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**Buckheit, James**

**From:** Don Bell [dbell@norleb.k12.pa.us]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, August 11, 2009 3:16 PM  
**To:** Buckheit, James  
**Cc:** Mary Gerhart; Brian Wolfe  
**Subject:** KE Information

**RECEIVED**

AUG 12 2009

**PA. STATE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION**

Dear Jim,

Congratulations on being selected to your new post at PASA.

Please note I was forward an email concerning a rescheduled meeting from July to August 12th.

*The State Board of Education has rescheduled the meeting that was canceled in July to August 12 - 13, 2009. The meeting is open to the public and will be held at the Keystone Building, Second Floor - Hearing Room One, 400 North Street, Harrisburg, PA. The meetings on August 12 will begin at 10:00 a.m. and the meetings on August 13 will begin at 8:30 a.m.*

Not a lot of time to adjust schedules to attend the public hearing to collect input however I do have have some information to share!

I implore the various education committees to collect more data about this type of testing from the people in the trenches, not just the state organizations, before making a final decision. In addition, I would like to see some transparency from the Pennsylvania Department of Education for all parents, students and educators. I would suggest that the PDE post a copy of the concepts, ideas and meeting minutes of the Keystone Examination discussions at least 30 days before any agreement or vote is taken.

I have often heard Department say these examinations will take the place of the PSSA standardized test. Please be careful to check with the Federal No Child Left Behind legislation. I think you will find that the PSSA is the only approved form of assessment accepted from Pennsylvania. Unless the PDE has secured the appropriate change with the federal government Pennsylvania will be issuing "both" levels of assessment in high school. In fact, I have been told by some PDE insiders that it will take a minimum of three years issuing "both" series of tests (PSSA and KE) before the federal government will be able to "trade" the KE for PSSA. In short, standardized testing continues to spiral out of control.

I ask the education committees not to compromise on this issue and instead appoint a special commission to collect "good" hard data from the people in the trenches and more importantly the students and their parents. I think you will find many quality "outside the box" ideas that are worthy of discussion prior to issuing a KE mandate.

The value of a diploma, as is frequently said by the PDE, determines economic future and thus we must increase measurements and accountability. I can assure you that nothing is further from what is the determining factor of the economic structure in Pennsylvania. Our economic structures are determined by business, specifically what benefits business, not by student assessments on a test.

Please note some of the following information. (I have been told that my assumptions below are correct – but please don't just take my word for it, have someone in your offices check to see if it is correct or not)

- The KE will count for 33% of a student's final grade in the specified core subject courses. Please note that most high schools in Pennsylvania today count the final exam as 20% or less.
- If a student scores below basic they will be given 0% for the work completed. The 0% will be issued for the

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student's final grade, regardless if the student got certain questions correct or not. Making this final exam simply pass or fail. Please note that most high schools in Pennsylvania today give credit to students when the student produces correct answers, which show a mastery of a concept.

- A 0% on the final exam will require students to attain a classroom grade (2/3) of 90% to pass the course. ( $90\% + 90\% + 0\% = 180\%/3 = 60\%$ ) Example for a district having a grading scale for passing ending at 60%.
- A 0% on the final exam will require students to have at least a classroom grade (2/3) of 90% to pass the course. ( $105\% + 105\% + 0\% = 210\%/3 = 70\%$ ) Example for a district having a grading scale for passing ending at 70%. Obviously, 105% is not possible to attain since 100% is the maximum, thus making the failure of the final examination the single determining factor in passing the course.
- An alternative local assessment must be validated. The validation must be completed by the local school district with the PDE paying for  $\frac{1}{2}$  of that cost. The other half of that cost must be covered by the local school district. Thereby making this optional "alternative local assessment" anything but optional. Especially in school districts which are already financially strapped to stay afloat in their day to day operations. It appears that this optional alternative assessment is another unfunded mandate that will burden the school district and thus the local taxpayer.
- The current PSSA tests have been given for more than a decade in Pennsylvania. If the students are not performing academically any better then they were ten (10) years ago, it appears that standardized testing is not the answer. Personally, I think it exposes the flawed system of standardized testing.
- High stakes testing, state standards, and curricular mandates have been mandated by the PDE and given to local school districts for many years. If the students are not performing any better, it appears that the current academic standards and mandates. Personally, I want more than old 20<sup>th</sup> century standards and students who can take tests.
- When students are passing these standardized assessments what are they successful at doing? Can you assure the test savvy students they can go on to college or that they will be able to get a job? Personally, I want more guarantees for our kids.
- According to national statistics released five years ago, business was turning away nearly 20% of college graduates who took and passed tests because that is all the employees knew how to do - take tests. Personally, I want to give our kids more than just test taking skills.
- It seems unproductive to give college level exams (KE's) in order for kids to graduate from high school.
- It was also stated that International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement tests will be accepted as an alternative to KE's. It mentions nothing about College-in-the-High School programs. Unfortunately, passing these college level courses is not being considered as an alternative to the KE's. Interestingly enough, at Northern Lebanon many of our kids are entering college as sophomores because of this program. Personally, I witness students achieve great academic success as a direct result of this program and yet no one at PDE appears to think it is valuable enough to be an alternative to the KE's. The new KE regulations should include the passing of the subject specific college-in-the-high school course provided by an accredited Middle States College or University should be an acceptable alternative.

As you can see I am concerned about moving forward without thoroughly investigating this issue and promoting the transparency of public education to the people we all serve, the public. I am convinced that hearings or meetings in the Capital are not nearly enough. Instead of mandating more assessments, mandate that the PDE get all the information out on their website, get out of their offices and into the trenches, and really find out what is going on in our public schools.

In a new book out by Lee Iacocca he states, that we should be mad as hell about all the sitting around and watching people 'stay the course'. In short, if we do the same thing we have always done, we will get the same thing, we have always got! Well, I am tired of hearing the PDE telling us to do the same thing that we have always done (standardized tests) and expecting a different result. The result will be the same; the only people who benefit from standardized tests are the ones who are selling them.

Thanks for your time and please feel free to pass along this information to the appropriate individual you deem necessary.

Dr. Don Bell, Superintendent of Schools