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May 21, 2008

Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street, 14th floor
Harrisburg, PA. 17101

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

2008 MAY 27 AM 10:39

RECEIVED

To: IRRC

Re: Academic Standards and Assessment (Graduation Exit Exams)

I could quote research indicating that exit exams are detrimental to those students who are at the greatest risk. However, let's approach this from a common sense perspective. Given any high stakes test given in the ninth hour of a student's public school experience is too late, and it creates an issue that school staff will be forced to teach to the test, it will not create the results that the state is looking for. Unless the goal is only to have a socialized and national system of schools with a state curriculum then money for this type of testing will again be educational dollars wasted. This will be a nail in the coffin of local control of education, and the further the state removes education from the hands of the family, teachers, and local communities the harder it is for children to have the individual support they need to succeed.

If you walk into a school that has a higher percentage of students at risk it would be painfully obvious that the students do not need any more tests. What they need is to have learned fundamental skills like how to respect their teachers and fellow students, how to follow directions, how to come to class prepared, how to study, how to plan for future goals, how to cooperate with other people in a classroom environment, how to effectively handle conflict in a positive manner, how to dress for success, how to speak in proper English so they can effectively communicate when interviewing or going out into the workforce, how to think, reason, and respect themselves. Self esteem comes with failing and succeeding.

Money should be used to help children with remediation in the earlier grades, and not prior to someone getting ready to graduate. If students are unable to read and process information effectively by 3rd or 4th grade then doing something as late as high school is way too late in a student's educational career. Money should be channeled into the 3rd grade when the student has not already developed a negative attitude towards school due to the struggles they have experienced.

If a state test was the answer then the state should have gotten the results they wanted with the PSSA. Any state test should be the lowest possible standard which is acceptable. It will be a logistic nightmare for school districts, and how will students who are in honors classes be tested for a class like Algebra I. If we are lacking enough people in science, math and engineering is it

practical to believe that any state assessment will give a clear picture of what should have been mastered in a honors class? Not every honors class is Advanced Placement.

How do you tell a high school student who spends hours after school working, because he or she has no money for food or clothing otherwise, that if they don't pass an exit exam in Algebra II then they don't graduate? How do you tell a student who spends their evenings tending to their younger sibling, because there is no parent there in the evening to help, that she can't graduate from high school because of one exit exam in Biology? How much comfort and motivation do you think there really is, for some of these kids who have no family support and help, that they can take a GCA more than one time and that they need to be remediated? When is this tutoring going to take place-during the school day-after school when they have to work or take care of younger siblings?

How does this type of testing help raise the bar for all students when some students need to be challenged to a higher level, and these exams are a waste of time? I remember asking my daughter, who had just taken the SAT, what she had thought of the PSSA in 11th grade. She said it was a terrible waste of classroom time, because the PSSA was an inferior test compared to what she had just experienced with the SAT.

What is the long term projected cost of this type of testing? If these tests do not get the results that are projected then will this become another bureaucratic mandate that lives on even when it is determined that they don't get the results needed? Obviously the PSSA has not gotten the results otherwise why are the GCAs being considered, and why do we still have the PSSA as an option.

The state will do as it always does, and that is to interfere in the function of all schools. Someone once said to me that the issue with public education is if one child needs corrective shoes then all the children get corrective shoes. The child that needs help does not get the real help they need, other students waste valuable instructional time on things they don't need, and in the end a vast amount of money is wasted on a program/tests that don't get the results, and won't go away when it is not effective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheryl Boise".

Cheryl Boise