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September 30, 2009

Arthur Coccodrilli, Chairman  
Independent Regulatory Review Commission  
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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY  
COMMISSION  
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RECEIVED

RE: IRRC ISSUE # 2696  
State Board of Education Final-Form Reg. No. 006-312  
Chapter 4 Regulations – “Keystone Exams”

Dear Mr. Coccodrilli:

This letter is to oppose the State Board of Education (Board) Final-Form Regulation No. 006-312 which would revise the current Chapter 4 regulations and establish the “Keystone Exams”. Concerns about Regulation No. 006-312 include the failure of the State Board to clarify the cost of keystones, to address the adverse impact of the tests, or to demonstrate that Regulation No. 006-312 is reasonable and/ or necessary.

The cost of the final-form regulations to the state and to local education entities will adversely impact budgets. The actual cost of implementing these regulations is submerged. First, the mandated curriculum is not new. It is the course of study offered as college preparation at all high schools. The elements of Algebra, geometry, English, writing, and American government are constant. Curriculum exists for those courses. It is a waste of the tax payer’s money to spend hundreds of millions of dollars for materials that already exists. Curriculum in the sciences is in constant flux as new discoveries are made. Districts address these changes through local curriculum committee choices.

Secondly, as to the submerged costs, districts will have unfunded responsibilities for additional record keeping, additional remediation resources for students, realigned professional development, realigned use of personnel and facilities as well as the purchase of supplies. There is also the cost to the state for validation of these tests. This has not been identified.

The alternative to Keystone Exams is the continued use of the current PSSA, which, according to the Department of Education is functioning successfully. Districts are presently organized to execute this assessment which satisfies the NCLB mandate for testing. Systems to monitor students and provide remediation are in place. There is no reason to dismiss the current system and spend un-estimated hundreds of millions of dollars to replace it.

Moreover, there is the adverse impact of calculating an “end of course test” as 33.3% of a student’s final grade in a mandated course. The negative consequence of this is immeasurable. At the least, using this formula will lower the Quality Point Average of many students, jeopardizing their access to scholarship funds. This can cause great hardship for many families. As worst, this plan will result in pushing some young Pennsylvanians out of high school without a diploma. The drop out rate of high school students is a national crisis. The Keystone Exams plan will exacerbate that issue in our own state and cost billions in basic needs assistance such as rent, health insurance and food subsidies.

Final-Form Regulation No. 006-312 is unreasonable and unnecessary. All research in education reform informs us that the best use of education spending is for early childhood education, for small class sizes, and for well trained educators. End of high school testing does nothing to improve education. As Pennsylvanians, we want our taxes used to do what works to educate children. Tests do not educate.

Based upon the failure of the State Board to clarify its costs, to address the adverse impact of the tests, or to demonstrate that Regulation No. 006-312 is reasonable and/ or necessary, I ask that you vote to disapprove the final form regulations.

Yours truly,

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