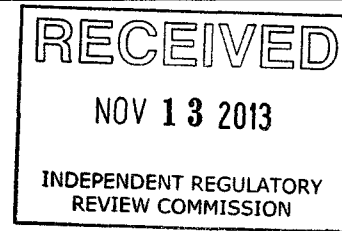


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Cooper, Kathy

**From:** Roller, Tom <RollerT@Jenkintown.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 12, 2013 8:51 AM  
**To:** David Sumner  
**Subject:** Keystone Exam Opposition



Dear Mr. Sumner:

I write to express opposition towards the implementation of Keystone Exams as a graduation requirement. As principal of Jenkintown Middle/High School, I can attest to our rigorous curriculum, our 28.5 credit requirement for graduation (well above state requirements), our extremely high number of students who score advanced on PSSA and Keystone Exams, and our commitment to providing a comprehensive educational program. It is well documented that there are many articles discussing the Common Core and Keystone Exams and "what they measure." Allow me to please share a few of the proudest items that take place in my school that are not and cannot be measured by Keystone Exams.

1. 90% of my students ELECT to participate in our music program. It is a comprehensive program that extends the walls of our classrooms and brings joy to many in our surrounding community.
2. Our Renaissance Night and International Festival bring the entire community together to celebrate and learn about diversity and cultures around the world.
3. We continually suspend less than 5 students each year because we emphasize care, concern, character, and love in our school.
4. We embrace, support, and care for all of our special needs students and celebrate their accomplishments even if their disabilities do not permit them to achieve "grade-level" status in reading or math. Each is as important as any other student in our school.

Without sounding too condescending, I would be interested to know how many state legislators could sit down over a 6 day period and pass each of these Keystone Exams. We all know that college is not for everyone, and that is o.k, because high school programs and diplomas also open paths for students who cannot be successful in college. My uncle struggled to be a good reader, but worked his tail off to become one of the best mechanics I know. He deserved a high school diploma because he struggled through his difficulties and overcame many obstacles. No, he didn't go to college, but he is a SUCCESS. I don't know when politicians and everyday citizens came to the conclusion that college had to be for everyone.

I am greatly concerned that drop-out rates will increase. Funding will once again be directed towards assessments that many students cannot and will not pass even though that money would be better served helping students and parents who live in poverty and just want to give their children a chance in life.

I offer you not only arguments and concerns about the Keystone Exams, but potentially an alternative that supports our desire to recognize those that can master the common core curriculum:

Keep the decision to issue a high school diploma in the hands of the local school districts. Require the districts to implement a comprehensive curriculum that address the common core standards, but allows districts to do so in a way that best meets their individual student body needs. Then, offer an additional diploma known as a "Keystone Diploma" that would be an add-on to a local district diploma. This diploma would recognize students who achieved at least proficient status on the necessary Keystone Exams. All students would take the Keystone Exams so that districts could use the results as formative assessment results to improve and focus instruction, but the results in and of themselves would not eliminate a student from graduating high school. This proposed alternative would eliminate the need for the state and school districts to spend millions of dollars on the creation of project-based assessments. This money can be more appropriately used to support the curriculum improvements and supports that schools need to help those students who did not achieve the proficient status on the Keystone Exams.

I see education all around me each day. I also see students struggling to find their place in the world. I am the luckiest principal in the world to work where I do, but I understand that there are so many more important components to a high school education than standardized test scores. There is emotional intelligence and hands-on learning. These too are not measured on Keystone Exams.

Thank you for your time and thank you for supporting the students in Pennsylvania's Public Schools that need your help. This decision is so very critical and our students need you to make the right choice.

Respectfully,

Thomas Roller  
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Jenkintown Middle/High School  
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