

From: Keller, Mary [PA] [mkeller@psea.org]
Sent: Thursday, June 12, 2008 11:33 AM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: GCA Comments

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Mr. James Buckheit, Executive Director
PA State Board of Education
333 Market St., First Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126 0333

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

As a non-educator, I'm confused about the State Board's proposal for Graduation Competency Assessments. Aren't students currently tested on rigorous standards developed by the Department of Education and approved by the State Board? Don't we currently have supports in place (tutoring, additional reading and math instruction, etc.) to help students who do not score proficient? I don't understand why the state needs to develop yet another test to measure student proficiency.

Even for someone without an education background, the notion that every child should obtain the exact same academic knowledge at a set point in time seems ridiculous. As a parent, I know some children learn to talk at 16 months, some at 24. Some individuals are gifted in art, or science or drama; some are destined for college, some are not. Human beings are not widgets that can be mass produced. We have different abilities, backgrounds, cultures and values. My favorite teachers in school were the ones who had a passion for what they were doing -- the English teacher who helped me to see the beauty of words on the written page or the social studies teacher who turned history into exciting stories and debates. True learning has to be more than teaching to the test.

A special needs student who learns to make change or ride a bus to and from work has made remarkable educational progress. Will he or she ever be successful at doing algebraic equations or writing the great American novel? Probably not, but he or she will be a person who can hold a job and be a productive member of society.

First and foremost, decisions made by the State Board of Education should always be about what's best for our students. Fads in education, as with every other aspect of our society come and go, but our commitment to our children should never change. Provide equitable funding for *all* students in the Commonwealth? Absolutely! Provide more programs to assist students who have limited English proficiency? Of course! Provide better transition and counseling for all students trying to decide between technical school or college? Yes! Add another high stakes test that will cost millions of dollars to develop and implement and will have a negative impact on many students and their futures? NO!

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Mary C. Keller