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# CENTRAL COLUMBIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

4777 OLD BERWICK ROAD  
BLOOMSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17815-3515

2696

May 22, 2008

Jim Buckheit, Executive Director  
State Board of Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

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**PA. STATE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION**

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 MAY 29 AM 8:30  
 INDEPENDENT REGISTRY  
 REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I have served in public education for 24 years—10 as a mathematics teacher, six as Curriculum Coordinator, and eight as superintendent—I have worked with numerous school districts and intermediate units in developing local assessment systems under the current Chapter Four Regulations. In addition, I serve with business and industry leaders on the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board.

I wish to express my support for the proposed graduation requirements.

The academic standards movement has improved the clarity and quality of curriculum for all Pennsylvania public school students. That quality, that rigorous and relevant education, should be reflected in the attainment of a meaningful high school diploma. I believe that the proposed graduation requirements will serve as a valid and reliable measure for graduation level attainment of the core academic standards.

A quality assessment system provides multiple opportunities for students to show mastery (or in this case, proficiency). The current proposal does so. By providing opportunities to show proficiency through the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) exams, a valid and reliable local assessment, through Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses, through course-based competency examinations, or through Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) goals, the current proposal provides all students with numerous options.

A quality assessment system considers the needs of those students identified as "special needs". The current proposal does so. Providing for the attainment of graduation requirements through the IEP goals addresses the unique learning needs of a large population of students.

A quality assessment system should provide local teachers and school leaders the opportunity to provide locally-developed, valid and reliable assessments as alternatives to the PSSA. The current proposal does so.

A quality assessment system should be linked directly to the curriculum and instruction provided daily in classrooms. The current proposal, through the inclusion of graduation competency assessments, and with the development of model curricula, does so.

Finally, I believe that the State Board and the Department should reinforce a culture of academic attainment and importance. The high school diploma should be based on defined, measurable and observable academic performance to reinforce a culture of academic importance. The current proposal provides for that important intangible.

Providing students the motivator of connecting the diploma to performance is a good thing. Providing students with numerous methods and opportunities to show their academic ability is a very good thing.

I respectfully suggest that the State Board and the Department consider the following issues:

- 1) The logistics of the Graduation Competency Assessment system must be accessible, flexible, timely and reasonable. Feedback must be timely, accurate and formative. And, most importantly, the assessments must be reliable and valid for the minimum proficiency level in the applicable academic standards.
- 2) The targets on the GCAs and PSSA must be clearly defined, reliable, valid and static.
- 3) Schools choosing to develop valid and reliable local assessments should be encouraged to do so for the benefit of their students, without unreasonable and inconsistent parameters placed on those assessments. Local assessments proven valid in measuring the academic standards and meeting reliability measures should be utilized in assessing graduation competency and should not be held to a higher standard.

Finally, I suggest one further motivator for students and a method of linking the K-16 educational system provided by the Commonwealth. Those students who are proficient or higher on all components of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA should be granted automatic acceptance into the State System of Higher Education.

In conclusion, I offer my support for the proposed graduation requirements.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Harry C. Mathias, Jr.", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Harry C. Mathias, Jr.  
Superintendent