



HARRISBURG SCHOOL DISTRICT

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OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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June 13, 2008

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

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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

Dear Mr. Buckheit

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

I am writing to support the concept of Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) as proposed in the revised Chapter 4 regulations and recommended by consensus of the superintendents in the Capital Area Intermediate Unit.

Like them, I endorse the concept of accountability through periodic assessment of achievement, particularly when that assessment is based on specific established expectations, and I support using a variety of assessments across subject areas, requiring students to master challenging content in English, math, social studies, and the sciences.

I believe that it is important to remember, however, that for many students in districts like Harrisburg, the most successful path to graduation is through a completed Individual Education Program (IEP) or, for those students attending Career Technical Academies like the one in the Harrisburg District, through a satisfactory completion of the National Occupational Testing Institute assessment (NOCTI).

One approach to achieving the important goal of making graduation achievable for as many students as possible, preventing drop outs among students less well suited for a purely academic assessment, and recognizing and rewarding the most academically successful students, is to establish a system in which three levels of diplomas are awarded: 1) a local high school diploma, 2) a state-certified diploma for which the requirements are the successful completion of six GCAs and the local requirements, and 3) an "Honors" diploma recognizing students meeting local requirements and exceeding the six GCA requirement and/or passing the NOCTI and one or more GCAs.

Thank you very much for taking the time to consider my recommendations.

Sincerely,

Gerald W. Kohn, Ed.D.
Superintendent

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