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From: Rob Stemple [robstemple@comcast.net]
Sent: Thursday, October 08, 2009 5:02 PM
To: IRRC
Subject: Keystone Exams

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
GROUP

Dear Sir or Madam:

I wanted to express my thoughts as a disabled person who's also a former special education teacher. I've also run a non-profit providing services to the blind and vision impaired and currently work in Marketing for an organization providing services to the blind.

I absolutely believe the Keystone exams are a good idea. No disrespect to my fellow disabled, but people in the real world, including colleges, trade schools and, especially employers need to know what a high school graduate actually knows. Not having a testing instrument that challenges our best and brightest doesn't help the disabled. It only makes it more difficult for employers to find out who has the skills and abilities they need. The Keystone exams should be accessible to individuals who are blind, but who have the academic ability to compete with sighted students, perhaps with an on-line version of the test that can be accessed with a screen reader or magnification program. Otherwise, no special favors should be offered to anyone. An absolute standard, against which our students are compared.

Competency tests should, perhaps be developed to permit disabled students to demonstrate a set of competencies that would be of value to employers. This could take the form of not only test results, but actual work samples, such as an artist would put together to present to a gallery.

I think the Keystone Exams may also tell all of us where we're going wrong, in terms of competing with schools from other states and countries.

All this being said, however, PDE needs to turn local schools loose to talk to employers in their communities and there should be room in the curriculum for teaching real world skills and specific job skills relevant to the local community. Most educators I talk to spend 100% of their time simply teaching the test(s) their students take at present that determine the school's funding. It all comes down to money, but it shouldn't.

Rob

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"Work joyfully and peacefully, knowing that right thoughts and right efforts will inevitably bring about right results."