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Legislative Office  
#224 Legislative Building  
10800 97 Ave  
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January 15, 2010

The Honourable Minister Hancock:

Re: Grade 12 Diploma Examinations

I am writing to you on behalf of the parents of students at Springbank Community High School regarding the recent changes to the format of some of the Grade 12 Diploma exams, specifically the math and science exams. Our specific concerns relate to the fact that these exams no longer contain written components, making the format of such exams entirely multiple choice.

The sudden announcement of these changes during the last summer vacation, without accompanying context and rationale, has left parents, teachers, and students largely confused and uninformed about these changes.

We wish to acknowledge the potential of standardized assessment to improve teacher practice and student learning and we are aware that such standardized assessments can provide valuable information in helping Alberta Learning judge its educational standards and the quality of its educational programs. It is also not our intent to position ourselves as critics of large scale assessments, but rather to ensure that the methodology of the assessment recognizes and is considerate of the high-stake consequences for students. We believe that the ultimate value of standardized assessment depends on its ability to foster student learning and support, not impede, student options.

In addition, we acknowledge the effects of the current economic recession and how such changes in testing format can save the government significant funds. However, in this respect we feel that the weighting of such exams towards the students' final graduation grade should be reduced to reflect the nature of the testing. Instead, we feel that an "in class" written exam should be introduced which could be standardized through out the province, with the assistance of Alberta Education and marked by each individual school on a standardized grading plan. This would ensure that all students are graded equally and marks are included for process and critical thinking as well as end result.

We still believe that multiple choice testing is an inexpensive and efficient way to check on factual knowledge and well defined skills. However, we question the degree to which the multiple choice format is useful for assessing the process involved in critical and higher order thinking. We believe it is extremely important to measure the ability to evaluate information and to apply knowledge to complex problems.

We kindly request your attention to our concerns regarding the above issue, in particular the change in processes adopted when time is limited, the recognition of the consequences to students following such program changes; the requirement to have proactive procedures in place to deal with poor results following program changes and the change to a multiple choice format,

Finally, we believe that standardized testing through diploma examinations has the capacity to enhance or disadvantage our children in their pursuit of university placements, particularly in relation to their Canadian and international counterparts. In this respect we are mostly concerned in ensuring that these examinations provide advantage (and not disadvantage) to our children as they move forward to compete in a global environment.

We thank you for your consideration and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Wendy Juergens  
Chair, SCHS Parent Council  
Springbank Community High School

cc. John Rymer  
Executive Director  
Learner Assessment

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