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2008 MAY 27 PM 10:47

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Subject: Proposed GCA regulations

Date: Tue, 20 May 2008 16:46:08 +0000

Message-Id:

<052020081646.4895.4833004E000D4F560000131F22165279669C0A9B0E070C019C9C0E9901050C0E9D@comcast.net>

X-Mailer: AT&T Message Center Version 1 (Oct 30 2007)

X-Authenticated-Sender: cmFja293YXNzb2NpYXRlc0Bjb2ljYXN0Lm5ldA==

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X-pstn-settings: 3 (1.0000:1.0000) s cv gt3 gt2 gt1 r p m c

X-pstn-addresses: from <rackowassociates@comcast.net> [307/14]
Return-Path: rackowassociates@comcast.net
X-OriginalArrivalTime: 20 May 2008 16:46:14.0639 (UTC) FILETIME=[04628FF0:01C8BA99]

To Whom It May Concern:

My Mom used to say to me, "don't just tell me your problem, tell me your solution."

Regarding the pros and cons of the proposed GCAs, there might be a way for proponents of the GCAs, as well as local school districts who oppose them, to have their "Diploma Integrity Cake" and eat it too.

Why not have the State Department of Education, in conjunction with a truly representative advisory committee of local district educators from all parts of the State, devise state-wide criteria for high school diplomas. (Like making the State's standardized tests already being given more meaningful, if necessary.) Once agreed upon, the State could "sanction" the diplomas of those school districts that meet the criteria.

Any district that meets that district's local diploma criteria could still graduate with their high school diploma. But if that district did not meet the State requirements, the diplomas for their graduates, in that year, would simply not be "State Sanctioned." With that mechanism, virtually in place as PSSA scores are already calculated and analyzed, Colleges and universities...along with prospective employers...could decide for themselves which applicants from which high schools with which diplomas met their entrance requirements.

After having had the experience, over the past 15 years, of my 4 children applying to, and getting into colleges and universities, I can tell you that the admissions departments of virtually every college and university I was in contact with...and it was a very wide range in terms of size, location and "reputation"...pretty much knew the relative "value" of the diplomas, course rigor, and grades coming from the various school districts. And, of course, they also have SAT scores to go by.

When, and if, parents in any given school district get the feeling that their district's high school diplomas, not "State Sanctioned," are not worth the paper they're printed on...or are hindering their children in getting into colleges or jobs they want, the pressure THEY'LL put on their districts at the local level will be far more effective than any pressure the State might apply.

Then, instead of squandering unimaginable, indefensible quantities of resources...tax dollars and real teaching time...devising, monitoring and taking more tests...use those "earmarked new testing dollars" (and more) to support individual districts in their efforts to get over the "hump" of whatever district-specific shortfalls they may be experiencing, as demonstrated by the State standards.

Using existing testing along with the real life experiences of teachers, counselors and administrators, there isn't a school district that couldn't tell you...right now...EXACTLY what would help them help their underachieving students. And that would include adequate State funding to do things like reduce class sizes, increase the availability of technology, fix up decaying school structures ... and to, once and for all, eliminate completely the "unfunded" or "underfunded" piece of government mandates that continually erode the ability of local districts to properly support their public schools.

We need to put away the politics. Put away the "punitive approach" to struggling districts and students. Turn "testing money" into "teaching money" and watch what happens.

We can do better.

We must.

Sincerely,

David M. Rackow
Cheltenham School District
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