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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION



United Way
of Westmoreland County

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June 16, 2008

James Buckheit
Executive Director
State Board of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Mr. Buckheit:

I am writing to express my strong support for the State Board of Education's proposed Chapter 4 (Academic Standards and Assessments) regulations that create a common statewide system of accountability and supports to insure that all of Pennsylvania's high school graduates possess a uniform knowledge and skill set that prepares them for productive adulthood.

As the director of the United Way of Westmoreland County, I meet with business leaders every day who tell me that entry level applicants are rarely ready for entry level jobs. As one local CEO from the Elliott Corporation put it, "we'll pay for training that is specific to our work, but we should not have to pay for basic knowledge that should be acquired in high school, graduating from high school should mean something". The Human Resources Director of another manufacturing company told me recently about her latest group of test takers for an entry level job. She had 30 applicants and only three passed the 10th grade equivalent math test.

Recently I had a meeting with ten of the largest business owners/managers in Westmoreland. Together, we are working on several strategies to engage more students and their teachers in work environments of the 21st Century. There was considerable discussion about the responsibility of business to be better partners and an equally amount of discussion about a reasonable assurance that all students, graduating from high school, possess a uniform knowledge and skill set.

While we all want a strong economy in Pennsylvania, and we know we need to compete globally, here at the United Way we see family sustaining wage jobs as essential for strong families. We know that these jobs are available to workers who graduate from high school and then go on to get more training or education. We see the community college as a great resource for continuous learning throughout the span of a person's career. But it is very discouraging to hear the President of the Community College say, what it said everywhere, "50% of the students entering the Community College need to take at least one remediation course".

Here in Westmoreland County we have a higher proportion of seniors than nearly every other county. We know that everyone of our children needs to graduate and that everyone of them, regardless of the school they attend, must be ready to move on with a strong academic background in place.

The State Board's proposed regulations would finally create a common statewide accountability system and support structure that ensures all students, from all school districts, possess the academic foundation needed to transition to college and 21st century careers. The regulations also provide multiple options for students to demonstrate proficiency of the state standards including:

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

I've heard that additional testing is of concern to students, parents and educators. I strongly support the GCAs however, because they replace the current final examination in courses and would not result in any additional testing. I also like 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.

As the mother of a 13 year old, the current PSSA system for middle school students, does not give me or my daughter the feedback we need to correct problems quickly. Currently, the results of Ali's PSSA tests taken in the spring were not available until the following school year.

Again, I support these important changes to Pennsylvania's high school graduation requirements. Please adopt the proposed regulations and ensure that all our students have a strong academic foundation on which to build productive and successful lives.

Sincerely,

Nancy E. Kukovich
CEO

From: Nancy Kukovich [nancy@unitedway4u.org]
Sent: Monday, June 16, 2008 2:00 PM
To: j buckheit@state.pa.us
Subject: Attached comments for IRRC GCAs

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