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Sent: Monday, May 19, 2008 10:15 PM
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Subject: GCA exams

2008 MAY 27 AM 10:48

Dear Sirs and Madames: I am contacting you with the letter below, as I would like it to be entered into the 30 day comment period during which community members may submit written comments, suggestions or objections regarding the proposed regulation to be considered by the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC).

thank you, Christine Broome

Hello:

I am writing in reference to the newly proposed GCA exit exams recently introduced by the state education board of Pennsylvania. As a parent of three Tredyffrin Easttown students, one of whom would be the first to experience these new laws as a future 2014 HS graduate, and a taxpayer in the state of Pennsylvania, I would like to express my deep dismay and displeasure with these newly proposed testing regulations.

Please do not implement these extra tests in our school district.

I have had the privelege of observing outstanding and innovative teaching and educational programs, that are currenety being implemented in the TE schools my children attend.

My youngest, a 6th grader a a TE middle School, has had the opportunity to take advanced reading and math, and has been an A plus student since entering these programs. Although fully capable of maintaining an above 90 average in her pre-algebra class, and her above grade level reading class, her PSSA grades were mostly in the "proficient" level, with only a few "advanced." I cannot imagine how other students, who are only studying "at grade level," will be able to do as well.

The weakest link in the educational approach that I can see for my daughter is lack of adequate instructional time. Due to Curriculum restraints and schedules, teachers are often forced to speed through new material, and are not able to take into account individual needs. This is primarily, in my opinion, due to the burden of too many state mandated testing days, that take away from needed instructional time in the classroom.

Adding more tests to the pile will only make this situation worse.

But, my daughter, who is educationally gifted, and lucky enough to have parents who study with her nightly, will most probably do fine, even with these added burdens.

However, one of my sons, currently at Conestoga HS, would not do as well. One of the "diverse" learners so often mentioned in many education articles, he, like many sucessful individuals, has numerous strenghts and abilities that cannot be measured by tests that only note the abilities of visual learners, who are proficient in language based communications. The teaching staff at Conestoga HS have been absolutely wonderful. Through alternate assessments, added work assignments and individual teaching sessions available to him through academic support classes, our son has maintained a B plus average, and has sucessfully completed classes at the accelerated, as well as honors levels. He has flourished, and looks forward to school with optimism for his future. He has already decided to study electrical wiring, or possibly applied engineering when he graduates. However, he must still spend many hours, dictionary in hand, correcting his writing, which is filled with spelling and word mis-cues, due to his language oriented learning difference.

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He is able to do algebra 2, and maintained a 90 average this past marking period, but still misses many simple calculations, due to number reversals. This disappears when he uses his calculator, and much of his syntax and spelling errors are removed when he writes on his computer with spellcheck.

None of these technologies will be available to him when he takes his PSSA in 11th grade. And so, he expects that he may not pass. I shudder to think how this would affect him, if it were presently the only method for him to expect a diploma. As it stands, he realizes that although he may not pass this "test," there are many other ways for him to demonstrate proficiency, including oral exams, and the use of technology to check his work, and he views his future with an optimism based on the knowledge that perseverance and hard work will bring its own rewards. How sad for the many students who will lose this opportunity, as they all become grouped together in one large mass of state mandated "learners."

Additionally, no student with a documented learning disability need worry about the lack of "testing" during their academic careers. My son, who has been tested by an educational psychologist 5 times in his academic life, has no need of any other test to determine what his learning styles are, or if he is able to "pass" a set of criteria that only applies to the segment of the population that are language based, visual learners.

Students in the Pennsylvania public schools who think, learn and achieve differently are not alone in their abilities. Some of our nation's and world's leading innovators, inventors, artists, statesmen and educators, including such people as Helen Kellar, Thomas Edison, Charles Schwaub, Henry Ford, Tom Cruise, Cher, Nelson Rockefeller, Galileo, Sylvester Stallone, Mozart, Gen. George Patton, Wright Brothers, Leonardo da Vinci, John F. Kennedy, Cher, Whoopi Goldberg, Bruce Jenner, Gen. Westmoreland, Henry Winkler, Harry Belafonte, Danny Glover, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Walt Disney, John Lennon, Robin Williams, Steve McQueen and Louis Pasteur have been identified as having the earmarks of an learning disability, and would probably have failed tests such as these proposed exit GCA's.

What a crime to deprive the world of future imaginative thinkers, who do not think "in the box," simply because they cannot pass written tests that only test the abilities of those who have brains and learning styles that fit the ways these test have been designed.

What a crime to wait until a student has passed through TWELVE years of schooling, and then administer a test that marks them as failures.

If the test makers, and state education administrators know the "magic" formula that will lead graduating seniors to success in the marketplace as adult workers, then why is this "formula" not being taught before 17 and 18 year olds are tested into failure?

Wouldn't all the extra money used to generate, give and grade these exams be put to better use through instructional venues?

I think so.

Sincerely,

Christine Broome

Parent, citizen and taxpayer

Tredyffrin Easttown School District

Devon PA