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Buckheit, James

From: Ellen Irwin [Irwin@havs.net]
Sent: Monday, June 16, 2008 10:43 AM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Cc: Tom Capista
Subject: Graduation Competency Assessment

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I have become aware of the proposed regulations to institute Graduation Competency Assessments which would mandate that students earn a "proficient" grade on the majority of the tests in order to earn a high school diploma. While I agree with the spirit of such requirements, I have grave concerns about the effect such exams will have on a significant population of students.

During my 28 years as an educator, I have been continually awed by students who did not perform well in high school, but went on to mature and earn college degrees. For any number of reasons including delayed maturity, family, social or emotional issues and substance abuse, students may struggle in high school. It is not unusual for a student to mentally "drop out" for a time, as they work through what ever issues are blocking their achievement. Under the proposed regulations, these students are essentially written off and denied a chance to improve their lives and choices. I could site many specific examples, but Laurie's story comes to mind first as she recently graduated from St. Joseph's University.

In Middle School, Laurie began cutting herself. As a member of the SAP team, I interceded. It came to light that Laurie had been sexually abused by her brother for many years and, although the abuse had stopped, the emotional scars were flaring. Over the next few years Laurie's grades were barely passing. On one standardized test, she actually connected the dots to spell a string of profanities. After years of family therapy and some very painful court intervention, Lauri began to rebuild her life. Her grades in her senior year were much improved and she went on to Delaware County Community College after graduation. After two years, she transferred to St. Joe's. Her story is not atypical. Under the proposed regulations, Laurie would have been denied a high school diploma. Kids like Laurie don't have the resilience to recover from such a blow.

Paper and pencil standardized exams are very imperfect measures of an individuals potential. What about all our students in vocational programs who

844

excel in that environment but do not perform well on standardized tests? I urge you lead the State Board of Education in understanding that these proposed regulations are at best misguided but, at worst, potentially destructive to the future of many students.

Thank you.

Ellen Irwin
Haverford Township Education Association