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Buckheit, James

From: RShaf5142@aol.com
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To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: Graduation Competency Assessment Comment

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Mr. Jim Buckheit
Pennsylvania State Board of Education
333 Market Street, First Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I was reading the story in yesterday's *York Dispatch* regarding the Graduation Competency Assessment and felt that I had to comment on it and the general level of education in the Commonwealth.

I guess I am from far, far away and from a time long ago, but I remember when teachers taught for the love of the profession. When they were dedicated to the enrichment of the fertile minds that sat before them every day, anxious, for the most part, to learn and prepare for their futures. There was no teacher's union and the teacher's primary goal was to enlighten those young students in their classes, not see how much they could get the administration to pay for their health benefits.

Fifty years ago this June I graduated from William Penn Senior High in York, PA. I was one of over 600 students that graduated that year, the largest class ever to graduate from York High. We were the pre-baby boomers, anxious to get to college and to work.

Forty-five years ago this June I graduated from Gettysburg College, where honor and integrity were critical to staying in school, and where Comprehensive Exams in your major were **required** before graduation. If you failed comps, you did not graduate! Cheating was rewarded with suspension or expulsion with no recourse.

It appears to me that as the unions have gotten stronger, the professionalism and level of teaching have gone down. For many, teaching has become a job, rather than a profession, and unfortunately, it is looked at as a job by many of those who are a part of the educational system. What I see and hear are questions about salary, benefits, how many classes I have to teach, how many free periods will I have, etc. Not what can I do to improve my ability to better educate the children.

The good news is there are still many teachers who are professional and work to improve the system of which they are a part but they are over shadowed by those who are looking for the benefits and retirement.

I have watched as the schools have dumbed-down education to the lowest common denominator rather than challenge the students to reach a higher level. It appears that it was easier to lower the standards and expectations so we could push everyone through the system regardless of their ability do long division or read. What was important was to get them to graduation, regardless of their failings!

If a student cannot meet the requirements of the class or a grade level, he should be held back until he can master the work. I realize that this has become socially unacceptable but it is no different than transferring a problem employee to another department rather than dealing with the problem and getting a resolution. We have a generation of overly indulged young people who feel society owes them a living.

This approach to "education" was undoubtedly brought to you by the same people who think every kid on every

299

team should get a trophy rather than just those who win. Where is the drive to win? Why put forth an effort when you get rewarded no matter how poorly you do? We now have a "me" generation where they must be praised for everything they do regardless of their performance or they go into a corner and pout.

Is this what our educational system goals are? Isn't it better to have higher goals so students can strive for greatness? By pushing through those who fail diminishes the efforts of those who work and is totally counter to what education should represent. American was once the beacon for brightness in education. Student from around the world fought to get accepted in US schools. Now we decide not send students to the world math and science competitions because why – we don't want to be embarrassed by the poor showing we may make.

Our educational system has become one the greatest failing I have seen in my 67 years on this earth. We have lowered the bar, taken away the incentives for superior efforts and diluted them with gross expenditures on sports, buildings and hardware. We have not spent our money on the education portion of the "educational system" but have squandered hundred of million of dollars of our taxes on peripheral activities. Being a football star may get you into college but if you can't read or do math what good are you? The emphasis should be on education, not athletics!

If it takes Graduation Competency Assessments to begin to raise the bar and start to reward those who have worked hard, then so be it. The only ones who should be afraid of such assessments are those teachers who fail to work to educate their students and those students who have not worked but expect to be handed their diploma and their life on a platter. Life is hard and everyone needs to be prepared for the difficulties. That's what education helps to do.

It's time the State Board of Education does everything in its power to raise the educational standards of this Commonwealth. For too long you have sat back and watched our students getting the short end of the stick. Politics be damned, you need to put the welfare of the students ahead of the petty school boards and the legislators who are looking for the "politically correct" thing to do. We need someone with a strong backbone and I hope it is the Board of Education.

Sincerely,

Ray G. Shaffer
Dallastown, PA 17313

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