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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Jim Buckheit
Pennsylvania State Board of Education
333 Market Street, 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I am writing regarding my concerns with the proposal to change Pennsylvania's graduation requirements to implement Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs). While it is important that all of our state's young people receive a quality education so that they are adequately prepared for college, it is equally significant that they receive the tools necessary to learn substantive subject matters and not just enhance their test taking skills. Implementing what is essentially a single test system for graduation without giving students additional educational resources to learn may harm our students and negatively affect educational outcomes.

Many high school students are having a difficult time reaching basic educational achievement goals. Initiating a new testing system without first providing a better foundation for test taking, does not best serve our children. 2007 PSSA test scores reveal that 35% of high school students are not reading and 46% are not doing math at 11th grade levels. In the Philadelphia School District, where my grandchildren (who are not yet old enough for school) live, students desperately need more resources to reach proficiency levels. In 2007 in grades 9-12 only 59% of white students and just 29.9% of black students were proficient in reading; 51.3% of white students and 24% of black students were proficient in math. Implementing a new test and installing remediation strategies for the test taking process fails to go to the root of the problem for our students. Schools in Philadelphia and in other districts are plagued with large class sizes. Large class size is a key indicator of educational outcomes. Students are unable to learn in environments where they are not receiving sufficient instruction. Additional teaching staff will be needed to conduct the tests and the targeted remediation. Instead of mandating that students pass GCAs to graduate, resources should first be directed to mandating class size limits so that students are able to have the educational foundation. Initiating the GSAs could increase student frustration and decrease students' motivation to graduate. In addition, there are so many tests for students to pass, that adding another one, may decrease their motivation to graduate.

I ask that you direct resources to small class size and teacher instruction of subject matter before, or in conjunction with your investment in GSAs.

Sincerely,

Barbara B. Anderson

Barbara B. Anderson

Buckheit, James

From: Barannbish58@aol.com
Sent: Monday, June 16, 2008 3:21 PM
To: jbuckheit@state.pa.us