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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



Senate of Pennsylvania

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YORK COUNTY

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March 3, 2006

The Honorable Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126

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MAR 07 2006
SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Dear Dr. Zahorchak: *Secretary*

I am writing to you in regards to proposed changes to Chapter 339 (Vocational Education) of Title 22 of the Pennsylvania Code. As Chairman of the Senate Agriculture & Rural Affairs Committee I am deeply concerned that enforcing a 360 hour requirement for reimbursement for vocational agricultural education will have an adverse impact on these programs in Pennsylvania high schools, which serve as an important venue for agriculture education in our Commonwealth. I am convinced that many of the difficulties facing the agricultural community today could be avoided with better education of the general public about the agricultural sciences.

As I am sure you are aware, there are approximately four times the number of vocational agriculture education programs being taught in a comprehensive high school setting as there are in career and technical centers. It will be extremely difficult for the students enrolled in these courses in a comprehensive high school setting, over 41,000 individuals, to meet a 360 hour requirement (which equates to approximately 2 hours a day) particularly if they are enrolled in college preparation courses.

In Pennsylvania, the General Assembly and the Administration have made a concerted effort to engage our younger generation in agriculture – not just our future farmers but our future agribusiness leaders, food scientists, landscape architects, wine makers, lumber manufacturers, veterinarians, beekeepers, nurserymen and women, food processors (just to name a few examples) and ultimately, our future consumers.

In 2004 the legislature passed a bill that extends the Agriculture Education Loan Forgiveness program, administered through the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, to teachers of agriculture education. Governor Rendell signed this bill, which received unanimous support by the legislature, because it was recognized that the vast majority of our citizenry no longer has direct ties or a clear understanding of

*Dr. Lee Bunker
to draft reply
copies:
Diane
Tom*

agriculture as a business, how it affects our daily lives and that this fact was adversely affecting the Commonwealth. It is hoped that this program will serve as an incentive for more individuals to choose careers in agriculture education in our public schools.

Additionally, Governor Rendell just announced the "largest commitment ever" to farmland preservation, the State Farmland Preservation Board releasing close to \$150 million along with county matching funds to help farmers protect vital agricultural land for future generations. Without the human infrastructure, which is developed through the education of our youth, the physical farmland will be of no use and the Commonwealth will have wasted millions of dollars.

Currently I am developing a program I have termed the "Farms to Schools" initiative, which is a new program that educates young children and their families about healthy diets and the importance of eating fruits and vegetables while supporting local agriculture. In my proposal, the program will supply young, school-aged children with locally-grown fruit and vegetable snacks and teachers with educational resources. Field trips are made to local farms to educate the children, their families and teachers about the source of their food and importance of agriculture in their daily lives. I would welcome your input on this program.

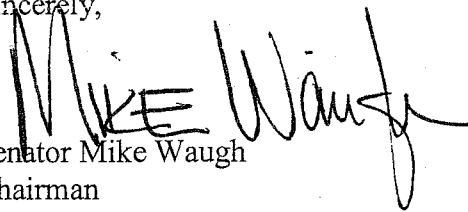
In the Governor's 2006-2007 proposed budget, nearly \$320,000 is earmarked specifically for youth in agriculture programs just in the Department of Agriculture's budget. The Department also launched a website called MarketPlaceForTheMind.com (with help from the Department of Education) that serves as a resource of agricultural educational materials aligned to Pennsylvania Academic Standards. Each year the Department hosts a Farm City Day during the Keystone International Livestock, Exposition, an AgVenture program where students experience a hands-on approach to the agricultural sciences and Secretary Wolff and his staff make many direct school visits, encouraging children to learn about agriculture. It is vital to encourage an early interest and understanding of agriculture that can be further cultivated in the later, high school years.

I bring these few examples to your attention to highlight the importance with which agriculture, and the education of our youth about agriculture, is viewed in Pennsylvania. Establishing a 360 hour requirement for schools to receive reimbursement for agricultural education programs will, I believe, serve to eliminate the vast majority of these programs from our high schools across Pennsylvania. If a school district has to make a choice between keeping an agricultural sciences program or any other program, you can bet that in many cases the support will be broader for other programs. As, many times, high school is the last chance many of these individuals will have to receive education in the agricultural sciences (even for those going onto post-secondary education), I believe we should be encouraging more, not less, opportunity for such an experience at this level.

An alternative to requiring a 360 hour minimum could be to modify the reimbursement formula for Career and Technical Education to reflect a sliding scale of reimbursement for the amount of contact time a student has in their vocational area, an idea put forth by the Pennsylvania Association of Agricultural Educators. The PAAE made several other pertinent suggestions and I encourage you to consider them.

I thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns regarding the Department's proposed revisions to Chapter 339. Should you have any questions or wish to meet, please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Waugh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "M" and "W".

Senator Mike Waugh
Chairman
Agriculture & Rural Affairs

MW/kje



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
333 MARKET STREET
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17126-0333

SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

April 14, 2006

717-787-5820 (TEL)
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717-783-8445 (TTY)

The Honorable Mike Waugh
Member, Senate of Pennsylvania
Senate Box 203028
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senator Waugh:

Thank you very much for expressing your concerns regarding the standards under review in Chapter 339. It is imperative that the Department of Education (PDE) receive feedback when considering the implementation of regulations and standards. We appreciate your commitment to Career and Technical Education (CTE) and look forward to continued efforts in serving the students of Pennsylvania.

In regard to the 360 hour requirement under Chapter 339, the Bureau of Career and Technical Education (BCTE) has been thoroughly reviewing how to best serve pupils, and how this can best benefit the needs of business and industry. A study, by Jobs For The Future, has given us guidelines for establishing best practices statewide. This study has found that along with academic rigor, Pennsylvania should align CTE with industry relevant training and standards. Sufficient time must be spent in the CTE classroom to ensure we are meeting these standards. We are considering all options in the effort to strengthen CTE programming, and also improve math and communication skills. In fact, current school improvement initiatives require integrating academic standards into CTE programs. It is not our intention to eliminate any CTE program, rather to provide resources for strengthening curriculum content and improving student occupational and academic achievement.

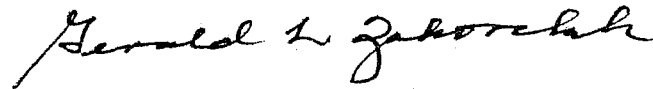
Vocational subsidy is based on approved program status and payment is based on Average Daily Membership of CTE students. CTE students are those seeking occupational goals related to the approved program as defined by Classification of Instructional Program and occupational analysis. This includes all approved Agriculture Education programs. The School Code does not include instructional hours as a part of the subsidy formula. PDE is considering all options in relation to this matter to ensure available resources are best utilized.

I appreciate the information you provided on the "Farms to Schools" program that you are currently developing. It is an excellent way to inform students about the benefits of good nutrition, while at the same time allowing them to explore all the agriculture industry has to offer as a career field.

I would like to direct you to our Agriculture Specialist in the Bureau of Career and Technical Education, Mr. Chris Weller. He can be reached at 717-783-6957 or cweller@sate.pa.us. Mr. Weller works closely with the Department of Agriculture and would be happy to assist in any way.

Quality career and technical education programs require a continuing commitment and dedication of schools, legislators, business and industry and the Department of Education. Bureau of Career and Technical Education stands ready to provide the needed resources and support. Together, we can provide quality education for all students in Pennsylvania.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gerald L. Zahorchak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "G" and a long, sweeping underline.

Gerald L. Zahorchak, D.Ed.

cc: Diane Castelbouno, Deputy Secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Dr. Lee Burket, Director, Bureau of Career and Technical Education /