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From: Gardiner Kreglow [gkreglowsbe@gmail.com]
Sent: Monday, October 19, 2009 4:46 PM
To: IRRC
Subject: IRRC ISSUE No. 2696
Attachments: Keystone Exams would be better than taking the PSSAs--Gardiner Kreglow .doc

To Whom it May Concern:

I wish to submit the following editorial that I submitted for publication to the Allentown Morning Call in favor of the Keystone Exam for IRRC's record of public support, IRRC ISSUE No. 2696. I have copy and pasted the editorial below and attached it.

Thanks,
Gardiner Kreglow
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Keystone Exams would be better than taking the PSSAs
By: Gardiner Kreglow

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BOARD/COMMISSION

The Keystone Exam proposal, approved by the State Board of Education in August, has sparked a great debate across the Commonwealth. There should only be one question in this debate: "What is best for the students?".

As a student, I see the new proposal as great since it has the potential to change the high school classroom providing students with fair assessments and teachers with meaningful information to help students.

The Keystone Exam Proposal would implement a series of exams given at the end of courses in English, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science, counting for one-third of a student's grade in the course. Three Keystone exams in Algebra I, English Literature, and Biology, pending federal approval, would replace the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA).

As a student, I find it very difficult to like standardized testing, but under the Federal No Child Left Behind Act, standardized testing is here to stay, so if I have to take a test, I want to be assessed by a test that has meaning and doesn't detract from time in the classroom either. Each year the PSSA results show steady gains in K-8, but each and every year high school results show minimal gains: The eleventh grade PSSA is just not working.

The PSSA isn't working because doesn't fit the high school classroom. The math section assesses competencies in Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. When I took the PSSA, it was three years since I had taken Algebra I, two years since Geometry and one year since Algebra II; it wasn't a timely test.

Furthermore, the PSSA has a spring administration date, so under block scheduling, a student may not have had English for several months, so reading passages and writing essays on the PSSA for that student is like trying to win a triathlon without having exercised in months: it is nearly impossible.

The Keystone Exams would be administered on a schedule that allows students to be tested right after they finish the course, which is much better for students.

Most high school students don't take the PSSA seriously since it has no effect on college admission, grades, or graduation. The Keystone Exams would be required for graduation and affect high school grades, which affects college admissions, so student buy in becomes a reality, which leads to meaningful assessment data.

The Keystone Exams would replace final exams, requiring no additional time, and actually giving the 18 hours of PSSA testing time back. That's more time in the classroom for students and more time for teachers to be teaching, and that's what education is all about.

One rallying cry against these exams is the price tag, which is not cheap. The amount is deceiving since the state would not write a 160 million dollar check this year but would pay in smaller increments over the next several years, yet in the end there is no discount store for standardized testing.

The Keystones would demand a rigorous and thorough course of study preparing students for college and career success. In order to help teachers and schools ensure that students succeed the contract includes development of model curriculum and diagnostic tools. The Keystone Exams would make assessment beneficial to the classroom rather than detracting from it like the PSSA.

In 2008, the State Board of Education decided to add student representation. I was chosen to be the first student in the Commonwealth to serve a two-year term to represent 1.8 million students; I have discovered that the members of the board care about the students of our Commonwealth. They lead busy, successful lives, yet they commit time and energy to sit on the board and develop policies to benefit students. When they approved the Keystone Exam regulation, they did so because in their hearts and minds they felt it was what was best for students.

No exam is perfect and the Keystone Exams are no exception, but the Keystone Exams are far better than the PSSA, and they are designed to bridge the gap between assessment and instruction while trying to lessen the testing culture. If education is really about the students, then the Keystone Exams are the way to go.

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