

The Daily Quotes

In a letter to superintendents dated March 4th, Secretary Zahorchak opened by writing that during his tenure as Secretary 'no policy question has proved more contentious than the discussion concerning high school graduation requirements'.

"With the budget issues in PA, the wisdom of using scarce dollars should be put where the needs are."
American Federation of Teachers - PA

"The Pennsylvania School Boards Association is unable to support the current outline of the proposal."

The Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA) "does not support the proposal ... and believes that the State Board of Education should continue to work with stakeholders to develop a proposal that meets the needs of all of Pennsylvania's children."

The Pennsylvania Association of Curriculum and Supervision Development (PACSD) "believes that these major parts of the Keystone Exam Program will result in a negative impact on students who do not respond well to standardized tests, on students identified as needing special support and students who do not have access to an equitable and adequate education."

"We are asking you to let SB 281, which would require the General Assembly's approval for any funding of exit exams and for any changes to graduation requirements, be considered by the full House Education Committee." -- Letter from Southeastern Pennsylvania School Districts' Education Coalition (SPSDEC) to House Education Chairman, James Roebuck

"High-stakes testing has not improved education but has added to the overall decline in high school graduation and the associated social and economic hardship that accompanies an ineffective education. Students at risk, such as those with learning disabilities, will be most vulnerable and dropout rates will increase as they have in states that have adopted graduation exit exams." Letter from Learning Disabilities Association of Pennsylvania (LDAP) to Senate Education Chairman Jeff Piccola

The Association was surprised by the announcement to move forward with this proposal because progress was being made by the state educational groups and the State Board of Education towards an acceptable solution. To suddenly stop discussions and move forward because the state teachers' association has no objections does create concern regarding how the process will move forward. The Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (PAESSP)

"The PSSA was designed to identify kids who are not proficient, so why do we need another set of tests?"
Katherine Pettiss, Great Valley School Board.

"Why would we invest millions into an initiative only to have to scrap it for national standards, national curriculum, and a national assessment which is in the works at the federal level?"
Kim Geyer, Mars School District

"Although the latest proposal contains language suggesting that local districts may use their own 'validated' local assessments with the state paying 50 percent of the cost of validation, none of the allocated costs in the \$201 million of contracts executed to date include a provision for validation." South Hills Area School Districts Association letter to the Senate

“While it advances the discussion, it should not be the final answer...Administrators are also concerned that, under the proposal, some students will get NO credit for the knowledge they can demonstrate on the final exam if they score 'below basic.' This is the effect of giving low performing students a 'zero' on the final exam,”
Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators

My heartfelt frustration as an educator is the randomness of these proposed mandates, accompanied by the suggestion that "testing" will be the answer to improving education and our children's' ability to "compete in a global economy." These decisions are AFFECTING CHILDREN and somehow, it appears that we have lost sight that these children are human beings and decisions are being made that have a tremendous effect on their lives. Dr. Linda Hippert (Allegheny Intermediate Unit #3)

“More than two decades of evidence demonstrates that high school graduation tests are an expensive and ineffective prescription for what ails public education. In fact, they most damage the very groups proponents claim will help.” Fairtest/National Center for Fair and Open Testing

“We endeavor to prevent: higher drop-out rates, negative academic outcomes, especially for low-income and minority students; a decrease in teaching higher-level thinking skills; extraordinary frustration for parents of special needs students; decreased attention paid to gifted students; roadblocks for career and technical school students; too much test!” Coalition for Effective and Responsible Testing

The Senate voted 49-1 "to make it clear to the Pennsylvania Department of Education that there can be no exams without legislative approval." Senator Andy Dinniman (Chester County Daily Local News (July 5, 2009)

“Politics and a rotten economy may have done what common sense could not: Stopped the Rendell administration from proceeding with plans to develop graduation competency examinations for high school students in Pennsylvania.” Beaver County/Allegheny County Times Editorial (June 26, 2009)

The state board of education has undergone a barrage of criticism since it announced plans last year to develop 10 subject-specific end-of-course exams that would be tied to high school graduation. Hundreds of school boards - including quite a few in Bucks and Montgomery counties - passed resolutions opposing the original test proposal. School districts argued the plan would burden students with too many days of testing, "dumb down" their curriculum and take away local control. Philly Burbs (June 24, 2009)

“In Pennsylvania, the Keystone Exam proposal continues to surface many complex issues. The costs of the exams and the alternative pathways for students who fail the tests are not fully understood here in Pennsylvania. The costs go way beyond developing and implementing the tests.” Dr. Patricia Green, Superintendent of North Allegheny SD

“The imposition of the requirements of NCLB on a state, such as Pennsylvania, without sufficient federal funding to meet these requirements is, in effect, an unfunded mandate... Pennsylvania’s concerns about the inadequacy of the funding for NCLB should not be construed as opposition to innovation and improvement, but rather, as a belief that states must be able to use state funds to invest in educational programs that they regard as most beneficial to their children... Shifting the federal government’s burden to the states will prove ineffective because the state’s ability to perform its educational obligation will be severely compromised...PA’s Constitution textually commits educational funding to the General Assembly. As a result, educational funding is determined through a legislative process in which the General Assembly must consider various fiscal and educational priorities. ” Governor Ed Rendell