

Buckheit, James

RECEIVED

572

From: Michael Sabal [m_sabal@yahoo.com]
Sent: Thursday, June 05, 2008 3:43 PM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: New PA Graduation requirements

2008 JUN 12 AM 9:37

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Not every high school graduate has college as their next step. Looking at other nations (such as Great Britain and Japan) where high stakes standardized testing has become a high school graduation requirement, we see lower graduation rates, and increased anxiety, suicide, and substance abuse rates. I beg you not to make that mistake here in Pennsylvania.

If you want to offer an advanced high school diploma, similar to New York's Regent's Diploma, make it optional, and make sure that the families interested in such a program pay for each test themselves. This then becomes a use tax rather than yet another school tax on an already overburdened populace. However, it is most important to get the colleges and universities in Pennsylvania on board with granting preferential treatment to holders of such a diploma, before even suggesting it to the public. Failing this most important step will turn any such effort into nothing more than political whitewashing.

If you are truly concerned with the state of public education in Pennsylvania today, you need to understand that the teaching methodologies most commonly employed are based on cultural attitudes and mindsets that are at least 20 years old. The PDE must push for all schools to embrace full inclusion at every level if you wish to see the quality of public education improve in our state. Furthermore, because of the student teaching requirement to be certified in PA (other than the internship requirement which is only available in select locations at a handful of colleges), skilled professionals wishing to change careers must essentially stop working for between 2 and 6 months (giving up health insurance and other benefits along the way), just to be eligible to look for a teaching job. A better system would be the mentoring model that New Jersey employs (sometimes called in-service student teaching), where a would-be teacher applies for certification based solely on his/her coursework and life experience, and can earn a higher level of certification after a number of years on the job working with a mentor. The full inclusion model has an added benefit of lowering the risk of such an arrangement due to the regular team and coordinated teaching that takes place.

While I no longer have children attending school, it would be unfortunate for Pennsylvania to take the wrong path towards improving its public schools, creating more of a problem that it was previously. Please remove the new graduation testing requirements from consideration.

Sincerely,
Michael J. Sabal
4943 Oxford Court
Bensalem, PA 19020