



South Fayette High School

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Phone 412-221-4542 • Fax 724-693-9843 • www.southfayette.org
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487

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JUN 04 2008

PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

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The Honorable Jim Buckheit
Executive Director, State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Sir,

In my capacity as the Student Government Advisor at South Fayette High School, I am transmitting to you the enclosed resolution passed by the South Fayette High School Student Government. The resolution is in regards to the proposed Graduation Competency Exams, currently being considered for implementation in the Commonwealth.

I would ask that you please address any correspondence regarding this resolution to the following address:

President
South Fayette High School Student Government
3640 Old Oakdale Road
McDonald, PA 15057-2580

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Felix J. Yerace
Social Studies Department
Student Government Advisor
South Fayette Township High School

The mission of the South Fayette School District, as an integral part of the community, is to foster development and growth of each student's full academic, artistic and athletic potential by providing exemplary opportunities in a caring, safe, positive environment; to promote lifelong learning, and to cultivate ethical, responsible, contributing members in a global society.



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The South Fayette Township High School Student Government

A RESOLUTION

Expressing Concern and Opposition to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania adopting Graduation Competency Exams to begin with the graduating class of 2014.

WHEREAS The South Fayette Township High School Student Government acts as the official voice of the student body of South Fayette High School; and

WHEREAS the purpose of the South Fayette Student Government, as defined in its organizational Constitution, is to "develop student involvement, to promote good citizenship, to give students a voice in government, to provide a service to the school and to the community, to promote the best interests of the school, and to serve as the official representative of the Student Body of the high school to all parties"; and

WHEREAS, the South Fayette Student Government has made a commitment to assist in the fulfillment of the South Fayette School District mission "to foster development and growth of each student's full academic, artistic, and athletic potential..."; and

WHEREAS The South Fayette Student Government acknowledges the importance of ensuring a high-standard, accountable learning environment measuring Adequate Yearly Progress as per the No Child Left Behind Act, and acknowledges and appreciates the State Board of Education's attempt to establish these qualities in each school in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS the South Fayette Student Government, on behalf of our student body, strongly believes that a greater education is received if local school districts are able to address their own needs and establish the most efficient method to ensure the quality of the education of their students; and

WHEREAS the South Fayette Student Government strongly believes that the South Fayette Township School District already does an outstanding job of preparing students for success upon graduation. We believe this based upon the PSSAs scores of the district, which rank us in the top performing schools in the state, studies performed by the *Pittsburgh Business Times* and *Standard and Poor's Ratings*, which rank us as a top school in the state, per pupil spending in the school district of over \$13,000 per student, and the selection of South Fayette Middle School as a 2007 U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon School. All of this has been accomplished through a partnership of the local school and community developing a rigorous curriculum and implementing it in South Fayette; and

WHEREAS many students have brought to our attention serious and legitimate concerns regarding the proposed Graduation Competency Assessments, or GCAs, currently being considered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and

The mission of the South Fayette School District, as an integral part of the community, is to foster development and growth of each student's full academic, artistic and athletic potential by providing exemplary opportunities in a caring, safe, positive environment; to promote lifelong learning, and to cultivate ethical, responsible, contributing members in a global society.

WHEREAS for the following reasons have been articulated by students in opposition to the GCAs, including but not limited to the following:

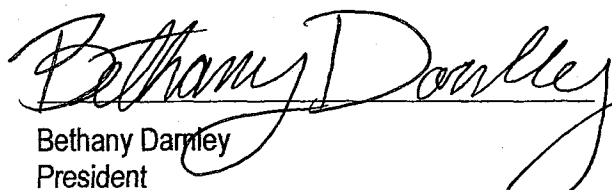
- Existing PSSA tests are already state mandated tests and required for students to graduate. If this testing method fails to work, the likeliness of a similar method to be successful is limited, and the state should work on perfecting the system already established; and
- Existing PSSA tests take time out of the curriculum already; the adoption of GCAs would eliminate even more precious time from the school year; and
- Existing PSSA tests and the proposed GCAs limit the ability to fully test the range of knowledge of a student and require skills simply in test taking, rather than a range of skills and talents; and
- Proponents of the proposed GCAs have not offered data to suggest that these tests will actually accomplish consistency in graduation standards; and
- Proponents of the proposed GCAs have not offered data to suggest that these tests will actually accomplish their goal in ensuring students are any more prepared to leave high school than before; and
- Existing "high stakes graduation assessments," such as the PSSAs, lead to teachers including more test preparation and eliminating supplementary curricular activities, and in some cases, entire curriculum offerings such as art, music, and social studies to ensure success on either the PSSAs or GCAs; and
- Existing PSSA tests already place additional stress on students, do not provide alternatives to students that do not test well, and do not guarantee that a student is prepared for college or life after high school, only that they can take a test. The proposed GCAs would only add to that stress level by requiring students who have been assessed in a variety of fashions throughout a school year to pass one cumulative, traditional assessment at the end of the year to "pass" a class; and
- Existing PSSA tests already take students away from valuable extracurricular activities, which provide many learning opportunities that cannot be provided in a traditional classroom; and
- The proposed GCAs are allowed to be taken multiple times, but if a student has to take the test multiple times, it limits the future scheduling opportunities for the student; and
- The proposed GCAs come with a voluntary state curriculum, but adopting GCAs as final exams, as is recommended by the Pennsylvania Department of Education, would naturally lead to a reduction of locally designed and developed curriculum and the adoption of the state curriculum; and
- The proposed GCAs will require additional spending by both local schools and the Commonwealth, funds that could be better put to use actually preparing students by supplementing local funds to offer a diverse curriculum, rather than simply adding additional tests to students; and
- The proposed GCAs will lead to increased stress on the students that will negatively affect their overall high school experience and limit their opportunities to try new activities, elective classes, participate in extracurricular activities, and focus on what is important to them for their futures; and
- The proposed GCAs could potentially lead to higher drop-out rates; and
- The proposed GCAs do not provide assistance to schools to help them ensure all students can successfully pass the tests and receive a high school diploma, nor do they provide alternative assessments for students with disabilities or other disadvantages.

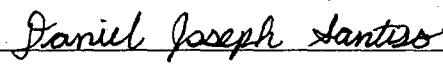
THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the South Fayette High School Student Government affirms its opposition, on behalf of the South Fayette High School Student Body, to the proposed Graduation Competency Assessment.

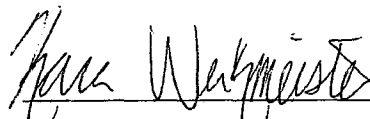
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED the South Fayette Student Government suggests that an alternative be found for the GCAs to better the quality of education for all Pennsylvania students and ensure their preparation after graduation without being limited by a single test.

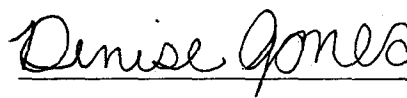
FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the South Fayette High School Student Government directs the Advisor of Student Government to send copies of this resolution to the Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Chair and Executive Director of the Pennsylvania State Board of Education, the Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Chairmen and Minority Chairmen of both the Pennsylvania House and Senate Education committees, and to our local representatives in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate, as well as the Superintendent of the South Fayette Township School District, and further authorizes the Superintendent of the South Fayette Township School District to express the organization's, and student body's, opposition to the proposed GCAs to state officials.

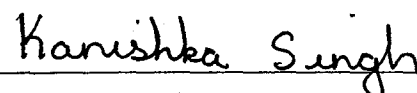
Done this 21st day of May, 2008, in South Fayette Township, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, upon affirmative vote of the Executive Officers and General Membership of the South Fayette Student Government.

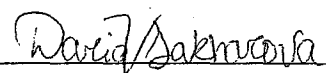

Bethany Darnley
President
South Fayette Student Government

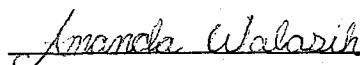

Daniel Santiso
Vice-President
South Fayette Student Government


Kara Werkmeister
Treasurer
South Fayette Student Government


Denise Jones
Recording Secretary
South Fayette Student Government


Kanishka Singh
Corresponding Secretary
South Fayette Student Government


Daria Sakharova
Student Advocacy Committee Chair
South Fayette Student Government


Amanda Walasik
Student Advocacy Committee Chair
South Fayette Student Government