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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

May 20, 2008

Ms. Karen Farmer White
State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg PA 17126-0333

Dear Ms. White:

Preparing all students for success in the 21st century requires strong, coordinated commitments by both the K-12 and higher education communities. With approximately 90,000 students at 24 campuses across the commonwealth, Penn State is making a significant, statewide effort to ready young people for the complexities and challenges of a global economy. This advantage of scale comes with a responsibility to support policies that will improve outcomes for all students.

Since 1999, the commonwealth has required high school students to demonstrate basic competencies in core subject areas prior to graduation. This is sound public policy. Students who leave high school without a foundation of basic skills face a steep climb to postsecondary success. Currently, high school students can demonstrate readiness in one of two ways: by passing the reading and math PSSA (the assessments Pennsylvania uses to comply with *No Child Left Behind*), or local tests that are aligned with state academic standards. However, no school districts use the first measure as a graduation requirement, and very few have developed the second.

The Department's *Changing High School Graduation Requirements* initiative expands the options for students to demonstrate readiness for college and career, and provides school districts with an array of supports to get the job done. The Pennsylvania Department of Education seeks to implement Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) in subjects like Algebra II and language arts. The GCAs could double as course final exams, and can provide students the chance to demonstrate their knowledge on high-quality, internationally-benchmarked measures. I believe this to be a worthwhile effort and encourage the Board of Education to support the Department's efforts to elevate the academic achievement and preparation of our students.

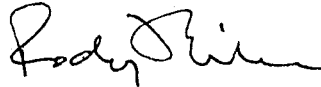
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It will also be important to make sure that high school students are on appropriate tracks for their intended fields of study in order to reduce any remediation needed once students enter college. The use of consistent measures of performance in basic skills needs to be combined with attention to helping students achieve the appropriate levels of competence in subjects such as mathematics, so as to be ready to enter associate or baccalaureate programs without the need for additional pre-college courses.

We all have a role to play in readying the next generation of students for higher expectations and global competition. Higher education can help bridge the secondary education and employer communities by better defining the needed preparation at each level and assisting each community to understand the challenges and needs of the other. As the state's land grant university, we're committed to doing all we can to give every young person in Pennsylvania the very best chance for a bright future. We're pleased to encourage the Department's efforts to develop meaningful graduation requirements.

Sincerely,



Rodney A. Erickson

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