

BETHLEHEM-CENTER SCHOOL DISTRICT



194 CRAWFORD ROAD, FREDERICKTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA 15333
PHONE: (724) 267-4910 • FAX: (724) 267-4904

KAREN S. DOWNIE, D.Ed.
Superintendent of Schools

JOSEPH A. NEPA
Business Manager

March 5, 2008

Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street
14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

RECEIVED
2008 MAR 10 AM 9:55
INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

RE: State Board of Education's Proposal to Revise the High School Graduation Requirements

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this letter concerning the recent proposal approved by the State Board of Education to revise the current high school graduation requirements under Chapter 4 regulations.

It is the consensus of the Bethlehem-Center Board of School Directors to oppose this proposal and I have included the resolution approved by our School Directors at their recent board meeting.

Please share this information with the appropriate individuals necessary in order that we may have a voice concerning this matter.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Karen S. Downie, D.Ed.
Superintendent

KSD/blr

Enclosure

**RESOLUTION OPPOSING PROPOSED HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION
COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS OF THE
BETHLEHEM CENTER SCHOOL DISTRICT**

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has approved a proposal to revise the current high school graduation requirements under the Chapter 4 regulations to require students to pass a series of standardized high stakes Graduation Competency Assessments in order to get a diploma; and

WHEREAS, these new requirements and exams will be the same for all students, whether they are taking college prep or vocational courses, are English language learners or participating in individualized programs, and all students effectively will be required to take the same courses in order to pass this new battery of state tests; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 4 currently allows districts to use either the PSSA or rigorous local assessments for their students to demonstrate proficiency of the state academic standards; and it is misleading and incorrect to make the assumption that because students demonstrate their achievements on local assessments rather than the PSSA that there is a disconnect between proficiency and graduation; and

WHEREAS, although the Graduation Competency Assessments proposal permits schools to use a local assessment option, it establishes numerous limitations, including the elimination of the ability to use various assessment strategies now available to local entities and requires local tests to be closely modeled to the Graduation Competency Assessments; and

WHEREAS, decades of research shows many reasons why standardized pencil and paper test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students, and that a diploma should be granted based on the coursework, tests and quizzes, presentations, projects and papers throughout the student's career; and

WHEREAS, the State Board of Education has not prepared a cost analysis or fiscal note, even though this will create a large financial impact on state and local budgets, and the State Board's own costing-out study did not include the costs for this new system and found that the state already is \$4.4 billion short in helping school districts prepare students to meet the academic standards by 2014; and

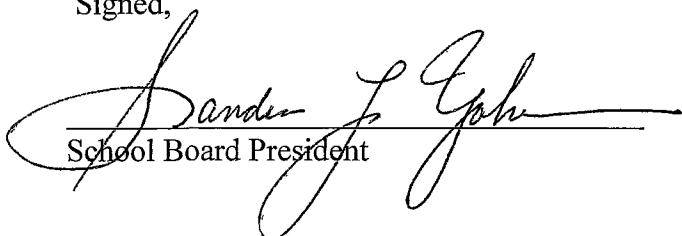
WHEREAS, the proposal requires school districts to absorb many new costs related to revising curriculum, professional development, test development and validation, test preparation and administration, remediation and other costs. Given the state's funding shortfall and the Act 1 limitations on tax increases, school districts have limited ability to fund these potential new costs.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of School Directors of the Bethlehem-Center School District opposes the State Board of Education's proposal to enact Graduation Competency Assessments and any other regulation or legislation that usurps the authority of local school districts to determine whether their students have earned a high school diploma. This resolution will be shared with the State Board of Education, state legislators including local legislators and members of the Senate and House Education Committees, and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission.

Adopted this 25 day of February, 2008

Signed,

Attest:



School Board President



Board Secretary (seal)