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April 13, 2023

Dear Members of the Florida Legislature,

This is a priority request/plea, for you as a state legislator to correct a problem before it unfairly and irrevocably prevents thousands of high school seniors from graduating on time with their Class of 2023! Since 2010 all high school seniors have had the option to use [Rule 6A-1.09422: Concordant and Comparative Scores](#) to meet graduation requirements for the State of Florida. The State Board of Education, several years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approved a rule change and increased the “concordant score” in order to graduate. In Leon County this change could mean approximately 400 out of 2100 seniors will not receive a high school diploma in May. At a time when Florida’s graduation rates and policies are being highlighted across the nation, we know this is going to mean unprecedented drops in graduation rates in our community and across our state.

*It is important to note that the increase in Concordant scores was originally going to start with last year’s seniors, Class of 2022, but in February of 2022 the State Board of Education approved “delaying the implementation of the increased concordant score”. We are simply asking to continue the delay of increased scores.

We are asking you to take steps today to prevent this tragedy before it becomes our new reality here in the great State of Florida. In doing so please also consider these important facts about the Class of 2023:

- **2 years of learning loss:** these students began high school in 2019-2020, during the start of the COVID 19 pandemic. Like all schools across the nation we did our best to transition to a digital learning environment. These students missed many opportunities and struggled for more than one-fourth of their 9th grade year. Less than half returned to brick and mortar classrooms the following school year, resulting in significant gaps in learning and learning loss.
- Most of these students were taking Algebra I in 9th grade and were not able to receive the same level of instruction or content review normally provided in the last quarter of the school year prior to taking the end of course exam (EOC). In addition, due to school closures they did not get to take the Algebra I End of Course assessment (a graduation requirement).
- As a result of COVID, this class had fewer regular testing opportunities in 9th and 10th grades, giving them less options to make up state tests in a timely manner, and less opportunities for support.
- This class has done everything asked to prepare and try to meet all graduation requirements including Summer School, Saturday School, Test Prep classes or weekend bootcamps, online classes or test prep, tutoring; many of these interventions started before this year.

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Building the Future Together

- **Change in rule re: concordant scores:** this class must meet a higher concordant score for graduation
 - **SAT** – increased by 50 points from a ERBW 430 to a 480
 - **ACT** – changed from Reading score of 19 to an average score of 18 or higher on the Reading and English sections
 - **PERT Math** was removed as a comparative score for the Algebra I EOC

The data shows the toll COVID 19 took on students throughout the state. School districts across Florida are equally alarmed and concerned about the future of this class. We believe in accountability and high standards to prepare our students for future careers; we understand standards have to be adjusted to align with the growing needs in our state and nation, including the gradual increase in test scores. But, we have to stand up for these students before its too late. Statistically once a senior leaves high school, without a diploma, it is highly unlikely they will return to meet additional requirements (i.e. passing a state test) to finish and receive a diploma. This not only negatively impacts thousands of students, which then trickles down to the community and our state.


This chart shows the impact on graduation rates for our local high schools in Leon County for the Class of 2023 if the current new concordant score requirements remain in effect.

SCHOOL	Projected Graduation Rate (data as of 3/28/23)	2022 Grad Rate	*2019 Grad Rate (prior to COVID)
District - Leon	79.60%	86.80%	92.40%
Godby (Title 1)	60.30%	80.40%	90.20%
Leon	79.10%	84.90%	94.60%
Lincoln	86.30%	94.10%	93.70%
Rickards (Title 1)	66.30%	82.60%	93.10%
SAIL	94.30%	95.70%	94.40%
Chiles	96.80%	99.10%	99.00%

We estimate that our district graduation rate will drop to 80% at best with our Title 1 schools experiencing the most significant drop. I have included the graduation rate for the Class of 2019 as reference because they are the senior class that graduated the year prior to the start of the pandemic. 95% of the current interventions occurring in our high schools started many years before the pandemic and were very successful in raising the graduation rates to 90% or better across all our high schools including our Title 1 schools. We believe this data supports our concern that the current class of 2023 is significantly suffering from the effects of the pandemic, combined with the increased concordant score is a recipe for disaster.

Like school districts and superintendents around the state, we respectfully ask you to pass legislation to delay the increase in concordant scores and restore the use of PERT math as a comparative score. We are asking that this delay remain in place until an analysis and alignment for “new tests” begin based on the new B.E.S.T. state standards. We need more time to address the learning losses and educational interruptions that resulted from the global pandemic.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

 Rocky Hanna