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## Students who fail AIMS test look for someone to blame

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Perla Espinoza is 18 and a senior in high school. Perla wants to go to college and get a good job, but she hasn't passed any portion of AIMS. "The requirement that she pass the AIMS test to graduate and receive a diploma stands in her way," we're told. If Perla wants to go to college and get a good job, which of the following courses of action should she pursue:

- A. Take advantage of the state's offer of 90 hours of free one-on-one tutoring and retake the test in July.
- B. Remain in high school for another year.
- C. Go to community college, which does not require a diploma, and take remedial courses.
- D. Sue.

Answer: Do you even need to ask?

Perla and her co-plaintiff, 19-year-old Hannah Gonzales, may not know much about reading or math, but they certainly know the score. When backed into a corner, find someone else to blame.

The pair have filed suit against the state, hoping to overturn AIMS as a graduation requirement. Their lawyers contend the state hasn't put enough money into schools, so it's unfair to expect them to pass a test that requires a 10th-grade education.

On Monday, a judge refused to put the AIMS requirement on hold until the case can be decided. As a result, Perla and Hannah and up to 10,000 other seniors won't be donning mortarboards this month.

Which actually could be the best thing that ever happened to them.

For years, people screamed about public education in Arizona, where the only skill needed to pass to the next grade was an ability to tie your shoes. In 1996, that began to change. That year, the state raised academic standards and decided to develop a test to hold people accountable.

Beginning with the Class of 2001, students would actually have to show that they learned something to get a diploma.

Of course, it didn't take long for the screaming to begin, and rightfully so. It didn't seem fair to suddenly impose a whole new set of standards on kids who were already two-thirds of the way through school. So the test was pushed back to the Class of 2002 and then to the Class of 2006.

Then came the complaint that the test was too hard. So it became easier. And the

passing grade was lowered. And bonus points were added for good grades or even average ones. Meanwhile, the state put up \$10 million to tutor juniors and seniors who hadn't passed. Last year, \$800,000 of that \$10 million was used. Only 6,000 of 37,000 eligible students bothered to sign up.

Now comes the lawsuit by Perla and Hannah, contending that the state doesn't adequately fund education, so it's not fair to expect kids to learn anything.

Perla, a student at Nogales High School, hasn't passed any part of the test. Hannah, a student at Scottsdale's Coronado High School, falls short on reading and math.

"The failure to graduate from high school will have drastic social and economic impacts on these students," the lawsuit notes.

So will the failure to be able to read at a 10th-grade level.

Like Perla, Hannah has dreams. "Ms. Gonzales wants to go to college, get a good-paying job and become independent," her lawsuit says. "What stands in the way of her dreams is the AIMS requirement."

No, what stands in her way is the fact she hasn't yet mastered the material she needs to make those dreams come true.

If I were Hannah's mom, I wouldn't be suing because the school officials won't give her a diploma. I'd be suing if they would.

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