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Sample letter

526

Buckheit, James

From: Donna Gillespie [Gillespie@mrs.org]
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2008 1:20 PM
To: 'jbuckheit@state.pa.us'
Cc: Donna Gillespie
Subject: Graduation Competency Assessment Program

The state will be spending \$48 million to implement this Graduation Competency Assessment program. I believe that this money is better spent in ensuring that local schools have the resources needed to provide all students with a real opportunity to learn and achieve state academic standards.

The needs and legal rights of students with learning disabilities are not addressed in the Graduate Competency Assessment program. These students are expected to be proficient in their final exams (papers and pencil test) regardless of their disability.

My key disagreement with the Graduation Competency Assessment program is that it takes away from local evaluations of student performance and goes against research that clearly illustrates why pencil and paper test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students, and that a diploma should be granted based on the coursework, tests and quizzes, presentations, projects and papers throughout a student's career.

I urge the PA Senate to stop Gov. Rendell from pushing through this legislation.

Donna J. Gillespie

3727 Bakerstown Rd

Gibsonia PA 15044

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PRSD Asking Community to Express Opinion About Proposed Policy on Graduation Competency Assessments

The Pine-Richland School Board is asking community members to express their opinions on the proposed policy on competency assessments. You might recall, the Pine-Richland school Board approved a resolution opposing proposed high school graduation competency assessments (GCA) at its school board meeting on February 19, 2008.

You must act fast, because you only have until June 16, 2008 to express your opinion.

[Why PR Opposes GCA?](#)

[Where to Send Opinions?](#)

[Other Information/Links](#)

[PR's Resolution Opposing GCA Mandate](#)

[Pennsylvania School Board Association's Notice](#)

[State's GCA Proposal](#)

[PSBA's Legislative Advocacy Conference](#) (Local Assessments & the GCAs)

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WHERE TO SEND OFFICIAL COMMENTS

Official comments must be made to Jim Buckheit, Executive Director, State Board of Education, 333 Market Street, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333, or to **jbuckheit@state.pa.us** by **June 16, 2008**. Your comments will be shared with the Independent Regulatory Review Commission and the House and State Education Committees, who will also have an opportunity to comment as well.

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WHY PRSD OPPOSES GRADUATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

While the Pine-Richland School District acknowledges the significance of accountability, the need for high academic standards, and assessment of such for providing Adequate Yearly Progress as per The No Child Left Behind Act, the board wishes to affirm its opposition to the proposed GCA (Graduation Competency Assessment) for the following reasons (Click on highlighted word for longer explanations.):

- ◆ The high stakes nature of the new requirement does not take into consideration the diversity of learners.
- ◆ Broad based curriculum should be guided by the leaders who represent citizens in each community.
- ◆ The proposed GCA essentially erodes local control of graduation requirements.
- ◆ The PSSA is just one tool that should be used to guide the proficiency needs of a student throughout his or her educational career
- ◆ Although the proposal provides an option for a local assessment to be given. It is done so in a manner of conditional constraint and appears to be a built-in disincentive for local assessment.
- ◆ The economic impact and true cost to tax payers at both the state and local level has not yet been determined. The state is expected to spend \$48 million to implement.

PR Board Reasons for Opposition in Detail

High Stakes Nature

♦ The high stakes nature of the new requirement does not take into consideration the diversity of learning venues for students who learn and assimilate information in a variety of ways. To say that all students test the same, whether they are taking college prep, vocational courses, language students, fine arts, or the sciences is simply inaccurate.

Guided by Leaders Representing Community

♦ Broad based curriculum should be guided by the leaders who represent the rights of the citizens in each community, affording students unique academic opportunities which enable them to pursue individualized dreams and life success. This will be undermined by the necessity of teaching to the test and causing difficult choices to be made by local boards when establishing curriculum and programs that offer a broader range of knowledge opportunity and experience. Although the proposal establishes a 'voluntary' model curriculum aligned with State academic standards in each GCA content area, it is inevitable that State wide uniform curriculums will become required to meet State standards due to the specifics of the test and cost of creating your own local curriculum, thus narrowing the course offerings at the local school district level.

Erodes Local Control

♦ The proposed GCA essentially erodes local control of graduation requirements by forcing them to be "rubberstamped" by an additional paper and pencil test. In

effect it is saying that local school districts and school boards are ineffective at measuring the success of their students. It is our belief that our own local standards and criteria for graduation are more rigorous and far exceed those of current state standards.

Only One Tool of Measurement

◆ The PSSA is already given as a means by which to measure the effectiveness of curriculum and teaching methods that serve to meet required State standards. The PSSA is just one tool that should be used to guide the proficiency needs of an individual student throughout his or her educational career. From the earliest time given in third grade, an individual plan for successful learning should take place at the classroom level on a continuum. We currently have rigorous pre-testing and student achievement mapping procedures in place with continued priority of development as a main focus to creating individualizing intervention for academic success. Furthermore, in high school, the PSSA and GCA tests do not account for other important skills of proficiency being learned, such as conducting laboratory experiments, public speaking, research papers, dissecting robotic engines, drawing CAD, specific art ability and other hands-on learning skills. An additional test at graduation is too late to correct a missed opportunity at guiding proficiency in core curriculum.

No Incentive for Local Assessment

◆ Although the proposal provides an option for a local assessment to be given – it is done so in a manner of conditional constraint. The local assessment, according to new guidelines, would require local assessments to be "independently and objectively validated by a vendor" selected from a list of approved vendors published every five years by the Secretary after obtaining approval from the State Board. In addition there are validation and method requirements, all at complete cost to the local school district. After all of that cost and effort, the test options are subject to change as per the

Secretary of Education. This will most definitely create a need for additional staff, professional development, curriculum adoption and difficult budget decisions. In effect, it appears to be a built-in disincentive to select the local assessment option.

Economic Impact Not Known

◆ The economic impact and true cost to tax payers at both the state and local level has not yet been determined. More money will be spent with no proof of necessity. How will we measure the success of this endeavor, by another test and research studies to prove or refute the effectiveness? What is success? Is it to say that every student has passed the test or should we be looking at how many students are successfully employed 5 years after graduation? The fact is that more money will be spent by local tax payers to implement measures to comply with offering the test three times a year, offering courses to guarantee success specific to the content of the test, to purchase testing materials that are approved by the Secretary of Education, to evaluate the effectiveness of our process and test materials, additional staff and staff development, additional policies and the cost related to internal and external measures of validity, and so on... This money will ultimately come from difficult budget decisions and tax dollars on both a local and state level. The state is expected to spend \$48 million to implement.

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