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Alternative Funding

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TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 1858

By Dr. Paul M. Healey, Executive Director
PA Principals Association

The Pennsylvania Principals Association wholeheartedly supports the notion that students have an understanding of basic government and be engaged citizens. Our schools continue to provide instruction through relevant and meaningful courses throughout the K-12 years. In fact, Chapter 4 outlines the academic standards for Civics and Government and specifically describes what students should know and be able to do in four areas:

- Principles and Documents of Government
- Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship
- How Government Works
- How International Relationships Function

These four areas are further expanded by outlining what students should master by the end of Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12.

HB 1858 proposes to require all high school students to take and pass a civics test as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma or a GED equivalency. The PA Principals Association joins the other educational organizations in opposing HB 1858 for the following reasons:

- To suggest that taking one civics test makes a person knowledgeable about government and a productive and engaged citizen is severely flawed. Our students receive instruction starting in their elementary years and the concepts are built upon throughout their school career. Therefore, instead of just one test, students demonstrate that they know and understand the concepts in these areas on an ongoing basis through classroom discussions, projects, course quizzes and tests, course grades, and school and community activities.
- We already have many hours of lost instructional time due to testing, so to add another required test is counterproductive. In fact, under the new ESSA law, states have been given the flexibility to take a hard look at their assessments and make some changes. PDE is currently looking at the assessment system and stakeholders have expressed a desire to change the amount of testing currently being conducted in our schools.
- Our PA standards have been implemented to require more rigor in our curriculum and for students to engage in deep thinking and higher order skills. The 100 multiple choice civics test requires rote memorization of facts and does not represent an individual's true understanding of any of the concepts being measured but merely measures the individual's ability to remember and regurgitate facts that are now easily accessible on any handheld device. Therefore, the proposed test serves no legitimate purpose as our courses are far richer in both depth and breadth in the areas of civics and government.

Our mission is to ensure a quality education for every child by comprehensively supporting the educational leaders of our schools.

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Affiliate of the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals
Serving Principals, Assistant Principals and Other Educational Leaders

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- Do we really mean to suggest that we are not going to let a student graduate unless they pass a civics test?
- What about the student who is not good at taking tests?
- What about the student that has test anxiety?
- What about the readability level of the test and the student?
- What about the student or students who intentionally see the test as a waste of time and intentionally blow it off?
- Why do we need a test when a student already has other ways to show mastery of the concepts throughout their school career?
- And why do we think that just passing a civics test makes a person a productive citizen?

If we are really serious about making sure individuals are productive citizens, then we should be examining, not a score on a test, but rather looking at other indicators such as; voting demographics, volunteerism, community service projects, mission trips, etc.

Instead of penalizing our students with another test, we should be applauding our young people who are doing great things on behalf of their communities through helping senior citizens, collecting and distributing food and clothing for the needy, building homes for those in need, and for responding to other calls to action both in our own country and abroad.

Let us not have a knee-jerk reaction to a problem that does not exist in Pennsylvania.

Let us not be influenced by a group that does not understand our curriculum or our citizens.

And let us not impose another mandate on our schools that is truly not warranted.

Thank you for your time and please do not let HB 1858 go forward.

Sincerely,
Paul M. Healey, Ph.D.
Executive Director, PA Principals Association

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