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Minersville Area School District

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Testimony of M. Joseph Brady, Superintendent Minersville Area School District before Pennsylvania State Board of Education

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Honorable Members of the Board:

It is my purpose to convey to each of you my passionate support for the proposed rulemaking which amends Chapter 4 and implements new high school graduation requirements.

This initiative by the State Board directing the Pennsylvania Department of Education to develop and cause to be administered new Graduation Competency Assessments in mathematics, social studies, language arts and science to all students is endorsed wholeheartedly. The specifics of this process which provide multiple opportunities for every student to demonstrate a level of competency to earn their diploma are reasonable, fair, and absolutely necessary.

The release of data by the Secretary of Education which reveals 33% of Pennsylvania high school graduates in possession of a diploma are inadequately prepared for entry level college math and English is a clarion call for action which must not go unanswered. Our graduating seniors along with parents, teachers and entire school districts must be held accountable for requiring a level of achievement that signifies every diploma issued is a recognized and accepted symbol of academic accomplishment.

The business community began the whispers about the negative economic effect which stems from hiring unprepared high school graduates. Their concern was soon echoed by the colleges and spread in recent years to service clubs, parent groups and teachers. It now has a level of acceptance by the general public that serves as a damning indictment of the educational systems.

It is the proper function of the state to address and remediate these concerns. The formulation of tried and true benchmarks in critical subject areas to define competency levels for a diploma is, in my opinion, not a feasible task for individual districts. If it were it would have occurred. There are those who see this rulemaking as an infringement on the

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right of individual districts. I argue this reasoning is nonsense. No high school worthy of the name should justifiably resist the establishment of norms by which its product can be compared to the broad statewide system.

This new plan correctly requires the state to assume the cost of testing and provides expert help to districts and students to enable their quest for competency to be achievable.

I have carefully read and re-read the proposed amendments to Chapter 4 for Academic Standards and Assessment. I have also considered the objections raised by PSBA and local political representatives. The nay-sayers greatly underestimate the potential and capacity of our students and teachers. The bar must be raised. The ever growing demand of the taxpaying public for accountability cannot be side tracked. A recognizable standard for the issuance of a diploma is a critical beginning which deserves total support.

In closing, I offer to you the affirmative judgement of an active superintendent with sixty (60) years of credited service in public education. This includes five (5) years of commissioned naval service in the Korean War. We would be well advised to emulate the educational success of our military forces. They have recruited our best and brightest and also our cast away students and molded them into the most efficient organization in the world. A close look at their training methodology reveals competency based education at every level of its structure. The philosophy that every student can learn if properly taught along with the accountability theme must be embraced by public education.

I congratulate the members of this Board for this initiative and urge you to "stay the course" until it is enacted.

M. Joseph Brady, Superintendent
Minersville Area School District
January 9, 2009