

## **The Torsella “Compromise”**

### **GCA/Keystone Exams**

7/9/2009

**The GCA Contract awarded by PDE on 5/14/09 is still effective regardless of whether the Torsella Compromise is adopted or not and the costs will remain \$201.1 million.**

- The Torsella Compromise claims to “reduce the cost by \$40 million”, when in reality the cost will not be reduced, but will remain \$201.1 million
  - It will actually phase out the PSSA and shift its funding (\$40m) into GCA development.
  - \$201.1 million contract will be funded by tax dollars.

**Exams are still voluntary, but will replace federally mandated PSSA**

- School Districts will be required to administer the 4 of the Exams
  - 3 Federally Required Exams – Math, Reading and Science
  - State Required Exam - Writing
- **Validated** local assessments can be used to test students in the other 6 areas required by the state

**Reduces Testing Time and Increases Instructional Time**

- The Torsella Compromise claims that test-prep time will be reduced by 60% when PSSA is eliminated
  - This is only true if school districts also eliminate midterms and finals; however
  - Test-prep time will also increase due to new additions and higher stakes:
    - 6 out of 10 must be passed
    - Counts as 33% of final grade
- The PSSA scores measure Average Yearly Progress and target schools for accountability
- The GCA measures student “proficiency” and targets students by threatening denial of diploma
  - Individual Students have much more at stake and increase test-prep time is critical

**PDE is required to provide, for voluntary use, model curriculum, diagnostic assessments and related instructional resources that are aligned with state academic standards in each of the courses and content areas assessed by the Keystone Exams**

- Schools are required to have curriculum that is aligned with assessments if it is part of a student’s grade; as determined by court rulings
  - If schools are using the Keystone exam they are required to have the supporting curriculum
  - If schools are using a combination of Keystone Exams and Local Assessments they must have a combination of curriculum, also

**Exams are not the sole factor in determining graduation**

- If a student scores 100% in all HS classes and fails the GCA, they can still graduate with 67%
- If a student scores 100% on GCAs, they only need 32% in the rest of their HS courses

**Testing Out – Smaller Class Sizes**

- Students who score advanced level on an exam prior to taking the course may be granted credit and not have to take the course
- Torsella Example: 8<sup>th</sup> Graders can test out of Algebra I since national studies show a large majority are extremely proficient, however
  - A very small percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> graders are offered Algebra I
  - New classes will have to be added for Algebra II even though schools are not providing Algebra I sufficiently
- Testing out may reduce class size, but it may also increase the number of classes and teaching staff needed.

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### **Alternative Pathways: Students who cannot pass required courses or the GCAs may be able to participate in a project-based assessment**

- Will provide another option for students who do not perform well in testing environments
- Administered Locally
- Scored Regionally
  - Loss of local control
  - Highly expensive
- Regional scoring of course work is extremely expensive and controversial.

### **Torsella Compromise – Cost Breakdown (6 year period)**

Original Cost of the PSSA	\$150,908,972
Savings available from PSSA phase out	\$15,000,000
Proposed Cost of GCA (tests only)	\$126,194,829
Savings from replacing PSSA	\$24,744,143
Total Savings/Funds Available	\$39,744,143
• <i>PSSA line item funding to be shifted into GCA</i>	

### **Total Contract Cost Breakdown (6 year period)**

Total Contract Cost	\$201,100,000
Shifted PSSA Funding	\$39,744,143
Remaining funds	\$161,355,857

### **Costs Not Considered**

Alternative Pathways – Regional Scoring in VA is \$500,000 for 5 days  
Testing Out – Addition of Classrooms and Teaching Staff  
Combination of GCA and Local Assessment – Tests and Curriculum  
Local Assessment Validation – 50% funded by PDE and 50% locally, but no total cost figure  
Students denied diploma – Returning and Drop-out Students