



Riverside Beaver County School District

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March 31, 2008

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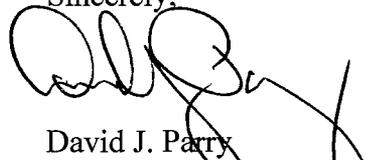
INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

1
Arthur Coccodrilli, Chairman
Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Mr. Coccodrilli:

On March 17, 2008, the Riverside Beaver County School District Board of Education adopted the enclosed Resolution opposing the proposed graduation testing requirement.

Sincerely,


David J. Parry
Superintendent of Schools

DJP:mf
Enclosure

**RIVERSIDE BEAVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT RESOLUTION OPPOSING
THE PROPOSED GRADUATION TESTING REQUIREMENT**

WHEREAS, the Board of Directors of the Riverside Beaver County School District recognize the significance of accountability, the need for high academic standards, and assessment of such for providing Adequate Yearly Progress as per the No Child Left Behind Act. We wish to affirm our opposition to the newly proposed concept of mandating the PSSA/Graduation Competency Assessments as a high school graduation requirement for the following reasons:

1. As we have seen with PSSA testing, any form of high stakes testing is difficult to develop, implement and score. Scoring in particular is of questionable reliability. How can any individual test or even a series of tests in different subjects really measure what a student has learned over twelve years of education?
2. This proposal calls for the PDE to develop model curriculum in each of the content areas assessed by the ten Graduation Competency Assessments thus narrowing the curriculum of local school districts and shifting to a statewide uniform curriculum. Contrary to the process, we take great pride in providing students at Riverside Beaver County School District a broad based curriculum menu of course offerings, some of which are not mandated but helpful in providing well-rounded students and preparing them to meet the needs of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, we believe our own local standards and criteria for graduation are more rigorous and far exceed those of the state standards at this point in time.
3. We believe the affordability factor will create a large financial impact on state and local budgets and taxpayers. Despite no cost analysis completed at this point in time, estimates are beginning at \$86 million+ as the initial cost for pursuing this statewide endeavor. The recent costing-out study did not take into account the costs for this new proposal. Costing-out study results indicate the state is already \$4.4 billion short of where it should be in helping students meet the academic standards. Furthermore, how will the state pay to develop, validate, and score ten Graduation Competency Assessments of each student in Pennsylvania annually? How often will the Graduation Competency Assessments be revised and at what cost? Will there be various versions of the tests and at what cost? How long will the state, not local taxpayers, pay the costs of the testing program?

This school board recognizes the adverse administrative and staffing implications associated with implementing this proposed plan. Graduation Competency Assessments would be offered three times a year (end of fall, spring, and summer semesters) in addition to the regular PSSA schedule which consumes an inordinate amount of student instructional time. Students who fail to achieve proficiency on the eleventh grade PSSA or in one of the content areas can only retake the content module in which they were unsuccessful. Accurate record keeping, organization, and scheduling will be critical in ensuring all students are provided every opportunity to graduate with their appropriate class. Students who do not score proficient on the eleventh grade PSSA or a Graduation Competency Assessment administered in any grade must be provided remediation and supplemental instructional support. The tracking, record keeping, scheduling, and administration of this testing process will require all school districts to hire additional staff exclusively to manage the administrative operations of this testing process.

4. Although the language in the current proposal theoretically allows school districts to use a locally developed assessment, in reality the process for developing and implementing a local assessment is

impractical. It is complicated, expensive and unrealistic. The practical impact of the current proposal is that only the wealthiest districts will select the option to develop a local assessment. By default, there will be few if any local assessments—only a statewide testing system.

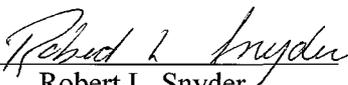
5. The Riverside Beaver County School Board opposes the adoption of a state-driven curriculum, assessments, and graduation requirements which infringe upon the local control of public school districts vested in locally elected school boards. Anything that comes in between that right and authority is clearly an erosion of local control. This is an “implied right” as vested in the General Assembly. The Pennsylvania School Code supports the statutorily defined autonomy of local school boards to determine curriculum and graduation requirements.
6. It is our belief that efforts to help students should begin in early childhood grades and should not focus on a high stakes test with serious life-changing consequences in secondary school when testing results are only required to be given to senior students ten days prior to graduation commencement.
7. It is our belief that the design of this testing is to serve as a gatekeeper for determining who will be eligible to seek further education and who will be forced to enter the workforce. This effort closely resembles the 1999 State Board of Education’s initiative to provide silver and gold colored stickers to label the quality of a student’s education. That initiative was a failure and we believe that the proposed initiative will produce similar results.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Riverside Beaver County School District directs the School Superintendent to send copies of this resolution to the State Board of Education, the Office of the Honorable Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, to the chairs of both the Pennsylvania House and Senate Education Committees, and to our local representatives in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate.

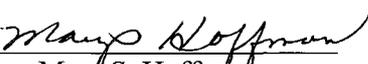
FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Riverside Beaver County School District hereby directs the Superintendent and our Board President to communicate this resolution to other school districts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, setting forth the views of this Board, and encouraging other school boards to take similar action in support of this issue.

RESOLVED, this seventeenth day of March, 2008.

RIVERSIDE BEAVER COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT


Robert L. Snyder
Board President

ATTEST:


Mary S. Hoffman
Board Secretary