



**FOX CHAPEL AREA
SCHOOL DISTRICT**

*"Excellence is not an act,
but a habit." - Aristotle*

2696

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

October 16, 2009

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Independent Regulatory Review Commission: IRRC #2696

Dear Members of the Commission:

I understand that the Keystone Exam issue will be addressed by you next Thursday. I have written previously concerning the strong opposition my Board of School Directors and the parents of the Fox Chapel Area School District have to creating this additional layer of testing for our students. We all believe in accountability and we believe that students must have specific skills to be successful beyond high school. We do not believe that ten additional tests will improve instruction or accountability measures in Fox Chapel.

Please consider the following points as you continue to discuss the Keystone Exams:

- Districts have worked very hard and have spent a significant amount of money to align their curriculum to the Standards.
- The PSSA and regulations surrounding No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have been challenging initiatives, but Pennsylvania schools have met the challenges and continue to make gains each year.
- The most important skills we can stress for student success are math and reading skills. The PSSA has been adopted as a test to measure success in these important areas. The development of the PSSA has been expensive. The work by school districts and the cost to make certain that all students have mastered the skills tested by the PSSA have been extensive.
- The move to the Keystone Exams will be disruptive as districts once again regroup to make the many changes in structure that will be necessary to prepare specifically for these exams.
- Many school districts throughout Pennsylvania already have a strong curriculum in place to address all subject areas. In addition, districts are networking with business and industry as they prepare together to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce. Local control of this process is important.
- Research indicates that tests like the Keystone Exams in other states have lead to a much higher dropout rate for students.
- Research indicates that it is instruction in the classroom that leads to the success of students. Money spent on professional development is money

well spent. We do not believe that money spent on creating an additional layer of testing is money well spent.

- Creating the Keystone Exams and all of the promised materials that will go with the exams will cost the state millions of dollars. Is this really the best way to spend taxpayer dollars? In addition, school districts will face many additional unfunded mandates as they work to implement the "plan" successfully.
- Pennsylvania has signed on as one of the states that will adopt a set of national standards in the near future. I assume that this will mean another change and another test. Do we know how this would affect the integrity of the Keystone Exams? Will those exams match the new national standards that haven't even been determined yet?
- Local school boards have reached out in opposition to the new tests. They have the pulse of their constituents and we ask that the desire of the taxpayers as expressed in the many resolutions that have been adopted and letters that have been written be honored.

School districts in Pennsylvania are focused on improving student achievement. We are one of the few states making significant progress. Please do not disrupt this progress by creating another layer that takes districts away from the objective of preparing all students for life and work in the 21st century.

Sincerely,



Anne E. Stephens, Ph.D.
Superintendent



**FOX CHAPEL AREA
SCHOOL DISTRICT**
COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE

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Re: IRRC #2696