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November 5, 2012

The Honorable Silvan B. Lutkewitte, III
Chair
Independent Regulatory Review Commission
333 Market Street, 14th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Re: Proposed Regulation #6-326 - Academic Standards and Assessments

Dear Chairman Lutkewitte:

On behalf of Pennsylvania Business Council (PBC), I would like to submit our comments on proposed regulation #6-326 (IRRC Number 2976) relating to academic standards and assessments, supporting this regulation and urging the Independent Regulatory Review Commission's approval.

This proposed regulation is necessary to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by amending the current state regulations (Annex A of Title 22, Chapter 4 – Public School Code of 1949, 24 P. S. §§ 26-2603-B and 26-2604-B. "Chapter 4,") that spell-out requirements for Pennsylvania academic standards, assessments, and high school graduation standards for public schools across this Commonwealth including school districts, area vocational-technical schools (AVTSS), charter schools, and cyber charter schools.

In 2010, the state regulations were amended to include new assessments known as "Keystone Exams" and to update Pennsylvania's academic standards in voluntary conformity with the nationwide initiative of governors known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Just as important, the regulation created a system of supports including mandatory supplemental instruction for struggling students and diagnostic tools for teachers to help students reach proficiency with the more rigorous state academic standards.

This amendment to the regulation continues that process. The Department of Education convened teams of educators to provide input during the drafting of the Pennsylvania's updated academic standards. A committee of the State Board held public hearings, in which PBC participated, to solicit input on draft revisions to Chapter 4 regarding the Keystone Exams. This amendment will dramatically enhance the impact of the Keystone Exams, mandating that a student must demonstrate "proficiency" on a Keystone Exam in order to graduate. PBC strongly supports the graduation requirement. Testimony we provided to IRCC in October 2009 included our survey research of 400 employers who indicated they had no trust that a high school diploma provided that a job candidate was career ready. PBC has long supported a graduation requirement based on statewide, standard assessments.

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Field testing of the Keystone Exams showed that many school districts needed more time to align their curricula and their teaching with the higher expectations, and so it was proposed to delay the new graduation requirements slightly. The Department of Education also proposed reducing the number of subjects for which the exams would be developed to save state funds. Many groups, including PBC and the Pennsylvania Partnership for Children, testified against the proposed cutbacks and recommended instead, an extended development and phase-in of the exams to accommodate budgetary pressures. A compromise of that sort is included in the final rulemaking. The proposed regulations:

- Require that students achieve proficiency on five Keystone Exams in order to graduate – Algebra I, English literature, English composition, biology, and civics. This change simplifies the determination of proficiency by eliminating the requirement that scores on Keystone Exams count as one-third of a student's grade.
- Extend the timeline for implementing the revised graduation requirements by phasing-in the first three Key-stone Exams (Algebra I, English literature and biology) in 2016-17, adding English composition in 2018-19 and civics in 2019-2020.
- Extend the timeline, subject to funding by the Commonwealth, to create the remaining five Keystone Exams for districts to use voluntarily (Geometry in 2016-17, U.S. History in 2017-18, Algebra II in 2018-19, chemistry in 2019-20, and World History in 2020-21).

PBC supports the specific elements of the rulemaking described above and the entire package (#6-326 – IRRC Number 2976) relating to academic standards and assessments, and urges the Independent Regulatory Review Commission's approval.

Sincerely yours,



DAVID W. PATTI
President & CEO