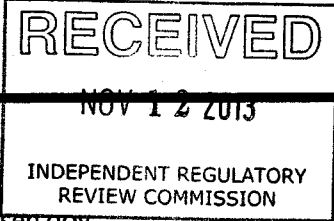


2974

Cooper, Kathy



From: Robin Kaliner <robinkaliner@gmail.com>
Sent: Saturday, November 09, 2013 12:55 PM
To: David Sumner; Dtruit@pahousegop.com; dpileggi@pasen.gov
Cc: DinnimanSenate@gmail.com; 'John Hellmann'; 'Chris McCune'; 'Joyce Chester'; 'Sue Tiernan'; 'Scanlon, James R'; 'RICKY L. SWALM'
Subject: RE: Keystone exams

Mr. Sumner, Representative Truitt, and Senator Pileggi,

I would like to echo Dr. Swalm's sentiments regarding the Keystone Exams. Like Rick, I am a recently elected School Board Director for the WCASD, and am also the parent of 3 children who attend WCASD schools. My oldest son is a Freshman this year so a member of the Class of 2017 which will be subject to passage of the Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement. My son took the Algebra I Keystone last year and passed, but I know there are many other bright students who did not pass this exam and are now being tutored so they can attempt to pass on their next attempt. My son is taking Biology this year, and I have heard through his accounting of the class, as well as witnessed firsthand when attending parent night at his school, how laser focused teaching has become on the passage of this exam. Based upon my son's experience, he is not learning key concepts in Biology necessary to understand living organisms and perhaps spark a desire for further study of the natural sciences; he is being fed material that he is told will be required to pass the Keystone exam that will allow him to graduate. While perhaps part of this is the fault of inadequate teaching methods, I recognize that teachers are under enormous pressure to ensure that their students pass these exams—this is what changes in teacher evaluation systems are incenting them to do.

There is much in the news regarding our children not "making the grade" when it comes to learning what is necessary to compete in the global marketplace. I've read about children graduating high school not able to read or clearly articulate ideas, colleges having to remediate new students who have not acquired the proficiency necessary for higher education, and businesses frustrated at the skill level of high school graduates seeking employment. So clearly there are things we need to do to improve our public schools. I am not adverse to all forms of testing as I realize we need to ensure that our teachers are teaching effectively and that our students are learning. But I'm not convinced the Keystones are the answer.

As you are aware, public schools have been dealing with eroding funding for years now between cuts to state support, skyrocketing pension costs, and increasing payments to charter schools. Public schools simply CANNOT afford to spend money on new programs unless they have clearly demonstrated they are value-adding endeavors; the Keystones have not. How a child can go through 13 years of measurements and evaluation only to not graduate because of his or her performance on a single test is nonsensical. We don't have the funds to keep these children in school forever, so if they are not able to pass these tests then we send them out into the world with an inferior diploma, only adding insult to injury. How is this making life better for our students?

There are limited funds out there, and they are becoming smaller and smaller every year. Local taxpayers are tired of footing the bill for mandates coming down from a state government that is not willing to share the costs. If the PA Department of Education feels so strongly about these tests, why are they not helping school districts to implement them effectively? Aren't there other things that this money could be used for that would have a larger impact on the educational achievement of our students? I implore you all to delay the implementation of the Keystone exams until they have been more thoroughly vetted, the PA Department of Ed is in a position to adequately support them, and the state is willing to share the cost for implementing them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Robin Kaliner

From: RICKY L. SWALM [mailto:rswalm@temple.edu]

Sent: Thursday, November 07, 2013 1:04 PM

To: dsumner@irrc.state.pa.us

Cc: DinnimanSenate@gmail.com; John Hellmann; Robin Kaliner; Chris McCune; Joyce Chester; Sue Tiernan; Scanlon, James R

Subject: Keystone exams

Dear Mr. Sumner,

I am writing in opposition to the implementation of the Keystone Exams.

While I adamantly support accountability and academic standards, I cannot support the Keystone Exams for we continue to erode local control, burden school districts with unfunded mandates, and against all sanity continue to remove the relevance of diversity and individuality. Someone in Harrisburg has to know that there are ways to meet the demands of accountability without the heavy hand of centralized control. I served previously on our local school board (just got re-elected on Tuesday), helped write the Health, Safety, and Physical Education standards, consult with ETS in Princeton on assessments, and have been teaching for over 35 years so I certainly have a frame of reference for my concerns. I implore you to stand against the Keystone Exams and squelch the Department of Education's attempt to trivialize the entire education students receive in their local school districts in favor of three exam scores as a substitute for those children's comprehensive educations.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this most important decision.

Rick

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