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House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

Chairman, Education Committee
Intergovernmental Affairs Committee

Caucuses

PA Higher Education Assistance Agency, Member
Board of Directors

PA Historical and Museum Commission
Black History Advisory Committee, Member

PA Legislative Black Caucus, Member

August 5, 2009

Joseph Torsella, Chairman
State Board of Education
Pennsylvania Department of Education
First Floor, Harrisstown 2
333 Market Street
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Dear Joe:

I want to personally thank you for your efforts to forge a compromise regarding new regulations for academic standards, assessments and high school graduation. I believe that the compromise embodied in the final form Chapter 4 regulations promotes greater accountability of students meeting academic standards while preserving local control for school districts in determining high school graduation for their students.

I believe that these new regulations will result in better and more timely testing of our high school students and not more testing with the eventual elimination of the 11th grade PSSA assessments. As important as the new voluntary Keystone Exams, the Department of Education's development of model curricula and diagnostic tools for school districts will enhance local school district efforts to bring all students up to academic proficiency. These changes will result in more timely remedial efforts by school districts for those secondary school students in danger of falling behind or dropping out of school. Hopefully, the development of model curriculum and diagnostic tools will be extended to elementary education so that our children who need remedial assistance can receive it at an earlier age reducing the need for later remediation.

These new regulations will provide significant options for local school districts to choose the high school graduation assessment that best meet their student's needs. I particularly commend you on your efforts in forging this compromise to recognize that some students do not test well on standardizes tests. I fully support your compromise proposal to permit alternative pathways for demonstrating academic proficiency based upon the Maryland Bridge Plan for students who have difficulty learning and passing a standardized test. Additionally, I support the need addressed in the regulation to

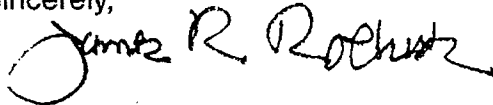
continue alternative measures of proficiency for special needs students with an individualized education program.

I also commend you on your efforts to broaden the number and quality of education stakeholders involved in the process of ensuring that the new Keystone Exams and local assessments are valid, accurate and fair measures of academic proficiency for all students.

While there will be some cost associated with the development of these Keystone Exams along with the accompanying model curriculum and diagnostic tools, I believe that these are wise investments. Given our state's financial difficulties, I am pleased to learn that there is an opportunity to seek federal Race to the Top funding to help offset costs associated with the exams. More importantly, due to these reforms, there should be a reduction in the number of high school graduates needing remediation in higher education. Presently, one in three high school graduates requires remediation in math or English in the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education universities and community colleges, costing taxpayers \$24 million annually. Better assessments and remediation in high schools will save taxpayers money for years to come.

Once again I want to thank you for your efforts on behalf of the children of our Commonwealth. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of Senator Piccola and Senator Dinniman in bringing education and government stakeholders together to work on this compromise. I encourage the State Board of Education to adopt the final form regulation, Reg. No. 006-312 that I believe will ensure that the Pennsylvania high school diploma provides graduates with the knowledge, skills and tools needed to compete in the 21st century and succeed in life.

Sincerely,



James R. Roebuck, Democratic Chairman
House Education Committee

cc: Jim Buckheit, Executive Director, State Board of Education
Dr. Gerald Zahorchak, Secretary of Education
Speaker Keith McCall, Speaker, House of Representatives
Representative Todd Eachus, Majority Leader, House of Representatives
Representative Dwight Evans, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
Senator Jeffrey Piccola, Chairman, Senate Education Committee
Senator Andrew Dinniman, Democratic Chairman, Senate Education Committee