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Buckheit, James

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From: raymond griffith [raygrif@verizon.net]
Sent: Monday, May 26, 2008 2:45 PM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Cc: Karen.Devine@psba.org
Subject: Official comment on Academic Standards & Assess.

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

TO: Jim Buckheit, Executive Director
State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

FROM: Raymond Griffith, School Director
Wilkinsburg School District
Wilkinsburg, PA

RE: Opposition to the proposed Academic Standards and Assessments
IRRC no. 2696; regulation no. 6-312

This comment is in opposition to the adoption of the above cited proposal commonly known as "GCA" or "high school exit exam" which is not good educational policy and not in the public interest.

1. It is inappropriate to assume that standardized multiple choice tests are so accurate and meaningful that failure to pass them should be grounds for denial of a high school diploma.

a. Dropout rates have increased significantly in states that have adopted high stakes high school exit exams.

b. No strong data has been introduced to show that graduates who fail to achieve a proficient score on the PSSA have become academic or vocational failures in their post-high school lives. However, the lack of success of high school dropouts has been well documented.

c. Students in career and technical programs ("vo-tech") spend much of their time learning specific trades and professions -- they are not always familiar with the subjects included in academic exit exams.

2. As the fear of seeing their children and grandchildren fail to graduate grips the general public, demands for turning all high school courses into test-prep courses will escalate. The result will be severe cutbacks in not only vo-tech but music, art,

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written composition, foreign language, and many extracurricular activities. Little will be taught that can not be encompassed by a multiple choice test format.

Teachers and curricula and school districts will be evaluated largely on this anti-intellectual criterion. Multiple choice tests do not reward doing, knowing or reasoning, but merely recognizing a correct answer from a list supplied by 'authority'.

3. The Department of Education has done little or no cost analysis on the effect of exit exams on local school districts. There will be added costs associated with test administration three times a year, remediation, curriculum revision and professional development; not to mention the impact on the state economy of having fewer vo-tech graduates ready for employment right out of high school.

4. PDE regulations at present already mandate that locally developed curricula and graduation assessments be aligned with the PSSA. Rather than spend the State Board's estimated \$160 million to implement the GCA proposal, why not spend this money to audit local curricula and instruction to make sure that the state standards are being followed and assist districts to make the necessary changes if they are not?

Respectfully submitted,

R. Griffith