

Chair Dembrow and members of the committee,

I am writing in support of SB 744. I am a retired clinical psychologist who worked in school settings for decades. Much of my work was devoted to assessment and I value the knowledge and action that can come from appropriate assessment. However, the essential skills requirement is more a barrier than an aid to helping students advance through life..

1. It disproportionately deprives some groups of students from taking engaging elective classes. Students who fail to demonstrate mastery of essential skills through a standardized assessment must use an alternative approach which frequently requires taking an additional class to produce work samples. In talking to teachers of such classes, they point out that this often means losing the chance to take an elective. Teachers express concern that since these are the students who struggle most in school, losing one of their rare electives means they may not be able to participate in choir, art, manual trades, or other classes that may be keeping them in school.
2. It puts students' graduation at risk because we don't trust the quality of the teaching they have received. If a student has passed all required courses, we should assume they have acquired the knowledge and skills represented by those courses. If this is not true, we need to improve the quality of teaching in the courses and, even more important, the quality of teacher preparation. After passing four years of English, no student should be barred from graduation because they can not succeed on something such as the SBAC assessment English language portion.

I am pleased that this bill suspends the essential skills requirement while establishing a review of current high school graduation requirements. Now that we are firmly in the 21st century and emerging into a post COVID world, it is time to look fully at both subject matter and approaches to teaching as we

prepare our students for their future lives. We have so much to gain!

Thank you for your attention,

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