



NORTH ALLEGHENY SCHOOLS

TM

Board of School Directors  
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Pittsburgh, PA 15237-5391

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PA. STATE BOARD  
OF EDUCATION

July 23, 2007

Mr. Jim Buckheit  
State Board of Education  
333 Market Street, First Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

My colleagues on the North Allegheny Board of School Directors asked me to submit this letter for inclusion in the testimony accepted at the August 1, 2007 public hearing on the proposed new high school graduation requirements.

The main reason we are submitting this testimony is to express our concern that the proposed requirements eliminate the local assessment option as a basis for graduation and instead mandate a state created and imposed assessment. As a high-performing school district, North Allegheny believes it is important for individual districts to have the flexibility to design and implement their own assessments for graduation.

Pennsylvania has a long and proud history of local control. While it is often debated as to whether 501 school districts is too many, what is clear is that the citizens of Pennsylvania have historically preferred that decisions impacting their lives be made at the level that is the closest to them. In this case, it is clear that local school districts (including individual teachers and administrators) are closer to students and their families and more understanding of their needs than is the State Department of Education.

Our Board recently revised its policy relating to graduation requirements. Our policy requires North Allegheny students to demonstrate proficiency on Pennsylvania standards to graduate. A copy of our current policy is attached hereto. However, you will note that the policy specifically provides the District with the ability to confer its diploma on students who demonstrate master of the standards based on a local assessment.

When the Board deliberated prior to the adoption of the policy, it was very clear that the members favored the local assessment option. Specifically, the Board members were comfortable with our teachers and administrators having the discretion to make the decision with respect to graduation for a student who performs poorly on the PSSA test but otherwise is a solid student worthy of our diploma. We believe that while

*"Great Expectations ... The Best Is Yet To Come!"*

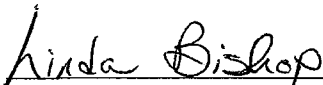
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REVIEW COMMISSION

standardized test scores are one important indication of whether a student has mastered the Pennsylvania standards, it is not and should not be the only factor.

North Allegheny historically and consistently performs well above the Pennsylvania mean and median in every student achievement indicator. We believe that when a student graduates from North Allegheny, it means something. To that end, it is important to us to maintain local discretion in the decision as to whether a student will graduate. Our reading of the proposed regulations is that North Allegheny (and all other school districts) would lose that discretion. Rather, the State would select and impose the assessments that the local professional educators would implement. The people in the best position to judge a student's performance are the teachers and administrators who work with that student on a daily basis. This principle is, again, consistent with the foundation of Pennsylvania education—local control. We ask that you consider the resultant loss of local control and the impact it may have on individual students and families as you deliberate on the proposed regulations.

Thank you for accepting and considering this testimony.

Respectfully submitted:



Linda Bishop, President  
North Allegheny School Board

LB/AS  
Enclosure (policy)

c: North Allegheny School Board  
Dr. Patricia P. Green, Superintendent  
Senator Jane Orie  
Representative Mike Turzai



**Official School Board Policy  
of the  
North Allegheny School District**

**Board Policy # 3241**

Rev. No.	Date	References:		
		School Law	Board Policy	Admin. Policy
1	4/30/03		3241	
2	6/27/07		3241	

## **HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **1.0 CURRICULUM REGULATIONS**

The Curriculum Regulations published in Chapter 4 of the Pennsylvania Department of Education Regulations, 22 Pa. Code §4.1 et. seq., require at §4.24 that each school district specify requirements for graduation from High School in the strategic plan as mandated under §4.13(c)(4) of the regulations.

### **2.0 GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

The graduation requirements for North Allegheny High School are established as listed below. Through grades 9, 10, 11 and 12, a total of 21.5 credits shall include:

- |     |   |                       |
|-----|---|-----------------------|
| 2.1 | English                                 | - 4.0 credits*        |
| 2.2 | Social Studies                          | - 4.0 credits         |
| 2.3 | Mathematics                             | - 3.0 credits         |
| 2.4 | Science                                 | - 3.0 credits         |
| 2.5 | Physical Education (.5 credit per year) | - 2.0 credits         |
| 2.6 | Health Education                        | - .5 credit           |
| 2.7 | Arts & Humanities Electives             | - 2.0 credits         |
| 2.8 | Other Electives                         | - <u>3.0 credits</u>  |
| 2.9 | <b>Total Credits</b>                    | <b>- 21.5 credits</b> |

\*Includes culminating project as detailed in the North Allegheny School District Strategic Plan.

- 2.10 In order to be eligible for graduation, a student must demonstrate mastery of the Pennsylvania Academic Standards on the culminating 11<sup>th</sup> grade Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA), and/or local assessment aligned to the PA Academic Standards as designed or selected by the District, or through progress monitoring of a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Mastery shall be deemed as attaining a score of Proficient or higher on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA or 12<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA Retest, attaining passing grades on a local assessment aligned to the PA Academic Standards as designed or selected by the District, or fulfilling requirements of a graduation plan on a student's IEP.



### **3.0 NON-PROFICIENT STUDENTS**

3.1 Beginning in 2008-2009, high school students in grades 9-12 who have not demonstrated proficiency on the PSSA in Math, and/or Reading and Writing will be required to schedule and attend a remediation resource class.

3.1.1 Non-proficient students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) may meet this requirement through attending classes determined by the IEP team.

3.1.2 Students will be required to remain in the resource class or class determined by the IEP team until they demonstrate proficiency on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA or a series of systemic benchmark assessment, identified by the District and/or IEP team..

3.2 Beginning in 2008-2009, students who do not achieve a score of Proficient or higher on the culminating PSSA test in 11<sup>th</sup> grade must take the retest offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education in 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

### **4.0 SPECIAL NOTE**

All citations to General Curriculum Regulations, Department of Education, Chapter 4, approved by the State Board of Education, January 16, 1999.

Second Reading  
and Adoption  
BP #3241  
June 27, 2007

## **NORTH ALLEGHENY SCHOOL DISTRICT**

### **Resolution Opposing Mandate of PSSA/GCA's as a State Graduation Requirement**

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has approved a proposal to revise the current high school graduation requirements under the Chapter 4 regulations to require students to pass a series of standardized high stakes Graduation Competency Assessments in order to get a diploma; and

WHEREAS, these new requirements and exams will be the same for all students, whether they are taking college prep or vocational courses, are English language learners or participating in individualized programs, and all students effectively will be required to take the same courses in order to pass this new battery of state tests; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 4 currently allows districts to use either the PSSA or rigorous local assessments for their students to demonstrate proficiency of the state academic standards; and it is misleading and incorrect to make the assumption that because students demonstrate their achievements on local assessments rather than the PSSA that there is a disconnect between proficiency and graduation; and

WHEREAS, although the GCA proposal permits schools to use a local assessment option, it establishes numerous limitations, including the elimination of the ability to use various assessment strategies now available to local entities and requires local tests to be closely modeled to the GCAs; and

WHEREAS, decades of research shows many reasons why standardized pencil and paper test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students, and that a diploma should be granted based on the coursework, tests and quizzes, presentations, projects and papers throughout the student's career; and

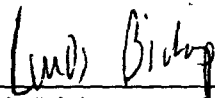
WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has not prepared a cost analysis of fiscal note, even though this will create a large financial impact on state and local budgets, and the State Board's own costing-out study did not include the costs for this new system and found that the state already is \$4.4 billion short in helping school districts prepare students to meet the academic standards by 2014; and

WHEREAS, the proposal requires school districts to absorb many new costs related to revising curriculum, professional development, test development and validation, test preparation and administration, remediation and other costs. Given the state's funding shortfall and the Act 1 limitations on tax increases, school districts have limited ability to fund these potential new costs.

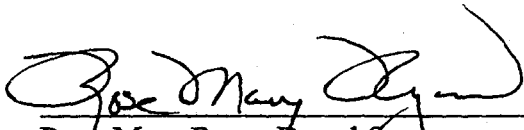
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of School Directors of the North Allegheny School District opposes the State Board of Education's proposal to enact Graduation Competency Assessments and any other regulation or legislation that usurps the authority of local school districts to determine whether their students have earned a high school diploma. This resolution will be shared with the State Board of Education, state legislators including local legislators and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission.

RESOLVED, this 27<sup>th</sup> day of February 2008.

BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS OF  
NORTH ALLEGHENY SCHOOL DISTRICT

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Linda Bishop, President

ATTEST:

  
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Rose Mary Ryan, Board Secretary