

2696

October 15, 2009

The Honorable Arthur Coccodrilli
Chairman
Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

RECEIVED

2009 OCT 19 AM 10:56

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

RE: Final-Form Regulation 6-312 – Academic Standards and Assessment

Dear Chairman Coccodrilli:

I am writing to express my support for the State Board of Education's efforts to ensure that the students graduating from Pennsylvania's high schools are ready for the challenges of postsecondary education and/or careers. The final-rulemaking that you will consider on October 22nd would revise Chapter 4 (relating to Academic Standards and Assessments) to increase accountability to ensure that graduates are proficient in the Commonwealth's academic standards and provide much needed supports and tools to educators and students to enable success. I respectfully urge the Commission to approve the regulations.

As I said in my previous correspondence on the proposed version of these regulations, it is critical in today's global economy that our students graduate from high school prepared to go on to some kind of postsecondary education. Despite this clear and widely-accepted fact, data indicates that Pennsylvania's students are not adequately prepared for the rigors of life after high school. This places an unneeded burden on them, their families and potential employers. We know that 20,000 students who enrolled in community college or state-owned universities last year had to take remedial classes before they could take credit-bearing courses. This cost students, their families and taxpayers over \$26 million.

We also know that more than forty percent of the graduating class of 2008 was not proficient on the 11th grade PSSA or the 12th grade retake. Concerns with PSSA testing aside, it is a valid tool for measuring proficiency in academic standards. This means that young people continue to graduate without any real assurance that they have the academic background necessary to transition to the next chapter of their lives. It also means that those youth going on to postsecondary education, and their families, will have to take on the financial burden of remedial classes so they can take credit-bearing courses and start the path that will lead them to their careers.

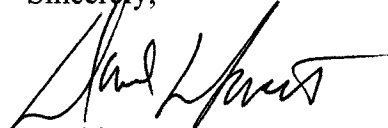
The final-form regulations represent the very essence of the word "compromise." The proposal will protect Pennsylvania's long history of local-control by providing a variety of options for determining graduation, including ten end-of-course assessments (Keystone Exams) and a local assessment that must be independently validated. The requirement for validation responds directly to a study performed by Penn State University's College of Education that shows only 18 school districts appropriately measure proficiency in math and reading for their students and uses these results accordingly to award diplomas.

The final rulemaking also provides Pennsylvania's students with the supports and tools for their academic progress. Educators will have access to voluntary model core curricula that is aligned to our academic standards. Teachers will be given diagnostic tools that will help identify struggling students (no later than sixth grade). Students will receive supplemental instruction (also called remediation) if they can't reach proficiency on a local assessment or in the courses where there are Keystone Exams. These supports and tools are key if we want children to be successful.

Again, I support the State Board of Education's proposal and I am gratified to see that Chairman Torsella took such care in working with members of the legislature, stakeholders and advocates to come up with a compromise on what was a very controversial issue. I respectfully urge you to approve the final regulations.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Sincerely,



David W. Sweet