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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Dear Ms. Molchanow,

The purpose of this letter is to express my concern with the proposed Chapter 4 changes. I am a mother of four children. Two of my children are boys, who love Legos. Josiah, my oldest, is a direction follower. He builds the project according to the directions and then moves on to the next project. Daniel, my youngest son, will follow the directions, but also enjoys creating his own masterpieces. When my boys first expressed interest in Legos, I wanted to keep all the sets separate. I did not want to mix the pieces. However, I soon realized that I was doing Daniel a disservice. I was stifling his creativity and hindering his learning. I was putting Daniel in a box in which he did not belong.

I believe the State is doing the same thing with our children's education. Standardized testing places children in boxes they were never intended to fill. While I believe all students need to be educated in the basics, I also believe students need the opportunity to be educated in their personal areas of giftedness.

I do not believe having all students pass a rigorous biochemistry exam is in anyone's best interest. Students need to know biology, in particular that which applies to their own bodies and what they can see with the naked eye. The biology of the cell is important, but not too practical for a student who wants to study HVAC, journalism, engineering, or music. The State's current plan will give us a generation of students who know cellular respiration but little other practical information. Why should a student who is a gifted musician be placed in the rigorous biology box? Not only does it limit that student's time in the area of their giftedness, but it also deprives the public as a whole of the enjoyment of listening to an outstanding musician. The same could be said of those who have gifts in math, writing, or engineering.

This leads me to my oldest child, Emily. Emily is a gifted violinist. She has perfect pitch and can play any song she hears. Emily has blossomed in the string program provided by our local school district. In fact she has been playing in school orchestras since third grade. Emily is now a junior with aspirations to be a high school orchestra director. She has recently started teaching beginner students in our home and thoroughly enjoys it. Music is her passion, and I cannot imagine her life with it. How sad that the State is taking it from her. While she excels in all things musical, math and science are not areas of strength. It is my understanding that if she is not proficient on the Algebra I Keystone, she will need to be remediated next school year. This will limit her involvement in music-related classes. Not only will it affect her time in high school, but it could also limit the availability of positions in her chosen career field. Financial pressures will force school districts to eliminate music positions to accommodate additional Keystone remediation positions.

Pennsylvania high school teachers are qualified professionals with academic degrees in their subject areas. They are capable of making curricular decisions. They know their students and can challenge them according to their individual differences. Curricular decisions should be left to the local school boards, administrators, and teachers. They know their students better than the state does.

Sincerely,

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