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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY  
REVIEW COMMISSION

June 10, 2008

Mr. James Buckheit, Executive Director  
Pennsylvania State Board of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Re: NO to PDE Graduate Competency Assessments, GCAs.

Dear Mr. Buckheit:


As a member of the Annville-Cleona School Board, I totally oppose your proposed new test for Pennsylvania students to qualify for high school graduation. Should you strongly feel that you need to test for graduation, you do not have to "re-invent the wheel". You already have such a test readily available. The GED test is used to prove that the person taking this test meets the requirements for graduation. Why not use the same test for all graduates? Much more cost effective and "levels the playing field". Why should a high school graduate not be required to have the same level of knowledge as someone earning an equivalency degree?

Our schools are now hampered with too many unnecessary tests! Our teachers are busy teaching what is required for these tests and our students are missing out on many of the basics. The young people earning a diploma today are more technologically adept than those of my generation (I am a grandmother with three of my five grandchildren already high school graduates) but, be assured, as a recent retiree with more than thirty years in management, the newer graduates are lacking in basics and we older folks came out of high school with much more knowledge of history, social studies, math, english, foreign languages, science, etc., as well as being prepared to earn a living if college was not in our future.

Do away with all the excessive testing; allow the teachers to teach their subjects and prepare these young people for the future. We will not only save money on all of the tests but save the time wasted away from their studies while being tested, for more time spent on learning.

Not all students (or adults for that matter) test well! Too many tests put too much stress on those who are pressed to "perform". PLEASE rethink this idea!

Sincerely,



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RESOLUTION OPPOSING PROPOSED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS  
BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
ANNVILLE-CLEONA SCHOOL DISTRICT

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has approved a proposal to revise the current high school graduation requirements under the Chapter 4 regulations to require students to pass a series of standardized high stakes Graduation Competency Assessments in order to get a diploma; and

WHEREAS, these new requirements and exams will be the same for all students, whether they are taking college prep or vocational courses, are English language learners or participating in individualized programs, and all students effectively will be required to take the same courses in order to pass this new battery of state tests; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 4 currently allows districts to use either the PSSA or rigorous local assessments for their students to demonstrate proficiency of the state academic standards; and it is misleading and incorrect to make the assumption that because students demonstrate their achievements on local assessments rather than the PSSA that there is a disconnect between proficiency and graduation; and

WHEREAS, although the GCA proposal permits schools to use a local assessment option, it establishes numerous limitations, including the elimination of the ability to use various assessment strategies now available to local entities and requires local tests to be closely modeled to the GCAs; and

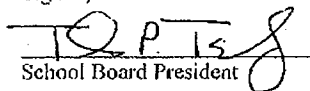
WHEREAS, decades of research shows many reasons why standardized pencil and paper test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students, and that a diploma should be granted based on the coursework, tests and quizzes, presentations, projects and papers throughout the student's career; and

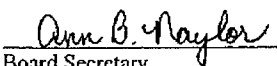
WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has not prepared a cost analysis or fiscal note, even though this will create a large financial impact on state and local budgets, and the State Board's own costing-out study did not include the costs for this new system and found that the state already is \$4.4 billion short in helping school districts prepare students to meet the academic standards by 2014; and

WHEREAS, the proposal requires school districts to absorb many new costs related to revising curriculum, professional development, test development and validation, test preparation and administration, remediation and other costs. Given the state's funding shortfall and the Act 1 limitations on tax increases, school districts have limited ability to fund these potential new costs.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the board of school directors of the Annvile-Cleona school district opposes the State Board of Education's proposal to enact Graduation Competency Assessments and any other regulation or legislation that usurps the authority of local school districts to determine whether their students have earned a high school diploma. This resolution will be shared with the State Board of Education, state legislators including local legislators and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission.

Adopted this 18th day of February, 2008.

Signed,  
  
School Board President

Attest:  
  
Board Secretary (scal)