

Buckheit, James

From: Hillwigs [hillwigs@innet.net]
Sent: Tuesday, June 17, 2008 12:00 AM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: High Stakes testing for High School Students

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

I am a high school teacher with a special education degree as well as a degree in elementary education and English. As a special education teacher, I have taught at all levels from grades K to 12 and in all subject matters. My students represent a wide gamut of abilities, intellectual capacities, and disabilities. Some have Down's Syndrome while others are gifted but struggle with a specific learning disability for which we teach compensation techniques. I would ask the following questions to all persons considering the implementation of more testing are: Have you ever taught in a public school? When was the last time you were tested to continue performance in your current job? Can you pass all PSSA subject tests at a proficient or advanced level? My concern is that the majority of you cannot give favorable responses to these question. Yet, this is the burden you place on students and teachers.

I began my teaching career in 1970. In that time period alone, factual information and knowledge has changed and increased exponentially. The dearth and increase of information in science, technology, and history is overwhelming! Society and government simultaneously expect all schools to function equally. We know this is not true. The cross population can vary from all white to all black to all urban to all suburban and every possible combination. Integrated high schools also have many ESL or ELL students for whom English is not their first language. Research shows that it takes 3 to 5 years to be orally fluent and another 2 or more to be fluent in reading and writing. Yet, we expect these students to take a standardized assessment after a year!

Those with sufficient capital may choose private schools rather than public. This can deplete the public school of students who would positively impact any assessment scores. Just as our society is a cross section of various cognitive level so are our schools. We no longer want to use measurements such as IQ scores. However, there must be a cognition comparisons. Not everyone has the intellectual capacity to be a physician, a lawyer, a teacher, etc. When my toilet is plugged and all the plunging in the world has no effect, I am glad there are plumbers! The same plumber who can unplug my toilet, fix my leaking drain, or replace worn pipes, may be the same person who scores basic on the PSSA or other uniform assessment. Uniform assessments are useful in giving direction for instruction, but it is ridiculous to expect everyone to perform uniformly! Graduation requirements should be a combination of qualifiers. These should include academic courses and levels, grades on selected academic and vocational classes, attendance, community involvement, and job performance for those doing co-ops. I humbly requests that you vote NOT to increase academic stipulations and assessments for graduation! In doing so, you will put an extra burden on those high cognition level academic students; you will discourage students who need life skills, job training, and co-ops; and prevent teachers from differentiating instruction to reach the various types of students in classes. You will eliminate much of the joy and love of learning and burden teachers. Teacher are trained professionals with specific knowledge and expertise. Please let them use this. Our high school has 21 or 22 different sub-groups for standardized assessment. Some school districts have 5 or 6. It is ludicrous to make a comparison when we are not compared equally. In conclusion, we must not fail to educate whatever diverse population fills our school, but we also must NOT assess our students to the death of excellent teachers and excited learners.

Sincerely,

Rita Hillwig