

Buckheit, James

RECEIVED

403

From: Barry Ferguson [bferguson@cls.d.k12.pa.us]
 Sent: Tuesday, June 03, 2008 3:56 PM
 To: jrbuckheit@state.pa.us
 Subject: Graduation Competency Exams

JUN -5 PM 1: 29

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

James Buckheit, Executive Director of State Board of Education

I am very dismayed that the State Board of Education insists on moving forward with the Graduation Competency Exam proposal.

I am a parent and my child is now entering her junior year in college. She did not reach proficiency on the PSSA but has done very well in college. She is maintaining a B average majoring in Family Counseling. Pushing through the proposal you are making makes absolutely no sense in light of the students, like my daughter who over the years who do not succeed on the PSSAs but have gone on to successful college careers and/or business opportunities. Schools should have the right to award a diploma based on its local assessments. Paper-and-pencil standardized exams are a imperfect measures of a student's achievement, ability and potential. Students who don't perform well on high-stakes tests may very well demonstrate their knowledge in other ways, such as research papers, portfolios, etc. **Not only is this true for me but also for many parents and students of those attending vocational education.** In my estimation you need to re-think this proposal and drop your insistence that this move forward.

A better use of funds would be to involve students particularly at the elementary grades in extended learning opportunities with scientifically validated core and intervention curriculum, training on specialized programs that help students build fluency and comprehension in their reading, writing and math skills. I know first hand when I implement RtI strategies with the students in my school and they work with success the great feeling of accomplishment and competency that this brings.

The ramifications of your proposal will in the end stigmatize and separate, students who can produce on the PSSA, and those who cannot pass, and will set up a "have" and "have not" scenario in our Commonwealth communities. Success in education and what it brings to those who succeed is not necessarily found on a standardize test but in real life situations. That is why we have education in the first place; teaching students to find a place where they can succeed. Those who demonstrate their skills in other ways than a Graduation Competency Exam based on the PSSA's can earn a high school diploma and can become successful college students and business leaders throughout our society.

I would really like to know what is going to happen to the students who drop out because they feel sure they won't graduate if they have to score Proficient on the Competency Exam you are proposing, or who just haven't scored proficient on all of them by the end of their senior year? Will they be prevented from going on to college without a high school diploma even if they can pass the college entrance exams? Will they be unable to get a decent job without a high school diploma, even though they have proven over 12 years of education that they reliably came to school every day, reliably did their homework, reliably worked as a team, reliably researched and wrote in clear, understandable language? Aside from the disastrous personal cost to the student, their will be costs to the community for those who are unable to find work because they have been unable to attain a High School Diploma. I predict that there will be many issues to deal with helping these

6/3/2008

struggling young people to coping with the ramifications of what you are proposing.

I do not think enough weight is being given to those who are already succeeding in the educational system and think that the proposal being made **should not go forward**.

Barry Ferguson
Principal, South Lebanon Elementary School