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Buckheit, James

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From: Laurel Taylor [laurel.anne.taylor@gmail.com] 2008 JUN 12 AM 9: 37
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2008 4:53 PM
To: JBuckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: I Oppose Graduation Competency Assessments for PA Students

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
 REVIEW COMMISSION

James Buckheit, Executive Director, Sate Board of Education

Mr. Buckheit,

I am a Junior at West Chester East High School in PA, and I was recently informed of the newest round of tests, the GCA's, that the State is considering implementing for High School Seniors. I am strongly opposed to the GCA's and am deeply concerned with the negative effects that will result if this high stakes exit exam is in fact implemented by the state.

If high schools in PA have already received State approval, which affirms their ability to successfully graduate students at a level prescribed by the State, does the implementation of the GCA's not clearly undermine the entire system already approved by the State? The GCA's unmistakably show a complete lack of faith and trust in the institutes that the State, itself, endorsed. I find it completely nonsensical that a set of tests would be needed to prove that school districts are successfully completing their jobs, when the State has already approved their ability to do just that.

On a personal note, as a student, I can think of a myriad of reasons why the GCA's are completely ridiculous. Initially, I was going to write a professional letter expressing my deep concern with the illogical choices that are being made that affect my future; however, in my opinion, the most I can do to stand up for my future is to tell you why I oppose these test, as a student and more importantly as a teenager. To put it bluntly, I know that if these tests were in fact put in place, I would pass. I am tenth in my class of over 300 students, I am a hardworking, conscientious student, and I have successfully run the gauntlet of standardized tests throughout my entire school career. However, I am not the student, or the person I am today because of the tests I passed, or even because of the GPA's I have achieved or the record I hold as a student. I am who I am because of the teachers I have encountered, and the time that I have spent learning and growing in and outside of school. When I look back on my high school career, I will remember the teachers, who made me look forward to a new and amazing day in each class, who made me realize my potential, and who made me excited about learning, not the tests I passed. This is where learning occurs, not on a sheet covered in lettered bubbles. It is the time, effort, love, dedication, and overwhelming perseverance of the teachers that truly educate students, and no set of exit exams could ever accurately measure this. The amount of money and the resources spent on developing and implementing the GCA's would be better spent on providing incentives for districts to train and support a faculty that will inspire students. Although this may be idealistic, and my view may be tinted by a bias because of the amazing teachers I have encountered throughout my education, I feel that the State should put the effort that would go to the GCA's towards encouraging and training teachers. They are the only real defense against poor performances by students. Likewise, providing districts with incentives to create new and exciting classes for students, to develop interactive clubs, and to increase the opportunities for students to gain real life experience and knowledge is a more logical and reasonable recourse than forcing students to take high stakes exit exams.

The very nature of these tests also has a counterproductive effect on students. Not only could the requirement of having to pass the GCA's if implemented, cause some students to simply give up because of the fear that they are not competent enough to pass, but the test also negatively affects the students

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who try their hardest in school, but perform poorly on standardized exams. To require students to pass tests that cover materials from classes they could have taken three years prior, that involves subjects that some students may excel in, while others may struggle, and that stresses materials that may not play any role in a student's future career, is unfair and superfluous. If a student successfully passes a class, why should he or she be forced to take a test after the fact in order to graduate? Does not the hard work, time and effort put into the class throughout the semester or year matter more than if they can accurately remember every detail they learned in order to pass a single exam? It is the skill set that includes time management, dedication, hard work, integrity, organization, and critical thinking that students will take with them as they leave high school and embark in the "real world," not necessarily specific facts. Those that head into careers that involve certain fields of study will no doubt have already embraced these areas of study, and will already be working hard to develop their knowledge base in those aspects. For those that are not planning on studying for careers in these fields, or who are unsure about their next steps, it is cruel and unnecessary to require that they pass an exam that covers these areas of study in classes they have already completed in order to graduate. Students work hard enough in the classes they take, adding on subject specific exams will only discourage and anger the already overstressed and under-encouraged students.

As stated before, I, and other students like me, strongly oppose the GCA's. They are a counterproductive measure that removes the focus of education from the areas that should be stressed, student-teacher relationships, character and skill set building, encouragement and opportunities for students, and a well rounded education, and rather places the focus on the ability to learn how to take standardized tests and how to correctly fill in bubble answer sheets.

This nation needs students who are passionate about learning, who are dedicated to their fields of study, and who want to give back to the society and world that gave so much to them; not students who have lost all drive for knowledge because too much of their time is spent being tested, or who care little for their subjects because they have been forced to study and remember so many, or who are angry at the system that has ill prepared them for the world because of all the time wasted filling out answer sheets.

My integrity as a student, my status as a citizen, and most importantly, my concern as a teenager facing her future, demands that I stand up and express my opinion about the harmful repercussions of the implementation of the GCA's. I greatly appreciate the time that you have taken to read this, and I hope that you and the other members of the Board will remember the real reason for education, the students, and will make a decision based on what is best for us. Thank you.

Laurel Taylor