

From: feedback@pahouse.net [feedback@pahouse.net]
Sent: Tuesday, February 17, 2015 7:58 AM
To: Rep. Steve Santarsiero
Subject: PA House Contact - Keystone exams

Dear Representative Santarsiero,

I am a math teacher with 24 years experience. I have taught in Maryland near the inner city, and I now teach in rural Pennsylvania. I have seen educational policies come and go and come back again. In the past, I have never really paid that much attention to the politics of it all, but this time, I feel that I must speak out.

I can't really speak for the other Keystone exams, but I can speak to the Algebra 1 exam since that is what I teach. This exam covers way too much material in one year and does force us to forego projects and other useful educational tools to focus on test preparation. My students have been successful because of all of the extra work that they have put in. We offer many, many before and after school help hours. We even offer evening math labs to help them prepare. These are well attended and without all of these extra hours, we would not be so successful. I do not think that most students would be able to pass the exam with just the hours we have in class to teach the material. Even with all of these concerns, the test is passable for most students. Perhaps the score needed to pass needs to be adjusted, the amount of material covered on the test needs to be less, or how remediation should be done needs to be looked at again, but I am not convinced that doing away with the test as a graduation requirement is the right answer.

However, if it is decided that the student does not need to pass the test to graduate, I feel that it would be very unfair to continue to have my evaluation based on it. When this test was first given as a pilot a few years ago, I taught the same way, offered the same help etc., and only about 50% of the students passed it because they, quite frankly, knew they didn't have to pass it to graduate so didn't really put forth effort and didn't care. Last year, I only had 7 students fail. Four of those students only missed passing by a question so they came back and worked with me this fall and retook it in January. Mifflin County Junior High was 5th in the state last year for math growth, which shows that we are doing something right. However, we have not changed what we do. Rather, the kids now know that they have to pass this test to graduate and are working hard to do so. If they work hard, good things happen. They learn algebra!

I do not know what the answer is. I only know that it is unfair that I would be rated a bad teacher one year and a great teacher the next using the same test as an evaluation tool when the only thing that has changed is whether the kids need to pass it or not. I also look at the data and see that the kids are growing mathematically so I wonder how can this be a bad thing. I know that parents of IEP kids are concerned and this must be addressed. All that I am asking is please be fair to both students and teachers when considering this topic.

Thank you for your consideration,

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