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MAY 29 2008

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Mr. Karl R. Girton
Pennsylvania State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. Girton:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board, which is incorporated as the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation (CPWDC), to express our support for the Board's proposed Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs).

The CPWDC is responsible for developing workforce policy and initiatives in nine counties (Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Snyder and Union). One of our key mandates is to coordinate and assist in building a comprehensive workforce system that can prepare, educate and train our labor force in those occupations that will support our region's key industries.

Like many Workforce Investment Boards in the Commonwealth, the CPWDC has dedicated significant resources toward the development of the future workforce – which are all students in the education system. This investment has led to increased partnerships between the region's 31 school districts and the CPWDC and the region's key industries. We believe that all of our youth are entitled to comprehensive career education and that all should be adequately prepared upon graduation from high school to enter the world of work and be prepared to pursue some level of post secondary education. For those students remaining in Central Pennsylvania, we believe it is critical that they have access to not only the necessary information on occupational opportunities but that they also possess key foundation skills upon leaving high school to enter these industries directly or upon the completion of post secondary education or credentialing. The CPWDC believes that the GCAs could provide the avenue to ensure that these youth are adequately prepared with those necessary foundation skills. Most importantly, the GCAs put into place a consistent standard for awarding a high school diploma that can be used with confidence by employers in the hiring process.

Once the GCAs are approved, the CPWDC stands ready to work with the State Board to assist in any way possible in the development of the assessment mechanisms. Our goal, which we believe the State Board shares, is to ensure that we assess our students in a manner that is clearly relevant to industry. We encourage the State Board to work closely with employers and post secondary educators to ensure that the assessment process aligns with the needs of the labor force and their ability to be employed or pursue higher levels of education.

The CPWDC understands and applauds the State Board's decision not to create a "high-stakes" testing mechanism but rather to develop a process that will allow for the GCAs to occur in a highly integrated fashion that could potentially incorporate existing exams that occur over the course of a four year high school career.

In summary, we believe that the GCAs are as much about the economic development and sustainability of our communities as they are about the social well being of our youth. The CPWDC commends the leadership of the State Board of Education for addressing a very critical

need within the Commonwealth and for the thoughtful and methodical approach that will be used to fully develop and implement these standards.

In addition to this letter I have enclosed two resolutions that support the GCAs. The first resolution was approved by the CPWDC Board of Directors and the second was passed by the CPWDC Local Elected Official Board which is comprised of County Commissioners from the region's nine counties. In addition, I have enclosed an Op Ed piece written by the CPWDC that was submitted to various local newspapers for publication.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



William C. Brock
Executive Director

CC: Dean Gorton, CPWDC Board of Directors Chair

enclosures

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BOARD OF DIRECTORS RESOLUTION

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA WIB ENDORSING
GRADUATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS

MAY 23, 2008

Whereas, the continued growth of Pennsylvania's economy depends on a well-educated workforce and citizenry; and

Whereas, the well-paying, high-skill jobs of the global economy demand employees who can demonstrate strong literacy, math/science and problem-solving skills; and

Whereas, gainful employment in today's workforce demands that students master the same essential skills regardless of whether they plan to enroll in college or immediately find a full-time job; and

Whereas, in 2006, 45% of Pennsylvania's high school graduates did not score proficient on the 11th grade reading and math PSSAs; and

Whereas, 26 states have or are currently adopting high school graduation requirements designed to better prepare students for college and high-skill careers; and

Whereas, members of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board served on the blue-ribbon Commission on College and Career Success, which recommended that Pennsylvania require all high school students to demonstrate proficiency in English, math, science and social studies in order to earn a high school diploma; therefore be it

Resolved, that the Central Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board strongly endorses giving the high school diploma meaning by requiring all students to show that they are career- and college-ready in English, math, science and social studies before they graduate; and be it further

Resolved, that the State Board of Education should adopt a requirement that students demonstrate proficiency in these core subjects by passing state assessments in order to earn a high school diploma; and be it further

Resolved, that the Commonwealth must also provide the necessary tools and resources to support students and schools in meeting these real-world expectations for college- and career-readiness, before making any tests mandatory for graduation.

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REVIEW COMMISSION

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL BOARD RESOLUTION

**LOCAL ELECTED OFFICIAL BOARD OF CENTRAL PA
ENDORISING GRADUATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS**

MARCH 28, 2008

Whereas, that the Local Elected Official Board of Central Pennsylvania strongly endorses giving the high school diploma meaning by requiring all students to show that they are career- and college-ready in English, math, science and social studies before they graduate; and be it further

Resolved, that the State Board of Education should adopt a requirement that students demonstrate proficiency in these core subjects by passing state assessments in order to earn a high school diploma; and be it further

Resolved, that the Commonwealth must also provide the necessary tools and resources to support students and schools in meeting these real-world expectations for college- and career-readiness, before making any tests mandatory for graduation.

To compete in a 21st century global economy, Pennsylvania needs an educated and proficient workforce. Over the next decade, region's like Central Pennsylvania could experience a skilled workforce shortage as more individuals retire and leave the workforce than young adults entering the workforce. The pending shortage requires every individual access to develop the skills aligned to the region's key industries.

The Central Pennsylvania Workforce Development Corporation (CPWDC) coordinates workforce policy and activities in Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union counties. As CPWDC's Executive Director, I see how my organization and our partners are tasked with assisting employers in finding a qualified workforce to keep businesses competitive. This task is not always simple, partially because there is no defined standard for skill proficiency as individuals enter the world of work after high school.

The CPWDC's board of directors, which serves as the region's Workforce Investment Board (WIB), and the Local Elected Official (LEO) Board, representing County Commissioners from the nine counties, passed a resolution supporting the Pennsylvania State Board of Education's Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs), which call for the creation of 10 GCAs covering the core academic subjects of math, science, English and social studies.

The WIB/LEO Board endorsement is not so much confirmation of the assessment content as it is support of the model to return relevance to the high school diploma. The WIB acknowledges that some employers find little value in using the high school diploma as part of the hiring process. Employers are seeking to document that students leave high school with the skills to meet workplace expectations. If the GCAs are not approved, it could be years before these issues are revisited.

The GCAs *would not* necessarily mean more high-stakes tests for students; rather, they serve as end-of-course assessments that could replace final exams. The progressive nature would allow students time and resources to complete all components prior to graduation.

The GCA regulations are *not an unfunded mandate*. The Pennsylvania Department of Education will provide school districts with an optional model curriculum and pay for developing and administering the tests.

The resolution was *not* passed to criticize school districts; instead it was passed because of the concept and what it could create – *assurance that our future workforce possesses the foundational skills necessary to participate in the economy and help the U.S. (and specifically the Central Region) remain competitive.*

Employers, unsure of what the diploma says about an applicant's skills related to work, have asked for consistency. The Commonwealth's 501 school districts currently have no uniform standards for awarding a diploma, resulting in a system of vastly different graduation standards. Each district sets its own requirements, which has allowed some students to obtain a diploma even though they do not have the skills to succeed in the world of work. This creates a disservice to those students earning diplomas but lacking foundational skills and academic proficiency, who enter the workforce unprepared for the challenges they will face. The result is often poor performance, an inability to compete, high employee turnover and lost productivity, profits and wages.

As a parent, I have no desire for more testing for my children. Yet I want to be assured that when my children graduate they will be competitive in either post secondary training and/or in obtaining gainful employment.

As a professional, I see this as a high-stakes economic development issue. As companies look to locate, expand or sustain operations in Pennsylvania, land, tax abatement and infrastructure all remain important in the economic development game. However, increasingly, the emphasis is on the skills of the workforce, the system in place to develop these skills and the local, regional and statewide commitment to educate at all levels.

The CPWDC hopes that the State Board of Education will work with employers throughout the implementation of the GCAs. Employers must validate that the proposed assessments truly measure the skills they need. Another series of tests that is not closely aligned with the expectations for work will not benefit anyone; however, if GCAs are aligned, all parties win.

While understanding the controversy associated with the GCAs, the CPWDC believes the competency levels of our graduates must be demonstrated because skills matter – to employers as a vital input to our long-term economic well-being and most importantly to our students as a vital step toward their ability to compete and prosper. Because the GCAs offer a pathway to achieve this goal, the CPWDC supports the State Board of Education effort to implement this process.