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*John -
Please
reply.*

June 4, 2009

Mr. Joseph Toresella, Chairperson
Pennsylvania State Board of Education
P.O. Box 230
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**PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION**

Dear Mr. Toresella:

I am writing to you to express my opposition to any regulation which would establish the passing of any large-scale assessment as a requirement for high school graduation in Pennsylvania, including the General Competency Assessments (GCAs) proposed by Secretary Zahorchak.

While the declared goal of utilizing such high-stake measures as the GCAs is to improve the educational achievement of our graduates, studies show that the opposite occurs: large-scale assessments do not help those students who pass them but do harm those who do not. The reality of the experience of other states which have imposed such a requirement is that the only way in which these tests apparently "improve" the skills of graduates is by causing all but the most successful students to drop out of school entirely--thus eliminating them from studies of graduates' skills, as they never make it to that level.

Further, imposing tests such as the GCAs is inherently discriminatory, depriving the most exquisitely vulnerable groups of students of the right to education--for example, special education students, English Language Learners, and those students in poverty areas, both urban and rural--as their education is scarcely the equal of that of mainstream students and/or those who reside in affluent areas. Thus the GCAs would place an unequal burden on at-risk students, many of whom are members of minority groups, and clearly discriminate against them. Use of the GCAs would predictably only widen that lamentable "Achievement Gap" on the demise of which so much time and money and printer's ink has been spent.

There is also the very real question of the justification for spending huge amounts of taxpayers' money on an unnecessary and ineffective enterprise--especially at the present time, when not only are state budgets so strapped that necessary services are being cut back, but also when the new federal Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, intends to develop a broad national curriculum and related assessments--and already has the announced support of 46 of the 50 states, including Pennsylvania. (There has been no suggestion of using set levels of performance on these planned assessments as graduation requirements.) This national effort is off and running with almost unanimous support from the states--so why spend well over \$200,000,000 of Pennsylvania taxpayers' money on an assessment which will very likely be obsolete before it ever sees the light of day?