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Buckheit, James

**From:** Miller, Bernard [PA] [BMiller@psea.org]

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**Sent:** Tuesday, June 10, 2008 2:30 PM**To:** j buckheit@state.pa.usINDEPENDENT REGULATORY  
REVIEW COMMISSION**Subject:** Graduation Competency Assessments

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I would like you to convey to the State Board members that the implementation of Graduation Competency Assessments is the wrong path to take towards moving students successfully to their post school outcomes. In my previous staff development position in an Intermediate Unit I was responsible for supporting 15 school districts in the area of transition for students with disabilities. I was invited to many IEP meetings in which students were not proficient on the PSSA but had goals, had teams of parents and educators working on their behalf and they had dreams. In working transition I found that dreams play an important role in motivating students towards their outcomes. Standardized tests dampen or destroy dreams.

I have job coached over 300 students in my lifetime in real jobs in the community. Many of these students, if you looked at them, you might think lacked the skills to hold down a job. They constantly amazed me with their determination and grit to want to be like everyone else who when they reach adulthood maintains employment. This is not to say that every student I job coached is now working a 40 hour a week job. Because of the nature of their disabilities the range was from full time employment to part time to volunteerism in the community.

How would the students gain entry into the workforce if they did not get a diploma? Sure the PA State Board says there would be exceptions made by the IEP team. The reality is that the students still have to take the tests. What makes a person feel worthless is taking a test that they look at and can not even decipher the directions let alone the content. Once again the educational staff will have to build up the child after being dragged into the GCAs. Once again the parents will be reminded at the IEP meeting that their child is not in the average range of abilities as determined by the test.

And then there are the hours that the student will be removed from community based work experience to study for the GCAs and the hours to actually take the test. I think the time would be better spent working in the real world, making connections with employers and building experience that enhances resumes.

I ask the PA State Board to reconsider their position and remove the GCAs from Chapter 4. The ramifications to the PA State Performance Plan for special education will be negatively impacted as more special education students are placed in remedial classes and their course selections are narrowed by schools attempting to have the students pass these high stakes tests. The State Performance Plan that is submitted to the Federal Government looks at drop out rates and employment of students with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Bernard Miller

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