

RE: [unclear]

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Public Comment: GCA

Graduate Competency Assessments

The Reading School District and its nearly 18,000 students face the challenges of all urban districts.

In advocating for the establishment of graduate competency assessments, I hope that this committee supports Covey's premise to "begin with the end in mind." There are significant misunderstandings and unclear messages in discussion of this issue. In defining what GCA is and why it is in the best interest of the children, we should first define the objective.

As we begin this courageous conversation, we should emphasize that this proposal for high quality final exams as a means to validate the rigor and relevance of our curriculum. This needs to be at the forefront.

When we hear the chorus of complainers, I'm reminded of the story of the mayor of Dublin who listened to his constituents when they complained of tender feet because they were barefoot. The mayor, in his benevolence, ordered shoes for everyone forgetting one key component....one size does not fit all. As with the mayor, we should remember that these high quality exams are one of a variety of alternatives to demonstrate proficiency and competency.

In today's global economy, new sets of skills are required for those who wish to advance themselves and their families. There are no collar jobs, blue collar jobs, and

white collar jobs. In order to be successful, we must provide our students with the skill sets and the content that will allow them to compete. As we move from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, we must provide our children with new skills.

No Child Left Behind placed upon all the states a mandate for excellence. Whatever flaws that exist, the objective cannot be denied. All children can learn. The PSSA is the first attempt to validate the instruction delivered in our schools with the statewide assessment. The GCA is another road toward student success.

If I have any concerns about the graduate competency assessment, it is in the development of the tests themselves. I would ask the commission to consider more participation and autonomy in local school districts' development of the final exams.

Investment in the human infrastructure of the Commonwealth requires quality options for our children. The graduate competency assessment is another means to an end. It is child-centered, hands-on, and developmental. The modular method prescribed by the Secretary of Education allows us to zero in on those areas that need further enhancement. All future exams should be structured in this manner.

Meaningful high school reform is made up of many parts...curricular alignment, instructional best practices, inclusive environments, small learning communities, the list goes on and on and on and on.

We must provide a direct correlation between the monies set to close the equity gap and increase achievement that has valid rigor and relevance to the future. The Governor and the Secretary of Education have made the futures of our Commonwealth

and the future educational needs of our children their top priority. All of us should support this initiative.

In summary, from a strategic, tactical, and operational perspective, the proposed graduate competency assessments will enhance our students, validate our instruction, and provide a truly substantive skill set for our future.

