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To: Pennsylvania State Board of Education
Senator Andrew Dinniman
Representative Duane Milne

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Subject: Opposition to Proposed Graduation Competency Assessments

We are writing to voice our opposition to the proposed graduation competency assessments which the State Board of Education has proposed to be effective with the graduating class of 2014. Our opposition is based on the following points.

1. The State of Pennsylvania already has a testing program in place, the PSSA's. In our district (WCASD), the PSSA's are the driving force for improvement. The PSSA's are utilized to determine student needs and then utilized to change the curriculum and above all improve the instruction. The PSSA's should be the instrument utilized to determine competency—not additional testing. There is no evidence that additional (and unnecessary) testing will be utilized in any way to improve the instructional process. Why don't all districts use the PSSA's that are already in place to determine competency and provide the necessary instruction for students to achieve competency? If the present PSSAs do not align with the state standards, then why have we been "wasting" our time on these tests for so many years?
2. If the concern is that students do not put much effort into the PSSA's in 11th grade, what makes you believe that the students will put more effort into Graduation Competency Assessments other than a "threat" of not graduating? If you want students to show competency, then use the PSSA's with that "threat".
3. The implementation of the proposed Graduation Assessments will, in our opinion, put the stress of education on passing a test and not on the true learning we want students to show. There are so many ways a student can show competency besides on a test. Portfolios are one example that show more of a student's progress and competency than a mere one-shot test does. What about the senior projects? Aren't they

another means to show competency? Perhaps more structure and definition should be provided to the senior project requirement rather than adding on another item for students to check-off their list.

4. Many of our students are over-tested and over-stressed as they enter their last two years of high school. They are already being assessed in so many ways: PSSAs, PSATs, ACTs, SATs, AP exams, college applications and essays, senior projects, etc. in addition to their normal course work. Why add another requirement when there are already so many in place to determine student competency?

5. The proposed graduation assessments seem to be putting all students into a mold and taking away any stress on the individual needs and goals. Shouldn't we, especially as students prepare to enter various life courses (work, college vocational school, military), be focused on the uniqueness of each individual student and his or her goals and needs rather than trying to make each student a mass-produced product from factories all producing the same thing?

6. A test will not make a student ready for college or provide a student with the needed skills for college. While we agree our graduates should be competent, we believe there are many ways for the students to show their competence and that many assessments are already in place where students demonstrate such competence. Again, why reinvent the wheel when a wheel already exists that may just need some "tweaking" to meet the perceived need. We question if the need is really a universal need for ALL of Pennsylvania or just someone's personal agenda, i.e., a need to make a "mark"!

7. Please seriously consider our comments and vote against this proposal.

Thank you.

Helen and Anthony Castrucci