



Abington School District  
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**Testimony to the Pennsylvania State Board of Education  
 High School Reform Hearing  
 March 13, 2009  
 Philadelphia, PA**

**Presented by**

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*11/11/09*

Good morning. My name is Ann Bacon. I am the Director of Curriculum for Abington School District. The district that I represent serves Abington Township and the Borough of Rockledge which are nearby suburbs of Philadelphia. Abington School District has seven elementary schools, a junior high school and a senior high school with a total student population of 7,500. It is a diverse population with 71 percent white, 21 percent African-American, 5 percent Asian, 11 percent economically disadvantaged, and 12 percent who have non-gifted IEP's. On the 2008 PSSA, 90 percent of the non-IEP grade eleven students were proficient or above in reading and 88 percent of the non-IEP grade eleven students were proficient or above in mathematics. An analysis of cohort data was used to compare the PSSA results for last year's grade eleven students to their results on the PSSA when they were in eighth grade. This showed an increase of 9 percent of African-American students achieving proficiency in mathematics and an increase of 17 percent of special education students demonstrating proficiency in mathematics. The results for reading were similar.

This is a district that strives for excellence. In addition to the significant results shown in the PSSA data, the district received a Bronze Medal rating in America's Best High Schools identified in 2008 by U.S. News and World Report. In collaboration with the community it serves, Abington has also been named by America's Promise Alliance as one of the *100 Best Communities for Young People*. It is the only community in Pennsylvania to receive this recognition for three consecutive years. For both of these awards, the quality of the educational program was an important component in the criteria for selection. These achievements reflect the district's mission: Excellence is our standard and achievement is the result.

Such accomplishments are the result of a highly-qualified, committed staff using research-based strategies and materials along with formative data to design and deliver appropriate instruction. In 2005, under the leadership of the Superintendent, the district developed an Opportunities to Learn initiative with the

goal of closing the achievement gaps. This effort involved not only the school community, but representatives of the Board of School Directors, parents and community organizations. As a result of this Initiative, the secondary program is now a rigorous, academic program in which all students have exactly two choices: honors/AP and college preparatory courses. Special Education students are mainstreamed into these classes to the fullest extent possible. The work of this initiative, as shown by the 2008 PSSA data, is now coming to fruition and resulting in a narrowing of the achievement gaps.

As reported in our Summary of Local Assessment Practices that was submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education in response to Dr. Zahorchak's request last fall, we have four options for students to meet the assessment component of the graduation requirements established by Chapter 4: (1) proficiency on the eleventh-grade PSSA, (2) proficiency on the twelfth-grade retest, (3) proficiency on the local standards-based assessment or (4) if the student has an IEP, meet the expectations outlined in the IEP. The local assessments are designed to reflect the PSSA. That is, the tests have the same blueprint and the same passing percent score as the PSSA. The process to prepare students to demonstrate proficiency by the end of grade 12 begins in ninth-grade and is based upon the results of their eighth-grade PSSA. Students who are not proficient on the grade 8 PSSA are enrolled in a Mathematics Plus and/or a Reading course designed to focus on the skills and concepts detailed in the Assessment Anchors. The students continue in these courses, in addition to their regular academic program, until they demonstrate proficiency in grade eleven or grade twelve.

All of this information is detailed to show that Abington School District takes seriously its responsibility to graduate students who are proficient and who are prepared for post-secondary education and/or the job market as they choose. However, we do not support the proposed Chapter 4 amendments that relate to the development and implementation of Graduation Competency Assessments or Keystone Exams. As detailed in the Proposed Rulemaking, the Cost and Paperwork Estimates section, "Direct costs to the Commonwealth include the cost to develop the GCA's which is estimated at \$15 million over 3 years. Costs to the Commonwealth to administer, score and report the ten tests are estimated at \$40.0 million each year. The cost to the Commonwealth to develop the voluntary model curriculum in 10 subjects is estimated in \$5.9 million over 3 years." Rather, we suggest that these funds be used to monitor districts' strategies to comply with the current Chapter 4 regulations and to provide direct financial support toward districts' efforts to meet the needs of their students and to enable all students to achieve proficiency.

In summary, Abington School District is working in compliance with Chapter 4 and requiring that students demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate. The district does not support the need for the development of a model curriculum or for the development of additional tests. Rather, the district is looking to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to provide additional financial support for an academic program that has been proven to graduate proficient students.