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Buckheit, James

From: CORR, Stephen [SCORR@CBSB.ORG] 2008 JUN 23 AM 10:16  
 Sent: Monday, June 16, 2008 10:40 AM  
 To: j buckheit@state.pa.us  
 Subject: Graduation Competency Assessments

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in **opposition to Graduation Competency Assessments**. As a school director in Central Bucks School District, I see on a daily basis the amount of time and effort that goes into preparing and administering mandatory assessments. Adding another layer of mandatory testing will most certainly negatively impact the education that can be provided in a well-run district like Central Bucks.

The governor, and legislature, propose these assessments because of the perception that all school districts in the Commonwealth graduate children with "empty" diplomas. Let's begin by clarifying....a truly "empty" diploma is one that only measures student aptitude through one method on one day with a standardized test. Such a test offers little chance to measure the success of a student in the areas of collaboration, creativity, technology, public speaking, research or innovation. These are all qualities that modern business leaders are urging schools to produce. An additional layer of standardized testing will not raise standards for high performing districts like Central Bucks. It will *lower standards*.

School districts are currently testing students with the PSSA, or Pennsylvania System of State Assessment, in grades 3,4,5,6,7,8 and 11. Across the four subject areas, that makes 20 tests for each student. School districts have realigned curriculum so as to more carefully match what is tested each year on the PSSA's. This realignment process has actually reduced opportunities in classrooms for important skills like collaboration or research; so as to prepare students for these standardized test. If faced with another battery of tests like the GCA's, school districts will again be forced to narrow their curriculum even further.

What is even more frightening is that the recommendation is for the new Graduation Competency Exams to serve as the final course assessment. Can you imagine one common final exam across the state of Pennsylvania for algebra 2, biology, chemistry, or American History? In a school district like Central Bucks, where its students score the fourth highest out of 501 school districts in the state, this will do nothing more than lower standards. Over time these tests will end up being the goal rather than simply a measurement of minimal competency.

We must also look at the cost involved with preparing and administering these test. The politicians in Harrisburg tell the citizens of Pennsylvania they will be getting some tax relief, those same people propose new costly initiatives that will be of no benefit to anyone. We have seen estimates (which we know are usually wrong) showing the cost of creating the GCAs to be in the multi-million dollars and the cost of administering the GCAs to be more than one million dollars annually. With little or no benefit to be gained, a cost/benefit analysis leads to one conclusion -- GCAs are a bad idea from an educational point of view and from a financial point of view.

At a time when many colleges are moving away from using standardized tests to evaluate potential students, Pennsylvania is proposing an additional standardized test. This kind of backward thinking from politicians who have no educational experience is exactly what our students do not need. For these reasons, and many others, I **oppose** GCAs and encourage the legislature to reject this proposal.

6/16/2008

Sincerely,

Stephen A. Corr, Esquire

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Stephen A. Corr  
School Director  
Central Bucks School District  
Regions VI & VII

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