



pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Testimony
House Education Committee
Public Hearing on HB 168 & HB 177

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Good morning Chairman Saylor, Chairman Roebuck and distinguished members of the House Education Committee. My name is Larry Wittig, and I serve as Chairman of the State Board of Education. With me today is Karen Molchanow, Executive Director of the State Board. We also are joined three by representatives of the Pennsylvania Department of Education: John Weiss, Assistant Director of the Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; and Richard Maraschiello, PDE Contractor; and Rita Perez, Director of the Bureau of Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the State Board's long history with standards and assessment, as well as review how the state's current high school graduation policy developed.

Setting state-level graduation requirements has been part of the Board's policymaking since 1964, when the General Assembly conferred this power in the Public School Code (24 P.S. § 26). Modifications made to Board policy in 1999 resulted in a requirement for school districts to consider at least four measures for high school graduation: 1) course completion and grades; 2) completion of a culminating project; 3) proficiency in state standards not assessed by the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA); and 4) proficiency in reading, writing and math as assessed by the PSSAs, or local assessments aligned with state standards and the level of proficiency established for the PSSAs.

When the Board proposed that policy in 1998, both the House and Senate Education Committees and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission recommended that the Board establish a process for determining the comparability of local assessments with the PSSA. At the time, the Board stated that "the most certain evidence of the comparability or alignment between

the local and state assessments will come from repeated administrations of the PSSA and local assessments. If it becomes apparent that large numbers of students not achieving at the proficient level on the PSSA are deemed proficient by local assessments, regulation and administrative review will become important.”

To that end, the Board engaged in continuous oversight of the number of students issued diplomas and the number of students who demonstrated proficiency on the 11th grade PSSAs in reading, writing and mathematics. This review identified a gap of more than 50,000 students annually (nearly 40 percent of graduates) who were issued high school diplomas without demonstrating proficiency on the PSSAs. A further look at the data showed this to be an issue statewide with 473 (out of 501) school districts graduating at least 20 percent more students than demonstrated proficiency on the PSSA.

This gap seemed to indicate that locally developed school district assessments were not aligned with state standards and the level of rigor established for proficiency on the PSSA. The Board also had concerns about the consequences of this apparent misalignment for both students and the Commonwealth, including the impact on postsecondary enrollment and completion rates, reduced economic opportunity, and a significant cost for remedial education at our postsecondary institutions. At the time, one-in-three high school graduates who enrolled in a community college or a state-owned university required coursework in remedial English or mathematics at a cost exceeding \$26.4 million annually.

Thus, in 2007, the Board began exploring ways to address these challenges, which culminated in revisions to statewide graduation requirements and the adoption of 10 end-of-course Keystone Exams designed to serve as comparable assessments of academic standards in

English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Technology, and the Social Sciences. In tandem with revising the assessment system at the high school level, the Board included important supports for both students and school districts in meeting the new graduation standards. To this end, the Board put forward requirements for supplemental instruction for students who are not proficient, and required the Department of Education to provide technical assistance and professional development resources for districts related to instruction in the content areas assessed by Keystone Exams.

New statewide graduation requirements, including Keystone Exams as an option for assessing a student's mastery of academic standards, took effect in 2010. Most recently, the Board took action to refine these graduation requirements in response to concerns raised during the initial phases of the Keystone Exam implementation. The Board acted to reduce the number of exams administered for graduation purposes and to remove the connection between the exams and a student's course grades. These revisions maintained the intention of the Board's policy to establish a uniform measure of proficiency for graduation, while addressing logistical concerns about the how early in the school year exams would need to be administered in order to calculate grades and concerns about the potential for inconsistent implementation since Pennsylvania does not utilize a statewide grading scale.

I will now turn to representatives from the Department of Education joining me today who will discuss administration of the Keystone Exams.

The Keystone Exams were developed and field tested during 2009and10. Pennsylvania educators participated in every stage of development including identifying the content to be assessed, reviewing and approving each test question, and setting cut scores. The exams were

first administered statewide in the spring of 2011 for the purpose of establishing cut scores. Due to budget constraints, the Keystone Exams were not administered during the 2011-12 school year. In the 2012-13 school year, the Keystone Exams were administered, and they replaced the Grade 11 PSSA for federal accountability purposes.

Three exams have been developed and administered statewide three times each year since the 2012-13 school year: these include Algebra I, Literature and Biology. Based on Chapter 4 regulations (22 Pa Code § 4), each Keystone Exam has two modules that reflect distinct, yet related, academic content that is common to a standards aligned curriculum. The exams are available in both paper/pencil and online formats.

Beginning with the graduating class of 2017, students who do not score proficient or advanced on their first attempt are permitted to retest after successfully participating in supplemental instruction provided by their local education agency (LEA).

Chapter 4 also required the Department of Education to develop supports to assist educators and students in their efforts to achieve academic success. To that end, the Department developed the Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) and Voluntary Model Curriculum (VMC). The CDT provides real-time feedback on individual student's strengths and areas of need with dynamic links to instructional resources within the Department's Standards Aligned System (SAS). Teachers can utilize the sample lessons from the VMC along with other resources, such as curriculum frameworks and online courses, in planning for students needs and then continue to monitor student progress throughout the year.

Chapter 4 provides multiple pathways to graduation. First, students who do not pass the retest may still meet graduation requirements through the satisfactory completion of a project-

based assessment. Second, a chief school administrator, in his or her sole discretion, may waive the state requirement of proficiency on the three Keystone Exams, on a case-by-case basis for good cause. If a chief school administrator grants waivers for more than 10 percent of the students in a graduating class, because the students were not successful in completing a project-based assessment, the chief school administrator shall submit an action plan for approval by the Secretary of Education no later than 10 calendar days prior to graduation. The action plan must identify improvements they will implement in each course associated with Keystone Exam content for which the waivers were requested.

I will now turn it back to the State Board who will discuss Pennsylvania's academic standards.

The Board's involvement in setting uniform goals for the Commonwealth's public education system dates back almost as long as its involvement with establishing statewide graduation requirements. In 1965, the Board first established 10 Goals of Quality Education, which described what quality education programs should include in schools across the Commonwealth. The roots of our current system of academic standards were established in 1999 when the Board adopted state standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening (RWSL) and Mathematics. Through July 2006, state academic standards were developed in 12 content areas.

In conjunction with the adoption of state standards, the Board made a commitment to conduct cyclical reviews of these standards to determine if they are appropriate, clear, specific and challenging. Opportunities for public review and comment on the standards have been extensive.

In 2007, the Board initiated a review of the state's math and English standards, and engaged teams of Pennsylvania educators to recommend revisions to the standards. Proposed revisions were made available for public review and comment in 2008, and public hearings were scheduled to solicit input on revisions to the standards. Shortly after this work began, the Common Core State Standards emerged as a policy goal of the National Governor's Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and more than 45 states and territories. At that time, the Board halted its internal review of state standards to explore whether Common Core was a sound alternative.

To inform its deliberations, the Board commissioned a Common Core alignment study and held regional public roundtables to gather public feedback before ultimately adopting the Common Core in July 2010. At that time, the Board also expressed its intention to gather additional public input on implementation of the standards and on whether Pennsylvania should adopt additional state-specific standards. The Board carried through on both of those intentions.

At the end of 2010, the Board convened public forums to solicit input on implementation of the standards and produced guidelines for the Department of Education in developing supports for implementation. Moreover, the Department brought together Pennsylvania educators who worked together to prepared revisions to the Common Core to make the standards Pennsylvania's own. These proposed state-specific standards were presented publicly in March 2012 as the Pennsylvania Core Standards, posted online for public access, and underwent multiple opportunities for public review and comment over the next year and a half. The Board was responsive to concerns expressed about the standards by the public and members of the General Assembly and took action to withdraw its initial proposal and make revisions to address concerns with implementation.

The Department has taken further action to respond to concerns with the Pennsylvania Core Standards by establishing an online portal to collect feedback on the Eligible Content aligned with the standards. Interested stakeholders were provided an opportunity to review and provide comment to the Department from October 22, 2014 through January 15, 2015. This feedback has been compiled and posted on the PA Academic Review website (www.paacademicreview.org) as of January 31.

Chairman Saylor, Chairman Roebuck, and members of the committee, we would again like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on standards and assessment. We welcome any questions you may have.