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Buckheit, James

From: Sweeney, Sandra [ssweeney@pvsd.org]

2008 JUN -5 PM 1: 29

Sent: Tuesday, June 03, 2008 12:38 PM**To:** j buckheit@state.pa.usINDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION**Subject:** proposed GCA exam and current PSSA testing

Sirs: Thank you for your concern that Pennsylvania students meet the standards of an increasingly technological world. I am a teacher in a public school and I am trying as well as I can to help my students to be better educated citizens prepared to work in the Commonwealth. In past years, my Earth Science classes included units on mapping, geography, and oceanography. Reading and following a map is an essential skill for anyone who ventures beyond the familiar territory of his own home. In spite of the fact that we live in Pennsylvania, it might be useful to know where states such as California and Iowa are when someone mentions elections of national leaders. If we are going to continue to send our young people overseas to fight in wars, it would be of interest to know where in the world such places as "The Iraq" are located. Since the oceans cover about 3/4 of the earth and are tightly linked to the atmosphere and climate, a discussion of global warming which does not consider the influence of the oceans is no discussion at all.

Since the advent of the Science PSSA tests, I no longer teach anything about those subjects! The wise individuals who constructed those tests have decided that maps, geography, and the oceans are not worthy topics for an earth science course. In place of learning about them, we now spend close to 15 class days, three weeks of school, preparing for and taking these "essential tests"! If the GCA exams are included, I am sure we will lose even more "non essential curriculum time" to preparing for even more testing. Every year we spend less time learning and more time testing. Private schools in the state are not bound by these requirements and they are free to engage their students in meaningful curriculum all of the time, while we continue to eliminate curriculum topics to make way for even more evaluation. Well meaning as the intention may be, this is MADNESS! More teaching, more learning, more time on task will create better educated students. More testing will cost even more money and will produce only results which indicate our kids don't know very much because we spend most of our time testing rather than teaching.

As a professional teacher with an Earth Science background, I know that the topics mentioned above are very very important. That some unknown individual in a high position has determined otherwise erodes my respect for the test makers and causes me to question the credentials of those who claim to dictate what students should know and be able to do. While we teachers want to believe that state officials are really interested in the well being of our youth and the growth of our state, the mandates reaching us make that premise increasingly hard to believe. Adding the GCA tests to the current PSSA will have no merit. Please start by relooking at the "essentials" of the PSSA, remember that the purpose of our schools is to teach, and finally stop this spiraling, time wasting, expensive madness.

Thankyou,

Sandra Sweeney