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From: Richard Victor [rdvmusic@verizon.net]
Sent: Sunday, May 04, 2008 11:10 AM
To: IRRC
Subject: Graduation Competency Assessments

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

10:20 a.m

The Board of Directors of the State College Area School District recently passed a resolution opposing the proposed Graduation Competency Assessments. I join them in urging you to oppose the State Board of Education's proposal to enact Graduation Competency Assessments and any other regulation or legislation that usurps the authority of local school districts to determine whether their students have earned a high school diploma.

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.

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.

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.

I believe there are more important places for the Commonwealth to put its resources. Pennsylvania could follow the example of several states that have begun to align their standards according to the work done by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills. This organization, which was formed via a collaboration between educators and business leaders, is developing standards and assessments for competencies that include collaboration, innovation, creativity, communication, and critical thinking skills.

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!

Sincerely,

Richard Victor
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