

#2696

From: Ryan Skiles [rskiles@chsd.k12.pa.us]
Sent: Tuesday, May 06, 2008 2:03 PM
To: IRRC
Cc: jbuckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: Graduation Competency Assessments

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INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS DISTRICT
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4:19 pm.

To whom this may concern,

As your constituent, I urge you to oppose regulations proposed by the State Board of Education that essentially would mandate high stakes standardized high school exit exams. The Graduation Competency Assessment (GCA) proposal would result in denial of diplomas to students if they do not score "proficient" on statewide standardized tests. My concerns include:

- * There are numerous reasons I oppose the GCA proposal, but first and foremost I do not believe that standardized tests are the best determination of student achievement. The thought of denying students a high school diploma - which has long-term negative effects on their lives - because they didn't score "proficient" on a statewide test truly concerns me
- * At a time when we know that Pennsylvania's public education system lacks the funding it needs by over \$4 billion in order to help every student meet the state's academic standards, it is irresponsible to impose high-stakes testing on our students. In addition, no analysis has been done on the cost of developing and administering the GCAs, let alone what it would cost to remediate those students who do not score "proficient" on the exam.
- * A paper and pencil standardized test is a very imperfect measure of what students have learned. Current regulations require each school district and area vocational technical school to create a local assessment system, of which local graduation assessments are a part. Local graduation assessments must be aligned with the state academic standards and be used to determine the degree to which students are achieving the standards. Local assessment systems, including the local graduation assessments, must include a variety of assessment strategies, including portfolios and research papers, presentations, projects and assignments, results of exams, scientific experiments, works of art, and musical or theatrical performances. These types of assessments provide a richer, more accurate and fairer measure of what students know than can a few paper-and-pencil tests. The state should not override these "local assessments" with one-size-fits-all standardized tests.
- * While the proposal continues to allow the use of local assessments for graduation purposes, it creates numerous costly barriers in the name of test "validation" that would be a disincentive for most school districts to continue using local graduation assessments. The proposal also allows the use of Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate exams as a graduation test; however, these programs are limited in their availability to Pennsylvania high school students. Therefore, the only option for high school graduation for most students under this new proposal would be scoring proficient on the PSSA or on six out of 10 GCAs. For all practical purposes, there would be no local option for students to graduate.

These critical competencies are taught in classes such as music or art. Research has shown that students across the country are losing opportunities to learn these competencies as school districts are forced to shift time away from these subjects in order to prepare students to pass high-stakes tests. Please do not allow that to happen in Pennsylvania! Talk to your colleagues on the Education Committee and ask them to oppose the GCA proposal. Thank you

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