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Buckheit, James

From: Mike & Therese Dawson [dawson@zoompros.com] 2008 JUN 14 PM 4: 24
Sent: Wednesday, June 11, 2008 11:27 PM
To: jlbuckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: GCA Input

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

As a parent of three elementary age children, I am writing to express my opposition to the proposed GCA legislation.

Fully recognizing the need for adequate means by which to measure achievement for all students of Pennsylvania against standards, I disagree with the GCA for the following reasons.

- Presently there are sufficient written tests to evaluate hurdles in individual student learning at various junctures in a student's growth through the PSSA. The GCA is redundant and a measure that comes too late in the overall K-12 education process to make a difference. Remediation should be noted and aggressively implemented as soon as the need is evident. The PSSA intervals provide adequate notice to assure intervention and student success.
- This will be tax money not well spent. It is more logical and fiscally responsible to use this money to individualize learning early in the education journey, not use it to slap a failure stamp on a child who has now spent their entire young life in school working to achieve failure. This money would be better spent on effective tutoring and mentorship programs and grants for models that work and yield results.
- The GCA will result in less graduates, especially in struggling inner-city schools where the motivation to pursue a diploma will be undermined by embarrassment or off the radar for kids who now see themselves as failures with limited opportunities.
- Other school districts with a larger number of advance placement classes and students in higher achievement categories or other specific vocational programs will find themselves dealing with an environment that lowers the bar rather than raises the bar as it will be necessary to teach to a lower level of more common achievement, due to an increased fiscal burden to meet yet another new regulation.
- Eventually, this initiative will result in standardizing curriculum across the state and the elimination of our freedom to have input into the school system where we pay local taxes, in effect censoring. Ultimately, teachers will become more entrenched in "teaching to the test" and the overall quality of creative and effective teaching will be squelched.
- All school districts and populations of learners are not created equal, different needs exist for different students and different districts based on a wide variety of factors – social, financial, environmental, community resources... The GCA will not enhance parental input, or inspire success for students or educators, rather it will erode the most essential essence of local control. Local control is a necessary element to assure educational opportunities that are in the best interest of the community of students with the input of the community. To create a blanket measure with yet another huge layer of cost is counter-productive and fiscally irresponsible.

Please share these thoughts with the Independent Review Commission and the House and Senate Education Committees and please listen to all sides of this discussion and recognize that there are better answers than the GCA.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Therese Dawson

6/12/2008