

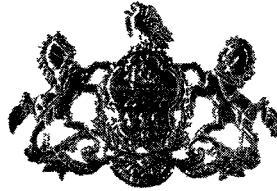
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15TH DISTRICT
JEFFREY PICCOLA

SENATE BOX 203015
HARRISBURG, PA 17120-3015
(717) 787-6801
FAX: (717) 783-3722
TOLL FREE: 1-(888)-742-2652

916-B NORTH RIVER ROAD
PARK PLAZA
HALIFAX, PA 17032
(717) 896-7714
FAX: (717) 896-7717

INTERNET E-MAIL ADDRESS
jpiccola@pasen.gov



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WEBSITE ADDRESS
www.piccola.org

June 17, 2009

The Honorable Joe Torsella
Chairman
State Board of Education
First Floor, 333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Dear Joe:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your June 12 letter in which you have made the extraordinary pledge as Chairman of the State Board of Education to seek legislative buy-in regarding the high school graduation exams.

As you know, I am a strong supporter of these exams believing it is essential that we have this accountability in place to ensure that our high school diploma has meaning and that our graduates may compete in this global economy. Many of my colleagues, however, have significant concerns with the concept and with the costs of developing the exams at a time of unprecedented budget deficits. That is why I have consistently stated that the Legislature must have a say in how this issue develops including any final product that emerges on how the exams are utilized in Pennsylvania.

Your leadership is critical in engaging all the affected parties in the educational and business communities and with interested legislators to ensure there is a final consensus on the exams. In keeping with your extraordinary commitment, my staff and I will review the proposal you transmit and consult with my Democratic colleague, Senator Andrew Dinniman, and then subsequently introduce a resolution for the committee to first consider and then the entire Senate. The State Board of Education will then have the benefit of this "Sense of the Senate" resolution before launching the formal regulation implementing graduation exams.

As you and I have discussed, there remain the issues surrounding the signing of the contract and budget negotiations on the model curriculum, diagnostics and graduation exams themselves. While I firmly believe that the process you have articulated in your June 12 letter tremendously helps with legislative buy-in and identification and acceptance of the final use of the exams, my response to your

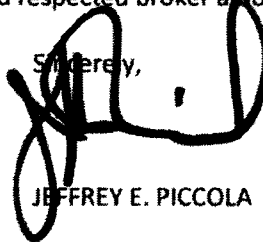
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proposal in no way binds or commits the Senate budget negotiators regarding the final appropriation for these items that may or may not be included in the General Fund budget for 2009-2010.

The compromise discussed prior to the Senate Education Committee's consideration and approval of Senate Bill 281 included a stipulation that the Administration would agree to immediately seek an amendment to the contract suspending development of the exams until the final form regulation is in place. I still believe this is an important piece of the resolution of the overall issue given the strong feelings within the General Assembly over the contract signing but I recognize this is outside your purview as State Board Chairman.

Thank you for your leadership on this important educational issue and your personal and professional commitment to be an honest and respected broker among all the interested parties.

Sincerely,

JEFFREY E. PICCOLA

cc: All Senators
Representative James Roebuck
Representative Paul Clymer