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Buckheit, James

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From: McConnell, Robin [McConnellR@TESD.NET]

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Sent: Tuesday, May 20, 2008 9:48 AM**To:** j buckheit@state.pa.us; irrc@irrc.state.pa.us; jrroadess@pasen.gov; musto@pasenate.com; jstairs@pahousegop.com; jroebuck@pahouse.net; dmlne@pahousegop.com; crubleyp@pahousegop.com; eerickson@pasen.gov; andydiminman@pasenate.com**Subject:** I oppose Graduation Competency Assessments for PA Students

Jim Buckheit, Executive Director, State Board of Education,
Dear Jim,

As a long-time Pennsylvania educator, I am writing to voice **my opposition to the implementation of Graduation Competency Assessments in PA schools.** GCA's, in my opinion, are nothing more than a poorly conceived plan that is sure to have unintended consequences, many of which have not been addressed or even recognized. The way to improve the performance of students is to offer them opportunities to take additional (exciting) courses taught by highly qualified (and stimulating) teachers.

The implementation of the math GCA's will in effect make Algebra 2 a graduation requirement. Such decisions are best left to local school districts and not imposed upon them by state requirements (or de facto requirements.)

In my humble opinion the drop out rate for marginal students will increase as an unintended consequence of GCA's. As a former community college teacher for 11 years, I have taught scores of high school grads who hated math while they were in high school and did poorly as a result. Once they entered the working world and started paying for their education, they become motivated and dedicated students. Many such students came back to school at considerable sacrifice to themselves and to their families. In short, life experiences taught these students the value of education and they were now ready to learn. This was in sharp contrast to their former high school attitudes. I know you want to change this via GCA's, but think about it. Will student attitudes change? Will life experiences of high schoolers be the same as those students with families and the need for more income? The answer to both questions is NO!

What to do? Offer all high schools financial incentives to implement courses that are appropriate for the kids that elected to stop taking the courses that are being prescribed by GCA's. In the field of mathematics, encourage schools to teach geometry for only one semester. Make Algebra 2, a two or three semester course. Provide more time for those who need more time to master the material. Offer meaningful supports for these students so they won't consider dropping out of school. AND, provide in-service training for the teachers of such courses. Consider funding courses at local universities for these teachers. (No applications hoops to jump through and all tuition paid by the state with Act 48 credits given. Consideration should be given to modeling the delivery of courses after the old National Science Foundation model for courses that was offered in the 1960's to math and science teachers. These initiatives changed the curricula as calculus was introduced along with changes to geometry and pre-calculus math.) **Be inventive! Don't impose tests upon all districts, especially those that excel. One-size-fits-all is rarely the preferred solution.**

In summary, **GCA's are a simplistic idea that I greatly oppose!** They seem to be based, in part, on very poor logic that builds on the fact that students who passed Alg 2 in high school have a higher rate of success in college than do other students. Thus the solution to society's ills is to require all students (de facto requirement) to take Algebra 2, and its prerequisite courses. This type of logic is akin to

asking low income families to get second and third jobs to increase their family's income since this variable (income) is closely related to group success on the SAT. Shame on you, for you know better!

Robin McConnell
954 Cloverly Road
Berwyn, PA 19312