
W. Cole Patno

South Burlington High School Student
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Chittenden County State Senate Members:

Senator Tim Ashe
Senator Philip Baruth
Senator Debbie Ingram
Senator Virginia Lyons
Senator Christopher Pearson
Senator Michael Sirotkin

South Burlington State Representatives:

Representative Martin LaLonde
Representative Ann Pugh
Representative Helen Head
Representative Maida Townsend

Board of Education:

Ms. Krista Huling, Chair of the Vermont Board of Education

RE: House Bill 793: An act relating to the requirement to pass a civics test for high school graduation

Dear Ms. Chairwoman, Chittenden County State Senate Members, and South Burlington State Representatives,

I am writing to express my disapproval of House Bill 793 to require students to pass a civics test in order to graduate. This bill not only goes directly against Act 77, but the way that it is worded right now doesn't promote active learning nor active citizenship. One of the the reasons I'm publicly taking a stand on this issue is because I'm a part of the SBHS Class of 2020 Committee which helps decide how to implement Act 77's proficiency based grading in our school. The committee is comprised of only class of 2020 students as we are the first class that have to graduate with proficiencies. With the knowledge the committee has given me about Act 77, I have been able to form my opinion on this bill.

Act 77 was enacted in 2013 to encourage flexible pathways to secondary school completion. One of the reasons the act was created was to, "... promote opportunities for Vermont Students to achieve postsecondary readiness through high-quality educational experiences that acknowledge individual goals, learning styles and abilities," (16 V.S.A. § 941). With that said, a law that would require Vermont Students to pass one test in order to graduate would go directly against Act 77 as it wouldn't allow students to show that they're proficient in citizenship in different ways.

In some cases, a test is a great way to prove that you've learned the material in a course, but that is not the case with a mandatory graduation requirement of a civics test. When material is being covered over a long period of time, students are able to learn the material and have take away from it not matter what the form of assessment is. In the case of H. 793, students wouldn't be learning the material to use it later to help them become better citizens, they would only be memorizing the material to be able to pass the test to graduate. When material is just memorized to be memorized isn't as valuable as meaningful conversations or actions.

On that note, passing a civics test does not simply make a student a good citizen. A student could be a terrible test taker and not pass the test multiple times, but have done work in their community and/or given a speech about changes that need to happen in their community at a public event. The more meaningful is the latter.

While I agree that the information that would be on a civics test can extremely useful and helpful, making one test that determines whether you graduate or not is not the way to help make students better citizens. At South Burlington High School, as of the Class of 2020, students need to show that they're proficient in being a good citizen through class work. This allows for more personalization as students can do different types projects showing their different views on important issues in not only our state, but in our nation. Therefore my recommendation is to require one of the graduation proficiencies be citizenship.

Sincerely,

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