

953

1730 Walnut Hill Blvd.
Media, PA 19063
June 10, 2008

RECEIVED

2008 JUN 30 AM 9:45

2696

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

RECEIVED

JUN 18 2008

PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

PA State Board
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. J. Buckheit, Executive Director

I am writing on behalf of my daughter. She is a 4th grader in a very good school district in Delaware County. She has an auditory processing deficit which means she needs additional time to process what she hears in lectures and directions and when reading a passage will be challenged to phonemically figure out new vocabulary. She does have an IEP and has the support of a regular education teacher, special education teacher, speech therapist and some paraprofessional support.

My background is as a regular education elementary teacher and I am now going back to college for my special education degree. I have some recommendations for the PA State Board related to the Graduation Competency Assessments. Remove the assessments/high stakes tests from Chapter 4.

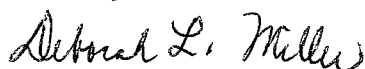
My child is not at grade level but she is not stupid. She is making meaningful progress yearly and on the PSSA she is scoring in the basic and proficient range. What will life be like for her when she enters high school and she is faced with the GCAs? Here is the crystal ball as I see it:

- Since she has an IEP she will find out from classmates that "you can get your scores to not count" because of your disability.
- Your teachers will focus more energy on those students that are struggling but do not have IEPs because their life can be ruined by failing to get a diploma.
- Classes outside of the GCAs really don't matter or have any impact on receiving a diploma.
- Course offerings will be very narrow for those students not proficient on such test as 4 Sight. Have to teach to the test.
- Better not move out of the school district because some of the surrounding school districts do not have the same tax base and can not offer the same educational opportunities. She would be at a great disadvantage in some school districts because economics does play a role in the quality of education one receives.
- Currently guidance counselors help my daughter with skill sets to self advocate and problem solve. The self image issue after taking the GCAs at the high school level has the potential of damaging our daughter. Will the guidance department and the support network at home be able to turn around all the negativity after taking the high stakes tests?

- How will the GCAs impact program offerings if she decides on a vocational technical program? Will students who do not have IEPs be allowed to participate in vocational technical schools if they have not passed the GCAs? This type of goal setting could negatively impact the course offerings at the Technical Schools due to lack or decrease of enrollment.
- What if in our wildest dreams the school district wanted to exit her out of special education because she had made significant progress only to have the GCAs looming over her like a dark threatening cloud. Working in education and knowing the educational system it might not be in our best interest to have her exit special education because of the chance that she would not pass all of the tests.
- How will I explain it to my daughter that some of her friends will not be walking down the aisle or participating in the prom or getting in the yearbook or have access to a post secondary education opportunity because of a single test. Twelve years of school come down to a single test result that will impact the child for years to come.

For these and many other reasons I urge the PA State Board to remove the draft graduation requirements. Take the money targeted for this project and spend it on developing a model state curriculum. The State Board had the Costing Out Study completed. Follow those recommendations and support the efforts to fund education for “all” students equally.

Sincerely,



Deborah L. Miller
Mother and Educator