

Buckheit, James

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From: Tom Kennedy [buzkenedy@embarqmail.com]
Sent: Monday, June 02, 2008 7:55 PM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: GCAS

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

State Board of Education
ATTN: James Buckheit, Executive Director
333 Market St.
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Re: Proposed Chapter 4 Regulations
Graduation Competency Assessments

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

GCA TALKING POINTS

- **If you are a parent or teacher of a student(s) who scored Basic on the PSSAs but has since gone on successfully to college or career:** Tell the State Board about that child. Your school district was right to award a diploma based on its local assessments. Requiring a proficient score on statewide tests may have stopped that student from going on to college or career. Paper-and-pencil standardized exams are very imperfect measures of a student's knowledge. 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.
- **If you are a parent or teacher of a vocational education student(s):** Tell the State Board how your voc-ed students demonstrate their knowledge in different ways, and should not be denied a diploma if they just don't do well on standardized academic tests.
- **If you are a parent or teacher of a special education student(s):** The proposed regulations allow IEP teams to exempt students from the requirement that they score Proficient on the GCAs or PSSAs in order to graduate, although the regulation does not exempt them from taking the GCAs. You could write:
 - Special education students would be harmed as resources are diverted to the unnecessary task of getting regular education students ready to score Proficient on more standardized tests. (If a class has 20 regular education students who will not graduate unless they score Proficient, and five IEP students who will graduate whether or not they score Proficient, the pressure to focus attention on the 20 regular education students will be extreme.)
 - This would very likely cause a flood of students attempting to get into special education as a way to avoid the GCA requirement, taking time and resources from the children who truly need special education services.
 - Although the proposed regulations allow IEP teams to exempt special education students from *scoring proficient* to graduate, it does NOT provide for special education students to

be exempted *from taking* the tests. If you are a parent of one of the many children who become emotionally distraught from taking standardized tests that are far divorced from their instruction, or a special education teacher who sees first-hand the impact these tests have, tell the State Board that more standardized tests are not harmless. Your children suffer emotionally and academically (as it often takes days or weeks for students to settle down from the trauma and start to learn again).

- There are too many unanswered questions. For example, what if a special education child does not take Algebra I and II? Will he still be required to take those GCAs? There is nothing in the proposed regulations that would exempt him from having to take them. If they do take a GCA and fail it, will they have to take remediation in that subject, even though they don't need to score proficient to graduate? The regulations aren't clear on this.

- **You can tell the State Board how these millions of dollars could be far better spent to help students:** parental involvement programs, smaller class sizes in the younger grades, tutoring and summer school programs, etc.. Ask them not to waste the money on more standardized testing when we already have the PSSAs.
- **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 these standardized exams, or who just haven't scored proficient on all of them by the end of their senior year?** Will they be out on the street? 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 where appropriate, reliably researched and wrote in clear, understandable language? Aside from the disastrous personal cost to the student, what are the costs to the community in coping with these struggling young people?

Elaine Kennedy- teacher and parent