

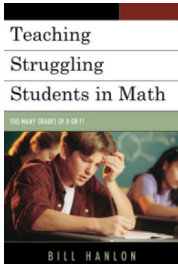
Nevada Public Education News



No Standards – No Graduation???

Bill Hanlon

If you are a parent of an 8th or 9th grade student currently enrolled in Algebra or Geometry, you need to know the state has no plan in place for them to meet graduation requirements. Local school superintendents are worried. It is customary for students to know the requirements to earn a diploma as they enter high school.



When the NV Legislature passed a bill last session to do away with the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) for graduation, many heralded it as a way to increase the graduation rate. The solution was to replace that exam with common end-of-course exams given to the students the same year they took a specific class.

As I have reported before, had anyone done any research on the subject they would have found the fail rate on the semester exams in high school is much higher than the fail rate on the HSPE in mathematics.

The NV State Board of Education recently passed a regulation to lower the cut score for passing the HSPE in math to increase the graduation rate for sophomores, juniors and seniors from 300 to 242 as it is being phased out. The intent is freshmen will be the first class to graduate requiring the new standards for graduation – passing end-of-course exams in Algebra and Geometry. The exam names will mostly like be changed to Course 1 and Course 2. It is my understanding that the end-of-course exams will be broken into two semester exams.

Students taking algebra or geometry in 8th or 9th grades are three-fourths through the school year and no exams have been created to address common course content across the state that can be used to meet the graduation requirement. The Legislative intent was to ensure students were taking these exams the same year they took the class.

Most school districts don't have common semester exams. But the school districts that do, have extremely low pass rates at the high school. Middle school students have traditionally done pretty well on the algebra exams.

The NV State Board of Education and the State Superintendent Dale Erquiaga had this ball dropped in their lap. The problem they have to deal with is there is no good solution. Students

enrolled in coursework are being taught the common core standards. State semester exams should be aligned to those standards and those semester exams should be somewhat aligned to the common core exams being created by the Smarter Balance to be administered in 11th grade. If the state has a set of end-of-course exams used for graduation that students score well but don't do well on the 11th grade exam created by Smarter Balance, Nevada will look foolish. The state will be accused of dumbing down the standards.