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From: rbitn@sasd.us
Sent: Wednesday, September 30, 2009 9:41 PM
To: IRRC
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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Sir,
I am opposed to Pennsylvania's current plan to use the proposed Keystone examination as a graduation requirement. Currently we are faced with PSSA requirements in math and reading. These at least are life skills which will enable students to be more productive adults. However, acquiring knowledge for a test in a content area does not ensure that a person will be a successful adult. In the case of these examinations students with innate cognitive ability automatically have a distinct advantage. Students with below average or even average intellectual ability must devote hours to prepare for these tests. In addition students with disabilities will struggle even more with these requirements. Our educational system has many flaws, but high stakes testing is not the way to fix them. I have worked in special education for the last 35 years and have three children of my own. As I have seen our schools change over this period of time there has been a distinct increase in students with behavioral and mental health problems. Many of our kindergarten students come to school with little background to prepare them for the demands of the educational system. I work with parents everyday who are unable to successfully parent their children. As we place more and more emphasis on academics in the form of tests the time available during the educational day shrinks. How can we prepare our students to become better parents, understand the principles of money management, and become better citizens with the emphasis on testing? How do we meet the requirements in the transition plan of an IEP when students must be coached and drilled for a one time test? How long will they retain that knowledge? We need to increase the rigor in our schools and help students to develop stronger work ethics. However, preparing for high stakes examinations, that are an all or nothing one time event, is a waste of time. Ongoing assessment of students in their daily classes should be the method to measure progress toward graduation. Tests, written work, projects, and oral presentations should be used to evaluate and prepare our students to become well rounded participants in the workplace, in the family, and in the community. The state of Pennsylvania needs to jump off of the testing band wagon and take time to investigate and truly find ways to improve our educational system for all students.

Yours truly,
Rebecca Bittner,
Director of Special Education,
Somerset Area School District

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