

# Testing and Terror

*The high-stakes testing of the WASL further marginalizes disadvantaged students*

By **DINORAH FLORES**  
*Guest Writer*

Let's be clear: one way the WASL is unfair is that private school students, who are predominantly white, don't have to take it, whereas public school students, who are more often low-income and of color, do.

This Friday, the Seattle Young People's Project will stage a haunted house showing the frightening implications of the Washington state Assessment of Student Learning, which will be a high school graduation requirement starting with the class of 2008. The "WASL Haunted High" will use gory drama to explain how the exam puts low-income students and students of color in a line of failure that will have a huge negative effect on the rest of their lives — and on society as a whole.

The event is a kick-off for our Education Justice Campaign. To prevent the education system from punishing low-income students and students of color for its own failings, our campaign seeks to decouple the WASL from graduation requirements.

Let's be clear: one way the WASL is unfair is that private school students, who are predominantly white, don't have to take it, whereas public school students, who are more often low-income and of color, do. The WASL is incredibly difficult for all those required to take it. Last year, only 42 percent of all 10th-graders across the state passed all three sections of the test. That indicates that 58 percent of the class of 2008 won't graduate. Yet wealthy students and white students can avoid the obstacle, whereas low-income students and students of color can't.

The way the WASL is administered is also unfair. The

2004-2005 passing percentages prove as much. In the Math portion of the test, 59 percent of Asian students and 56 percent of white students passed, respectively. By contrast, only 31 percent of American Indian students passed, 26 percent of Hispanic/Latino students passed, and 23 percent of the Black community passed. The scores keep decreasing: 30 percent of low-income youth passed, 13 percent of English Language Learners passed, and 7 percent of special-education students passed the WASL.

These low scores take many by surprise, but they shouldn't. To begin with, the WASL is not translated to any other language, making it difficult for ELL students to understand and be able to pass the test. Also, some of the cultural references made in the test do not take into consideration all the cultures each student represents. Also, public schools in which low-income students and students of color predominate receive less funding and resources than predominantly wealthy, white public schools.

What are some of the consequences for not passing the WASL? With so many students failing, the pressure this test builds up in students could lead to the high school dropout rate increasing, which would prevent students from pursuing their desired and needed education and, in many cases, lead them into the criminal justice system. Why? Without the proper education or job credentials, the fallback support for young people will be the streets. As a result, our communities will be denied the opportunity to better themselves and the people in them. This will only continue the ongoing experience of limitations and oppression in low-income communities and communities of color. If the WASL stays as a high school graduation requirement, it will become a terror not just for the students taking it, but for the whole future.

Something must be done. By decoupling the WASL from graduation requirements, we can expand the opportunities of all students. In particular, it would mean that low-income students and students of color are given a chance to succeed. For young people, school should be a place of growth, not a house of horrors. ■



## [Scary]

WASL Haunted Highschool Fri., Oct. 27, 7-10 p.m. Youngstown Cultural Arts Center, 4408 Delridge Way SW. Free for youth under 19; \$5 suggested donation otherwise. Information: call (206) 860-9606 or [info@sypp.org](mailto:info@sypp.org)

Dinorah Flores is a 12th-grader at the Center School and a volunteer with Seattle Young People's Project, a youth-led community organization. For more information, go to [www.sypp.org](http://www.sypp.org).



Real Change is published weekly and is sold by the poor and homeless of Seattle. Vendors receive 65¢ of the \$1.00 paid for this paper.

### Mission Statement:

Real Change exists to create opportunity and a voice for low-income people while taking action to end homelessness and poverty.

The Real Change Homeless Empowerment Project is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. Programs include the Real Change newspaper, the StreetWrites peer support group for homeless writers, the Homeless Speakers Bureau, and the First things First organizing project. All donations support these programs and are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law.

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