



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE RECEIVED

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CREATING STRATEGIES
for Educational and Economic Opportunity

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Jim Buckheit
Pennsylvania State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg PA 17126-0333

June 12, 2008

Dear Jim Buckheit,

I am writing on behalf of Jobs for the Future, a national education and workforce development policy and research organization, to offer our support for the Commonwealth's proposed graduation requirements. Jobs for the Future has partnered with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on a range of initiatives, including high school reform through Project 720, dual enrollment program design, and efforts to strengthen career and technical education in Pennsylvania.

We have been impressed with the thoughtfulness and commitment of the state's leaders to raising student achievement and helping all students succeed. We are quite excited about the range of human capital and education initiatives now underway in Pennsylvania in an effort to improve the future of the state and its residents, both youth and adult.

The Governor's Commission on College and Career Success was an ambitious effort to address high school student success. Its recommendation to set statewide high school graduation requirements in English, mathematics, science, and social studies for *all* graduating students was an important step forward. The Pennsylvania Department of Education's approach to setting these requirements—which provide multiple ways that students can prove they have the skills to succeed in college and work—is respectful of local diversity in the state while ensuring that all students are able to demonstrate proficiency in the core subject areas of high school they need to succeed in further education and career. Jobs for the Future commends the Department on its commitment to common state standards combined with local flexibility in assessing proficiency. In addition, we commend the state for insisting that the requirements apply to all public schools, including charters and area vo-tech schools. This commitment to all students is critical.

To make this system work, though, the Department will have to honor its stated commitment to help provide additional support for struggling students and schools. Ensuring high standards without ensuring that all students get the support they need to meet those standards does a long-term disservice to students, schools, and the Commonwealth. High graduation requirements and high graduation rates must be a braided single goal.

We hope the Department will offer more specifics and dedicate sufficient capacity and resources to extra academic support and teacher training, in addition to the voluntary curriculum that the Department will offer districts. And we hope that the Commonwealth will continue to promote dual enrollment programs that link struggling students to college, new school models that meet the needs of an increasingly diverse high school age population, and a college-going culture and vo-tech programs, curricula, and schools that are state of the art and teach to high academic and technical standards.

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Some are concerned that Pennsylvania is moving too quickly. We disagree. As the Department notes, 26 other states, which together educate 76 percent of the nation's students, already have high school graduation testing requirements in place or are implementing them. And many states are moving toward end of course exams as one or the only testing option.

A high school diploma should signal to colleges and employers a level of proficiency that they understand and respect. And a Pennsylvania diploma from one district should signal the same proficiency as that from any other. This should be the goal for all high school students, across the Commonwealth. We commend the Department of Education for its efforts and hope that the stakeholders in the state unite around this plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Kazis".

Richard Kazis
Senior Vice President