

Nearly 7,000 Seniors In Washington Don't Pass Math Exam

By Donna Gordon Blankinship
Associated Press

(AP) - Just as Washington state officials predicted, most of Washington's high school seniors are passing the statewide exams required to graduate. But that fact doesn't make life any easier for the nearly 7,000 students in the Class of 2013 who have yet to pass the newly required math test and didn't get their diplomas in June.

This year's graduating class was the first that had to pass either an algebra or geometry test in addition to previous requirements that included reading and writing exams.

Of the 71,671 students who stayed in school until the end of

UW To Pay \$15M After Medical Mistake

(AP) - The University of Washington will pay \$15.2 million in a medical malpractice judgment after a mistake caused a debilitating brain damage to a girl in 2008.

The sum ordered Friday by a King County judge is one of the largest medical malpractice payments in state history, The Seattle Times reported Saturday.

The settlement stems from the case of MacKenzie Briant, who five years ago was being treated for a heart defect at Seattle Children's hospital. After she got a cold, her mother consulted with doctors who had treated her, but miscommunication between two cardiologists led them to prescribe a nasal spray that blocked MacKenzie's breathing. The prolonged lack of oxygen caused brain damage.

For her mother, MacKenzie's early history makes what happened even more painful.

MacKenzie, born with a heart defect in 2004, had survived a heart transplant early in life. By 2008, before her injury, she had nearly caught up with her peers, delighting in the attention she received from her parents and giggling during "sword fights" with her older brother, Ethan, in their Snoqualmie, Wash. home.

"Oh my God, she lived through half a heart for almost 4 months. She had a heart transplant, for God's sake. She's been a fighter and working so hard her whole life," Elaine Briant said.

Now 8, MacKenzie is unable to walk or talk or swallow, and doctors say she will require round-the-clock nursing care for the rest of her life.

Initially, the official stance of the UW and Seattle Children's — that MacKenzie's injuries were not caused by the nasal spray but by breathing complications from her earlier transplant — plunged the family into constant battles with insurers, Briant said.

At the trial in King County Superior Court, the lawyer representing Seattle Children's and the University of Washington, which employed the doctors, was frank in his opening statement.

"The very first thing I want to say on behalf of both Seattle Children's and University of Washington is we made a mistake," Clarke Johnson said in court.

But that mistake and the nasal spray prescribed were not responsible for MacKenzie's "severe and devastating brain injury," Johnson told the court.

The trial, replete with technical experts and material, took three weeks. For six weeks afterward, Judge John Erlick weighed the testimony and evidence.

Friday, Erlick ruled the nose spray, given after "negligent advice," did cause the cardiac arrest that left MacKenzie with brain damage.

He said the UW doctors at Seattle Children's had failed in their duty to communicate with each other, and to properly advise Elaine Briant.

In the courtroom, as the judge announced the award, Elaine Briant began to cry softly.

"I wish MacKenzie would be the way she was before," she said afterward. "But now we will have the funds to take care of her, which is so important."

The UW does not plan to appeal the settlement. The money is coming from insurance.

their senior year, more than 4,100 didn't meet their math test requirement and another 2,700 never even attempted the exams, according to data released recently by the state education department to The Associated Press.

Some "seniors" will continue to work toward graduation by attending another year of high school, according to Nathan Olson, spokesman for the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. State law promises a free public education until age 21 for people who have not earned a diploma or GED.

Of the nearly 7,000 who didn't meet their math test requirement in time to graduate in June, some will find out by August the results of a late spring exam or the graduation portfolio alternative called the collection of evidence.

The numbers are better than they were at the start of spring, between April 1 and June 6 more than 2,000 students received some good news, learning they met the state math requirement and graduated on time.

Overall, about 90 percent of Washington state seniors met the math standard by passing either the algebra or geometry exam or an approved alternative. That's an improvement over a 71 percent passage rate on the algebra test and a 79 percent pass rate on the geometry test in 2012, the year before math became a graduation requirement.

Pass rates for writing and reading have been above 90 percent for the past few years. Students are given multiple chances to meet their graduation testing requirements. There are also various alternatives

such as scoring well on the SAT or turning in a portfolio of academic work.

"Our teachers, students and families should be proud of their accomplishments," said Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn, when this year's test results were announced in late June.

"But I don't want the students who dropped out of school to be forgotten," he added.

More than 380 students who started their senior year in fall 2012 dropped out or transferred before June, Olson said. That number doesn't include the students who dropped out in their freshman, sophomore or junior years.

Dorn has made increasing the number of Washington students who graduate from high school in four years or longer a top priority of his administration. The state's five-year

graduation rate has been inching toward 80 percent over the past few years.

The numbers for the class of 2013 won't be announced until early next year.

Of those in the Class of 2013 who didn't make it to commencement, some transferred to private schools, which usually don't require students to meet state graduation requirements to earn a diploma.

Bob Hagin, founder and principal of Northwest Liberty School, a mostly online private high

school in Woodinville, says his program helps hundreds of seniors finish their public school work online or in a small learning lab. For students who just can't fulfill all the state requirements, Hagin offers a private school diploma.

Hagin said his empathy for struggling students led him to start his school a few years ago, after more than 20 years in public education.

"I think they should be able to come to the finish line after 13 years of hard work," Hagin said.

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