

Concerns erupt on assessment test results

Forum scheduled as 90 Orange High School seniors may be at risk for diplomas

By Chris Sykes Staff Writer, Orange Transcript

A forum to discuss the state's high school assessments and how they could affect the upcoming Orange High School graduation class is planned for Monday night.

The forum, to be presented by the Orange High PTSO and the NAACP Unit of the Oranges and Maplewood, will come after Wednesday's release of the latest Alternative High School Assessment scores from the test that was administered on April 18.

It will also coincide with the state Department of Education deadline for any High School Proficiency Assessment or AHSA- related appeals from public school teachers and administrators on behalf of their students. The graduation eligibility of students who failed one or both parts of the alternative test has been in jeopardy since an independent scoring agency determined that 90 percent of the students who had to take the AHSA's math and language arts tests did not pass both parts.

That includes approximately 90 members of Orange High's Class of 2010 who might not be allowed to graduate on June 25. Superintendent of Schools Ronald Lee did not return a message for comment Tuesday morning.

Nicole Williams-James, the NAACP treasurer and education co-chair, said Monday's forum was organized after a request from the school's parent-teacher group.

"We found out, on basically the sneak-tip, that the results are going to be in on June 2 and you have until June 7 to appeal," said Williams-James, a former member of the Orange Board of Education.

"We put the information out to the high school PTSO, but they asked us to come back in and do a forum so they could get a better understanding of what their children and all our kids are facing," Williams-James continued.

Other education advocates in Orange added their concern about the test-appeal process.

"We don't know anything about it and we've been meeting every week," said North Ward Councilwoman Tency Eason, who serves as president of the PTA/PTO/PTSA District Council. "I don't know if I like the idea of this new appeals process because it seems the state is going against its own stated policies and procedures. Instead of lowering the bar, they should raise it and put more emphasis on the academics. You can't keep on graduating all these kids who are unprepared and don't find that out until they get to college, where they have to take remedial classes."

The Rev. Reginald Jackson, pastor of St. Matthew AME Church and a Board of Education member, agreed with Eason. He said he believed the state is sending everyone mixed messages at a time when clarity is needed.

"We have not gotten back the test scores from the students who took the AHSA the second time on April 18, but I know the state has said any students who failed the second time can march but not get a diploma," said Jackson. "My problem is that a lot of parents don't know yet that their children are not eligible to graduate. It's really the local school district's responsibility to inform them."

Information about the forum is available by calling 973-675-5325 or by sending an e-mail to orangesmaplewood-naacp@yahoo.com.