an agenda item scheduled for the meeting on Friday, September 11: Approval of the Position Statement on Setting Graduation Cut Scores.

I will not be at the meeting, but I believe the Board should discuss and take action on this important subject.

The ideal assessment system:

- **Helps students.** The Smarter Balanced assessments were designed to measure students' college and career readiness, not basic high school proficiency. They were never intended to be exit exams or a barrier to graduation.
- **Is clear.** The current system is confusing for students and parents, and takes too much time away from instruction.
- **Maintains rigor.** In recent years, the legislature has increased credit requirements and instructional time. They have established the state accountability index, High School and Beyond plan, academic acceleration program, and rigorous teacher/principal evaluations. The Smarter Balanced assessments are just one way our state measures rigor.

On August 5, the State Board set graduation threshold scores lower than what are considered to be career and college ready, to achieve a similar graduation rate as in previous years.

I propose an alternative to simply lowering the score to accommodate more students: Students who don't meet the career and college ready threshold scores as juniors would be better off increasing their skills and knowledge through transition courses their senior year.

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Not only would students have the opportunity to fill in gaps in skills considered to be crucial for career and college, the state would save about \$30 million. Most states do not have exit exams. And there is no evidence that exit exams improve academic outcomes.

As a legislator, and as state superintendent, I have always supported the requirement that students demonstrate that they have met our state's learning goals before we hand them a high school diploma. That is why I support testing as part of the high school experience. My proposal would simply use state tests as the tools they were designed to be and put the focus back on student learning.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Randy I. Dorn  
State Superintendent  
of Public Instruction

cc: Isabel Muñoz-Colón, Executive Committee Chair  
Kevin Laverty, Executive Committee Vice-Chair  
Judy Jennings, Executive Committee Member  
Connie Fletcher, Executive Committee Member  
Bob Hughes, Board Member  
Mona Bailey, Board Member  
Tre' Maxie, Board Member  
Cindy McMullen, Board Member  
Peter Maier, Board Member  
Dan Plung, Board Member  
Jeff Estes, Board Member  
Holly Koon, Board Member  
Janis Avery, Board Member  
Baxter Hershman, Student Representative  
Madaleine Osmun, Student Representative  
Ben Rarick, Executive Director, State Board of Education