

GREATER JOHNSTOWN HIGH SCHOOL

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Dr. Zahorchak:

My name is Nicholas Costantino and I am writing in support of the new Pennsylvania High School Requirements. As a mathematics teacher at Greater Johnstown High School, I believe that it is vital to assess students' knowledge before they are awarded with a high school diploma. The new requirements would offer a broader assessment of integral knowledge as students move on to higher education or into the work force.

The new requirements allow teachers flexibility while still giving schools recommended structure in their curriculum. In addition, I believe it further emphasizes periodic assessment of student progress. As a microcosm of the benefits the new requirements give our students, I could refer to a single unit taught in the classroom. When students are assessed and found to be below proficient in that principle, I would offer extra help and consider different methods of instructing the material. Since mathematics builds on its own knowledge so extensively, I think that it would be very beneficial to realize student struggles on an intermittent basis. For example, a student who does poorly on the Algebra I GCA is not likely to easily learn the advanced material in Geometry or Algebra II. By realizing their struggles with basic knowledge more early on, they can be given additional assistance to help them become proficient and thus more able to expand their knowledge in the content area.

I also believe that the new requirements relieve - rather than increase - the pressure on students. At Greater Johnstown High School, students take final exams for their courses, and these could be replaced by the GCAs without the added pressure of an additional test. In addition, the flexibility offered by allowing students to take exams when they are ready and to retake failed exams certainly alleviates some of the pressure they may feel entering any examination.

Finally, I believe that the new requirements increase the validity of a high school diploma at a universal level. In addition, students would likely feel a greater sense of accomplishment by meeting a goal that was a challenge to achieve. Doing what is best for students is our job as educators, and I believe that increasing the meaning of student achievement and enhancing their self esteem will go a long way toward their motivation and success as they exit high school. I believe that the new requirements will help to achieve the most important goal of all - giving optimal education to our students.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Costantino
Mathematics Teacher
Greater Johnstown High School