

Buckheit, James

From: Snyder, Tom [tsnyder@westallegheny.k12.pa.us]
Sent: Sunday, May 18, 2008 3:47 PM
To: jrhoades@pasen.gov; musto@pasenate.com; jpliccola@pasen.gov; lbaker@pasen.gov;
 jscarnati@pasen.gov; pbrowne@pasen.gov; mfolmer@pasen.gov; rtomlinson@pasen.gov;
 andydinniman@pasenate.com; hughes@pasenate.com; lavalley@pasenate.com;
 jstairs@pahousegop.com; jroebuck@pahouse.net; jorie@pasen.gov;
 dmetcalf@pahousegop.com; irrc@irrc.state.pa.us; jbuckheit@state.pa.us;
 00statbd@psupen.psu.edu
Subject: Please Oppose GCA Legislation!!!

RECEIVED
 2008 MAY 27 AM 10:41
 INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
 REVIEW COMMISSION

Greetings,

As a PA resident, parent, and educator, I urge you to oppose the State Board of Education's proposed Graduation Competency Assessments. This proposal would mandate high-stakes standardized high school exit exams and would deny students a high school diploma if they do not score "proficient" on these statewide tests.

Note the just released study from researchers at the University of California at Davis and the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, which is scheduled for publication in the peer-reviewed journal Educational Policy, that suggests that "state requirements that students pass exit tests to graduate from high school appear to do nothing to improve achievement on federal reading and mathematics tests." According to the study, comparisons of math and reading scores "of children in states with exit examinations to the scores of children elsewhere in the United States...concluded that there was NO evidence that requiring passage of such tests improved academic achievement in those subject areas." Furthermore, "[e]ven the most rigorous versions of the exit tests failed to produce significant improvements in the reading and math performance."

Don't subject PA schools to this until all aspects have been carefully researched and analyzed.

I oppose the GCA proposal for numerous reasons:

1. I do not believe that standardized tests are the best determination of student achievement. Portfolios and exhibitions promote the development of skills, knowledge and applications actually valued by employers. Employers are more interested in examples of student work and problem-solving than test results.
2. Exit exams do NOT reflect how students analyze conflicting explanations, solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, find, assemble and analyze information, engage in the give-and-take of ideas, and reach conclusions.
3. Exit exams do NOT measure higher-level thinking or any aspect of oral and written literacy.
4. Most tests just measure basic academic skills via multiple-choice questions. These measurements don't match up with necessary job or college-level skills. Ask employers and college professors what they see is lacking and take action steps accordingly, instead of the easy way out of adding more testing.
5. At a time when we know that Pennsylvania's public education system lacks the funding it needs by over \$4 billion in order to help every student meet the state's academic standards, it is irresponsible to impose high-stakes testing on our students. In addition, no analysis has been done on the cost of developing and administering the GCAs, let alone what it would cost to remediate those students who do not score "proficient" on the exam. This is fiscal malpractice. The inequality among PA's 501 school districts remains profound---apply that 4 billion dollars to that cancer first.

6. Above all, the emphasis on multiple-choice questions, no matter how 'hard' they are, completely ignores the Multiple Intelligences that ALL need to be developed in the education of the whole child. Please don't ignore the vast amount of research about the benefits of arts education for the whole child---creativity, expression, imagination, outside-the box thinking, self-discipline, collaboration---that can't be measured by a standardized test. RESEARCH HAS PROVEN: "Music teaches the 21st century skills which will prepare students for success in the competitive global economy."

I have no problem with accountability. I just think exit exams on top of the repressive standardized testing environment we already face would be a waste of time for all involved, especially for our students, and funds that could be far better spend to improve the equity among ALL districts in PA.

Please oppose the GCA proposal. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Tom Snyder

401 Bon Air Ct.
Cranberry Twp., PA 16066