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Senate of Pennsylvania

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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Mr. Karl Girton, Chairman
State Board of Education
First Floor, 333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-7306

RE: Proposed 22 Pa. Code, Chapter 4, Appendix C (academic standards)
Regulation #6-275

Dear Chairman Girton:

As Democratic Chair of the Senate Education Committee, I am submitting a one-page summary of important concerns raised by educators regarding the proposed Chapter 4 academic standards for social studies (attached). The concerns address issues related to *the number of standards and instructional feasibility, structure, emphasis and contextual relevance, and teacher certification*. Please give utmost consideration to these concerns in the course of the Board's deliberation on the proposed standards.

Respectfully Yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Allyson Y. Schwartz".

Senator Allyson Schwartz,
Democratic Chair, Senate Education Committee

Cc: Senator James J. Rhoades, Chairman, Senate Education Committee

Number of standards & Instructional feasibility

Educators consistently raised concerns that there are too many standards and that the standards are too detailed in their requirements. With 17 categories and over 100 content standards at each level, the proposed regulations would be unrealistic and unworkable for teachers, especially with an average of 60 minutes a week for social studies instruction in elementary education. Teachers would have to rush through the curriculum with very little in-depth analysis (especially with regard to the history standards). This may also result in the near exclusive use of lecturing verses other more interactive and interesting means of educating students. Ultimately, the standards would not allow any instructional flexibility to accommodate different classrooms and individual student needs.

Structure

Educators commented extensively on the structure of the proposed standards as well. They emphasized that the subject of social studies transcend the areas of civics and government, economics, geography, and history. According to the National Council for Social Studies' expectations for state standards, curriculum in social studies are to help students "develop core basic knowledge and ways of thinking drawn from many academic disciplines, learn how to analyze their own and others' opinions on important issues, and become motivated to participate in civic and community life as active, informed citizens."

Instead, the proposed standards create four fragmented disciplines with standards that may necessitate full courses to implement the requirements. Educators believe that the standards ought to be based around themes or enduring understandings including core ideas, conflicts, key questions, key persons, etc. For example, the history standards would be based around important events such as the American Revolution or WWII in history that transcend the standards' proposed separation of PA History, American History, and World History.

Emphasis and contextual relevance

Educators are concerned that the standards emphasize rote memorization (i.e., memorizing multiple versions of the Pennsylvania Constitution) rather than the understanding of larger social ideas in their context of significance. This may in effect turn the classroom into a 'supermarket of facts' rather than a multi-dimensional learning environment. Further emphasis is needed on predominant themes such as civil rights and political developments to prepare students to work toward the common good in the Commonwealth.

One educator raised the concern that because sociology, psychology, or anthropology are not required in the standards, few districts will offer courses in these subjects.

Teacher certification

Educators raised concern with the proposed separation of citizenship and social science certification, particularly that this will preclude the development of well-rounded teachers and limit districts in curricular offerings. Furthermore, because schools are required to offer citizenship education, a citizenship certification may represent the most employment opportunities for prospective teachers and few college students will likely continue for dual certification in social science. Alternatively, it was recommended that the Board at least consider requiring social studies certification through continuing education for these teachers, achieving certification in three to five years.