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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY  
REVIEW COMMISSION

June 12, 2008

Mr. Jim Buckheit  
Executive Director  
State Board of Education  
333 Market Street, 1st Floor  
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I am writing to express my support of the State Board of Education's proposed regulations to change the high school graduation requirements in the state. The proposed regulations will ensure all of Pennsylvania's graduates have the academic background they need to transition successfully to college and careers.

Jobs of the new economy require higher levels of academic skills than ever before. If our young people are going to be successful, it is critically important that they graduate from high school with the strong academic foundation necessary to go on to postsecondary education or workforce training programs – regardless of what high school they attend, their race, income level, or aspirations.

In 2007, 44 percent of Pennsylvania's high school graduates did not score proficient on the 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSAs or the retest in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Couple this with the information from community colleges which suggest that about half of the high school graduates that go on to community college are unprepared to take college-level coursework.

The State Board's proposed regulations would finally create a common statewide accountability system and support structure to ensure every student, from every school district, possesses the academic foundation needed to be successful in college and 21<sup>st</sup> century careers. The regulations also provide multiple options for students to demonstrate proficiency of the state standards including:

- The 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSAs (or 12<sup>th</sup> grade retake)
- A local assessment that has been independently validated
- Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate exams
- End-of-course Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs)

I know that additional testing is of concern to students, parents and educators. However I strongly support the GCAs because they can replace the current final examination in courses and would not result in any additional testing. I also like the fact that the GCAs would be taken by students throughout their high school years and would be administered

right after the student completes the related course. Students would also have as many opportunities as they need to pass the GCAs and the proposed regulations call for accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners.

Importantly, the State Board's proposed regulations also include safeguards for students. The regulations create a system of supports for students and for schools to insure students succeed. Supports specifically identified in the regulations include mandatory remediation for struggling students, voluntary model curriculum that is tied directly to the state standards, professional development and technical assistance for teachers and schools.

I support the proposed regulations. They will create a strong system of supports for students and schools, along with a common-sense accountability system so that all students achieve to the same standards and that a high school diploma – no matter where it's awarded in the Commonwealth – prepares our young people for the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,