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**Buckheit, James**

**From:** Kathleen & Douglas Smith [dksmith@kathleen-douglas.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, August 12, 2009 6:33 PM  
**To:** Buckheit, James  
**Subject:** comments for Board meeting 8/12

**RECEIVED**  
AUG 12 2009  
PA. STATE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you as the Vice-President and Legislative Liaison of the Canon-McMillan School Board, and as a member of the Joint Operating Committee of the Western Area Career and Technical Center. I represent the interests of thousands of students of varied backgrounds and abilities.

My priority for those students is to prepare them for the challenges they will face as adults in the very competitive 21st century. They will need to know more and be able to do more than any previous generation. I firmly believe in both high standards and accountability for schools and educators. That said, I do NOT support high stakes, end of course exams for students. I opposed them as GCA's and I oppose them as Keystone Exams.

No single state wide test can measure the breadth and depth of student achievement. Students who are already at risk for dropping out of high school will believe that they have no alternative if they fail to pass such a test. Students with disabilities that limit their test-taking abilities will be at a disadvantage. Vocational students will face barriers to graduation that have little bearing on their future success. By now you have heard objections from many professional educators and seen that other states are in fact questioning the value of exit exams and moving to other forms of accountability. I will not repeat that evidence here.

To fund such tests - or even the creation of such tests - diverts scarce resources from the critical work of teaching our students; and from focused, local evaluations conducted by those educators who know the students best. No one is more invested in our students and their success than the professional staff of their own school district!

The Canon-McMillan School Directors have twice passed - unanimously - resolutions opposed to state-wide end of course exams. I have attached those, and ask you to distribute them along with these comments at the State Board of Education Hearing on August 12 and 13.

I urge you to stop the headlong rush toward more testing.

Sincerely,  
Kathleen Smith  
Canon-McMillan School Board

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**From the 6/15/09 minutes:**

**Resolution Opposing Keystone Exams**

Mr. Zupancic made a motion, seconded by Mr. Cianelli that the Board approve the following resolution:

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS OF THE  
CANON-McMILLAN SCHOOL DISTRICT  
OPPOSING THE PROPOSED KEYSTONE EXAMS

WHEREAS, the Pennsylvania Department of Education had approved a proposal to revise the current high school graduation requirements under the Chapter 4 regulations to require students to pass a series of standardized high-stakes Graduation Competency Assessments in order to get a diploma; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania placed a one-year moratorium on the State Board prohibiting them from implementing regulations to establish GCAs or proceeding any further with them without the sanction of the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the State Board has ignored the one-year moratorium placed on them by the General Assembly under Act 61 of 2008 which prohibits the establishment of high school graduation requirements and issued Request for Proposal for the GCA tests in August 2008, which will now be known as the Keystone Exams. Further, the Department of Education has awarded contracts with Data Recognition Corp. to develop Keystone Exams in spite of the one-year legislatively imposed moratorium.

WHEREAS, the State Board, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association have entered into a joint agreement that would replace the highly-controversial and highly-objectionable GCA proposal with an alternate proposal that is also highly controversial and highly objectionable, known as the Keystone Exams; and

WHEREAS, there is a broad requirement for local assessments to be aligned with the state academic standards and include performance-level expectations to be comparable to the PSSA or Keystone Exams; and

WHEREAS, the Keystone Exams' proposal permits schools to use a local assessment option; these local assessments must be validated in order to be used. The proposal states that "PDE will establish a Local Assessment Validation Committee to develop criteria for the validation process and criteria for the selection of approved validation entities .... The

committee's criteria for the validation process and criteria for selection of validation entities will be submitted to the State Board of Education for approval or disapproval." The cost of validation is to be evenly divided between the District and the State Board; and

WHEREAS, the costs associated with validation will be an additional burden to school districts and taxpayers across this state, and the proposal requires school districts to absorb many new costs related to revising curriculum, professional development, test preparation and administration, remediation and other costs; and

WHEREAS, the cost for the development and implementation of these exams approximates \$210,000,000 over the next seven years, and, in light of the current economic situation in this Commonwealth and the nation, the Governor, the State Board, the Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association should not be adding additional expenses to district and taxpayer budgets, and, with the limitations of Act 1 on tax increases, school districts have limited ability to fund any potential new costs; and

WHEREAS, the State Board has already sent out the preliminary revisions to the current Chapter 4 regulations in regard to the Keystone Exams; these new regulations leave many unanswered questions and much ambiguity; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Canon-McMillan School District opposes the joint proposal between the State Board, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and the Pennsylvania School Boards Association to enact the Keystone Exams. With the additional validation costs to school districts and taxpayers, school districts will implement and use the Keystone Exams thereby making the Keystone Exams mandatory, as school districts may find that they have no alternative but to choose the Keystone Exams due to cost and complications related to the validation process; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of the Canon-McMillan School District will hereby continue to support legislation to extend the moratorium as well as any legislation against any new test development or implementation and funding being used for this purpose; and

WHEREAS, this resolution will be shared with the State Board of Education, the Department of Education, the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, state legislators, including local legislators and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, and any others as this board directs; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of School Directors of the Canon-McMillan School District hereby directs the Superintendent and Board President to communicate this resolution to other school districts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and to members of our community, encouraging other school boards and individuals to take similar action on this issue.

The motion carried unanimously.

**RESOLUTION OPPOSING PROPOSED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION COMPETENCY  
ASSESSMENTS  
BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE  
CANON-McMILLAN SCHOOL DISTRICT**

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has approved a proposal to revise the current high school graduation requirements under the Chapter 4 regulations to require students to pass a series of standardized high stakes Graduation Competency Assessments in order to get a diploma; and

WHEREAS, these new requirements and exams will be the same for all students, whether they are taking college prep or vocational courses, are English language learners or participating in individualized programs, and all students effectively will be required to take the same courses in order to pass this new battery of state tests; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 4 currently allows districts to use either the PSSA or rigorous local assessments for their students to demonstrate proficiency of the state academic standards; and it is misleading and incorrect to make the assumption that because students demonstrate their achievements on local assessments rather than the PSSA that there is a disconnect between proficiency and graduation; and

WHEREAS, although the GCA proposal permits schools to use a local assessment option, it establishes numerous limitations, including the elimination of the ability to use various assessment strategies now available to local entities and requires local tests to be closely modeled to the GCAs; and

WHEREAS, decades of research shows many reasons why standardized pencil and paper test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students, and that a diploma should be granted based on the coursework, tests and quizzes, presentations, projects and papers throughout the student's career; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has not prepared a cost analysis or fiscal note, even though this will create a large financial impact on state and local budgets, and the State Board's own costing-out study did not include the costs for this new system and found that the state already is \$4.4 billion short in helping school districts prepare students to meet the academic standards by 2014; and

WHEREAS, the proposal requires school districts to absorb many new costs related to revising curriculum, professional development, test development and validation, test preparation and administration, remediation and other costs. Given the state's funding shortfall and the Act 1 limitations on tax increases, school districts have limited ability to fund these potential new costs.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Board of School Directors of the Canon-McMillan School District who are also members of South Hills Area School District Association (SHASDA), **opposes 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. This resolution will be shared with the State Board of Education, state legislators including local

legislators and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission.

Adopted this 24th day of March, 2008.

Signed,

Attest:

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School Board President

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Board Secretary (seal)