

RAPHAEL MUSTO

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STATE EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT BOARD

December 20, 2005

James M. Smith
IRRC, 14th Floor
Harristown 2
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Re: #s6-293 and 6-295

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2005 DEC 20 PM 12:20
REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Jim:

Enclosed please find a copy of a letter Senator Musto has submitted to the State Board concerning the above-noted Proposed Regulations. This letter is also submitted to you for IRRC review.

Thank you for your attention.

Very truly yours,

Marilyn C. Zilli, Esq.
Executive Director, Senate
Minority Education Committee

Enclosure

RAPHAEL MUSTO

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STATE EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT BOARD

December 16, 2005

Karl Girton, Chair
State Board of Education
1st Floor, Harrisstown 2
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Re: Code amendments

Dear Chairman Girton:

I write to you concerning the changes to Chapters 4 and 49 being proposed by the Board, specifically the changes proposed in Chapter 4, Sections 4.52(c) (relating to local assessment system) and Sections 4.11, 4.12(a)(8) and 4.25 (relating to world languages) (Proposed Regulation #6-295) and in Chapter 49 (concerning certification generally (Proposed Regulation #6-293) but also the proposed new requirements for certifying teachers of Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education and Special Education).

I have received substantial correspondence about these proposed changes, as I know the Board has also. I believe many of the concerns raised in this correspondence are legitimate and must be given consideration by the Board and result in amendment, or even withdrawal, of some of their proposals. I know that discussion continues on these proposals. As part of this discussion, I would ask the Board to consider the following:

1. Whether the data sufficiently supports the accuracy of the PSSA as an evaluation tool and a predictor of student success to justify its use for all purposes being assigned to it, and indeed an enlargement of these uses, to the exclusion of local assessment tools. Even the HumRRO analysis provided to the Board raises doubts about the external validity of the PSSA, showing that most students who "failed" the PSSA enrolled in nonremedial college courses in the same subject area. More study of the PSSA, and the cut scores proposed, should be undertaken before further reliance on this assessment tool is recommended.

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2. (a) Whether its requirement that all schools offer instruction in at least two world languages while at the same time refusing to require all students to pursue world language study is contradictory and will create impossible personnel decisions for school districts (they must have teachers available to teacher courses which then students do not need to take); (b) whether its refusal to require all students to study world languages will simply perpetuate the alleged shortage of world language teachers (if students are not required to study world languages, how will a pool of instructors to teach world languages be developed/maintained) and whether the Board's argument that the lack of world language teachers supports its decision not to require all students to study world languages is therefore circular; (c) whether the data proves that there actually is a shortage of world language teachers; (d) how the Board intends to resolve the conflict which its proposal creates with the proposals of the Governor's Project 720 concerning "core curriculum" and world language study; (e) given the data supporting that world language study enhances a student's abilities in many other subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics, how it can be proposed that *considering the importance of student proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics*, it is *questionable* whether students need gain proficiency in a second language as well; (f) how the Board's position can be rectified with the Administration's insistence that we produce students and workers prepared to join the global economy.

3. (a) My office is aware of several cases in which students have repeatedly failed one portion of the PRAXIS exam. I believe the Department and the Board need to review this test with ETS (as my staff is attempting to do) to determine why this is the case and whether a test other than the PRAXIS should be adopted. We have also received complaints from students with out of state training not being able to quickly and efficiently gain certification in Pennsylvania, despite our claim of reciprocity. In both of these cases, some sort of conditional certification should be considered. (b) As the Board continues to work to draft its proposal to restructure early childhood, elementary education and special education preparation and certification programs, that the concerns of teacher preparatory institutions be given careful consideration. Specifically the Board should review whether the amended proposal of Chairman Fogarty, which would require all special education majors to be dual certified in special education and a content area (either early childhood education or elementary education) will create the same problems as the original proposal, which would require all early childhood and elementary teachers to be certified in special education.

Thank you for your attention and consideration of these important matters. I will follow the Board's action in these areas.

Sincerely,



RAPHAEL J. MUSTO