
From: Miller, Sarah E.
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2009 8:50 AM
To: Cooper, Kathy; Schalles, Scott R.; Totino, Michaele; Gelnett, Wanda B.; Wilmarth, Fiona E.
Subject: FW: IRRC Website - New Message

From: Independent Regulatory Review Commission [mailto:No-Reply@irrc.state.pa.us]
Sent: Thursday, August 20, 2009 8:06 AM
To: Help
Subject: IRRC Website - New Message

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IRRC

Independent Regulatory Review Commission

A new message has arrived from the IRRC Website

First Name: Katherine

Last Name: Pettiss

Company: Great Valley School District

Email: kpettiss@gvgsd.org

Subject: #006-312

Message:

I am writing to you today on behalf of Great Valley School District to urge you not to approve the Keystone Exams proposal. Last month the Pittsburgh Post Gazette carried a headline stating that "28 superintendents back state graduation exams"; it speaks volumes that after 18 months of this controversy 472 other superintendents did not. The determination and tenacity of the Governor's Policy Director have been directly responsible for initiatives that have provided or will provide great benefits for our students; the exit exams initiative is not one of them. As a locally elected, volunteer official I and my fellow Board members are responsible for setting local education policy; ostensibly deciding how to best spend classroom instructional time and our taxpayers' money to provide the best education for our students. There is no argument that many students in Pennsylvania are graduating unprepared; however, we already know with considerable precision which students and which districts are not performing. It is our consensus opinion that spending classroom time and money on the proposed exit exams is not the remedy for this situation and is not in the best interests of our students or our taxpayers. According to Daniel Koretz, a professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, "We have very little hard, empirical evidence about the effects of these test-based accountability programs, all of them, on student learning." Koretz further stated, "There is absolutely no expectation in education policy right now that these reforms would be evaluated. It's almost as if drug manufacturers were able to dream up drugs and go ahead with them without any testing," At a recent meeting held at the Rand Corporation, a Rand researcher reported that "there is little research to support exit exams, but what does exist shows an increased dropout rate and very little, if any increase in student achievement." The Maryland Bridge model, the project

approach to supplementing “end of course” tests scores, is not an answer. While the State Board presented the statistic that only 28 Maryland students failed to graduate when using the Bridge; they did not mention the estimated 27,000 Maryland students who dropped out or otherwise failed to graduate in the same year, None of the 20+ statewide education organizations have endorsed this proposal. In the past few weeks the PA School Boards Association, the PA Association of School Administrators, the PA Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals and the PA NAACP have issued statements expressing their ongoing, significant concerns and reservations with the Keystone Exam program. Last year more than 200 school boards passed resolutions opposing the GCAs. This year 49 school boards, representing more than 40% of Pennsylvania’s High School students, have passed additional resolutions opposing the Keystone Exams. Not one school board in the state has passed a resolution in support of the Keystone Exams. Why aren’t we targeting the State’s resources towards the students and districts that need the most help? Many of those districts are represented by the 28 superintendents noted at the start of this letter. While I am certain that there are school districts that would welcome a statewide curriculum and statewide final exams I am writing today to tell you plainly that there are many districts that do not. If we are not going to graduate students who are unable to perform at a certain level of proficiency on our standardized tests, then we need specific proposals for interventions that will enable those students to perform at the expected level: like math and reading coaching, tutoring, extended day and extended year programs and well defined funding for those programs; especially in districts where high numbers of students are not proficient. More significantly, we need to invest resources in proven, data driven early interventions. Invest it in preschool programs. Invest it in training, recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers; in programs that foster parental involvement in their children’s education, again, especially in districts that need the most help. Ask a veteran principal and they will tell you (and research backs it up) that for the most part they know by third grade which students are likely to be measured as “below basic” nine years later. Please, do not approve the final form tests in this regulation from the State Board of Education.