

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Too much testing

Last week, the Pottstown School Board unanimously passed a resolution urging the Pennsylvania Department of Education to substantially decrease high-stakes standardized testing in our schools.

Standardized tests are a valid measure of some kinds of achievement, but not others.

Vitally important qualities such as the ability to think creatively, work with others, and solve problems in real world situations cannot be quantified in a paper or computer exam.

Courage, decency, honesty, compassion — all are essential to a life well lived, but none will show up on a standardized test.

Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is fully immersed in the nationwide testing obsession that has reduced learning to a narrow set of goals reflected in multiple choice questions.

Everything our schools do is focused on PSSA test scores published annually by the Department of Education and trumpeted in the media like major league baseball standings.

Each year, even our elementary school students, starting in third grade, have to endure three weeks — three weeks! — of standardized tests

in the spring. And that doesn't include tedious hours of test preparation.

As President Obama says, "One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching the test because then you're not learning about the world, you're not learning about different cultures, you're not learning about science, you're not learning about math.

"All you're learning about is how to fill out a little bubble on an exam and little tricks that you need to do to take a test..."

"Young people do well in stuff that they're interested in. They're not going to do as well if it's boring."

And it's so demoralizing!

So what does the Pottstown School Board do, besides pass resolutions?

First, we need to decide if we will fixate on test results. Obviously, we must give required state tests, but we don't have to make them the focus of our curriculum.

Second, we should ask our teachers and principals for ways to make our educational program more child-centered and less test-centered.

This will be a good topic for our policy and curriculum committee meetings 6 tonight in the school district administration building (open to the public).



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

