



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

December 2, 2005

Mr. David A. Mowery
Superintendent
Gettysburg Area School District
900 Biglerville Road
Gettysburg, PA 17325-8007

Dear Mr. Mowery:

Thank you for your letter of November 30, 2005 on proposed 22 Pa. Code, Chapter 4, academic standards and assessments.

Your letter is considered as official public comment and is being shared with all members of the Board. Pursuant to the provisions of the Regulatory Review Act, copies of your comments are also being provided to the Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) and the Chairpersons of the House and Senate Education Committees.

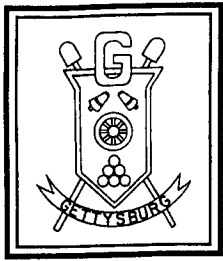
The regulatory Review Act provides that information on proposed and final regulations be mailed to public commentators at their request. If you would like to receive the final-form of these regulations when they are finalized, please make your request to me in writing at the address printed below.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jim Buckheit".

Jim Buckheit
Executive Director

cc: Members of the State Board
Senator Rhoades
Senator Musto
Representatives Stairs
Representatives Roebuck
IRRC



GETTYSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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November 30, 2005

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Mr. Jim Buckheit
Executive Director
State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Mr. Buckheit:

The purpose of this letter is to provide comments from our school district on the revisions to Chapter 4 regulations that were published on November 7, 2005. These comments are specifically based on proposed changes to § 4.52 (c).

Proposed changes to this section include a narrowed set of options for local assessments. Other than the option of portfolio assessment, districts are restricted in the number of opportunities that can be offered to students. The terms *nationally recognized standardized* and *locally developed standardized assessment* imply that students will have only one opportunity to participate in a retest. To base the ability of students to successfully complete a secondary education based on scores that represent only a single snapshot of student performance and ability is doing a disservice to students who have varying needs. This type of evaluation clearly places ESL and Special Education students at a distinct disadvantage.

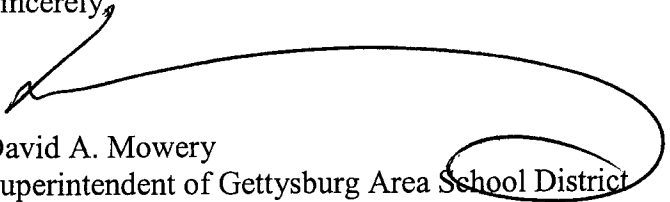
Further, the implication that having a graduation rate that is higher than the number of students who scored proficient on the 11th grade PSSA signals that districts are doing something wrong flies in the face of the belief that schools should view students as individuals. We contend that it instead signals districts are doing many things right. Public schools are obligated to provide an appropriate education to all students. That includes differentiating instruction and assessment in ways that support learning and scaffold student success. Rather than encouraging schools to utilize strategies to keep students from dropping out of high school, focusing on "once and done" assessment choices creates an atmosphere where students may give up on graduating and schools may give up on preventing that from happening. In short, we believe this proposal will lead to increased drop-out rates. Evidence from other states point to the ineffectiveness of a graduation test.

We would instead encourage the Board to continue to allow districts the local control to educate all students in the way that meets their need and to identify and utilize the high

quality methods of certifying that students have met the requirements of the graduation plan that are part of each district's Board Policy. A district should be required to verify that the local assessment identified in their strategic plan is comparable to the State assessment and that it is being administered correctly and consistently. If able to do so, their efforts to increase the number of students who were not successful on the PSSA but were remediated and supported by their local school so that they were able to meet criteria for graduation, should be lauded, not considered suspect. Helping students be successful and meet their full potential is certainly the true intent of No Child Left Behind. Efforts of districts attempting to meet this intent should be viewed as a standard of practice rather than a symptom of non-compliance.

We urge the Board to reconsider the negative correlation drawn between non-proficiency on the 11th grade PSSA and the ability to improve and be successful in obtaining high school graduation as evidenced by the wording of the revision.

Sincerely,


David A. Mowery
Superintendent of Gettysburg Area School District