

Buckheit, James

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From: Emily Sturman [gothicbaroque616@gmail.com] 2008 AUG 12 AM 9:15
Sent: Sunday, August 10, 2008 1:53 PM
To: Buckheit, James
Subject: GCA Proposal

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I am not a Pennsylvania taxpayer, or a voter. I am not a potential employer of graduating students and I am not involved in college education. I am a student at Pine-Richland High School, so I believe you ought to hear me out.

I am not as set against this proposal as I know my district is, though I feel an additional test to be more or less unnecessary. What worries me is that the proposed test is to cover, along with reading, English, and math, science and social studies. These subjects are not usually a prominent part of standardized testing, so I was worried, though not particularly surprised (I apologize, but in the traditional spirit of teenagers everywhere, I do not have a particularly high opinion of the government in general) to see that these subjects made the cut.

The science test worries me because of the diverse nature of the subject. How do you propose to cover biology, earth science, astronomy, anatomy, physics, and half a dozen other branches of "science" in a single test? You probably don't. If you did, the test would have to be vague, incomprehensive, and above all ineffective, as students would be more than capable of learning the material purely by memorization, not understanding. I envision, instead, a board tasked to determine which of these branches are "important" enough to be tested and separate them from the "unimportant" branches, which would be completely ignored. Instead of ensuring adequate preparation for collage, this would actually weaken Pennsylvania's educational system, because students would have little incentive to explore "unimportant" sciences and would be forced by their school to become "proficient" - but only proficient - enough to pass a test in an area that may hold very little significance for their chosen educational and vocational path, and schools would have no reason to offer "unimportant" courses. Even if they were offered, students would have little opportunity to take these classes, already enrolled in the required course. Schools would end up graduating several hundred students with basic knowledge in, for example, biology, instead of several groups of students with specific interest and experience in the diverse branches of science.

I have come to realize, through my still-continuing education, that social studies has, for quite some time, been taught precisely wrong. Students are encouraged in history classes from elementary to high school, excluding an alarmingly small handful of courses, simply to swallow facts as they are, to memorize, not to understand or criticize, the events of history. This is useless. It leads people everywhere to question the necessity of learning history at all, or, worse, not to question, because they were told during their education that history is important and, as with all the other "facts" of the class, have accepted it without thought. It is my opinion that not even the AP exams can truly measure proficiency in history. Despite convoluted language and confusing questions, the multiple choice portion is still objective, attempting to test a subjective subject with facts. The essay portion is better, but as the number of graduates would drop to next to nothing if AP standards were applied to every student in Pennsylvania, and, as history is not taught, generally, with a subjective approach, I cannot see how this proposed test can accurately measure proficiency in social studies. Add this to the fact that there are just as many branches of history as there are of science, and you risk stanching both the

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students' ability to fully understand basic Western history and the incentive for schools to offer courses in world history, which is becoming all the more important with every passing day. As I am sure you are aware, the world is flat.

Listen to me. I have taken enough bad tests to know that you cannot possibly expect to test in science and social studies. Don't try. Since I know that, as I, a mere fifteen years of age and having no political clout whatsoever, cannot affect you by withdrawing my support of the GCA, I hereby threaten to sic the whole of my tenth grade AP European History class and the Forensics team on the state legislature, and we will then proceed to debate the crap out of it, if you do not at least take my concerns seriously.

Sincerely,
Emily Sturman, sophomore, Pine-Richland High School