

Oct. 21, 2013

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The Honorable Silvan B. Lutkewitte, III, Chairman
Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market St., 14th floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101
Email: irrc@irrc.state.pa.us

Re: Final-Form Regulation #6-326 – Academic Standards and Assessments

Dear Chairman Lutkewitte:

I am writing to express my strong support for final-form regulation #6-326, related to academic standards and assessments, and urge IRRC to approve the regulations.

Too many young people in Pennsylvania graduate from high school without the critical thinking and learning skills to be successful in college or careers. The adoption of the more rigorous and internationally benchmarked Pennsylvania Core Standards, along with aligned assessments that include Keystone Exams, will help to ensure our high school graduates have the academic foundation required to transition to postsecondary education or the work force.

The regulation strikes the right balance between accountability and supports for struggling students. It provides for supplemental instruction for students who do not demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exams, along with the opportunity to retake the exam or a module of the exam. If the student is still unable to demonstrate proficiency on the Keystone Exam, he or she can move to a project-based assessment. There are also supports for teachers, such as the voluntary model curriculum that is aligned to the PA Core Standards, computer diagnostic tools and professional development.

Questions raised recently about the Core Standards seem to me rooted in misunderstanding about their role. Rather than limit teachers' or schools' creativity and autonomy, strong, clear standards will create better opportunity for innovation. With a shared understanding of what skills students need to acquire, there can be lots of variety in how schools help them acquire those skills. Also, Core assessments aren't about increasing the amount of testing; they're about replacing existing tests with better, more nuanced tools for measuring student learning.

Again, I strongly support the final-form regulation and urge IRRC to approve it.

Sincerely,



Mark J. Gleason
Executive Director