

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA

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Proposed Chapter 4 Regulations

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House Education Committee

Irvis Office Building
Room G-50
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Wednesday, June 25, 2008 - 9:00 a.m.

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BEFORE:

Honorable James Roebuck, Majority Chairperson
Honorable Mike Carroll
Honorable H. Scott Conklin
Honorable Richard Grucela
Honorable Patrick Harkins
Honorable Mark Longietti
Honorable John Palone
Honorable Frank Andrews Shimkus
Honorable Barbara McIlvaine Smith
Honorable Mike Fleck
Honorable Daryl Metcalfe
Honorable Duane Milne
Honorable Beverly Mackereth
Honorable Thomas Murt
Honorable Bernie O'Neill
Honorable Kathy Rapp
Honorable Sam Rohrer
Honorable Curtis Sonney

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1 ALSO PRESENT:

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Christopher Wakeley
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Majority Research Analysts
5 Erin Dixon
Tracey McGlaughin

6

7 Sonia Terech
Majority Administrative Aide

8

9 Patty White
Minority Executive Director

10

11 Dustin Gingrich
Minority Research Analyst

12

13 Sandi Pancoe
Minority Legislative Asst./Committee Secretary

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1 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Good morning. I
2 want to resume the House Education Committee
3 hearing on Chapter 4 Regulations which focus
4 upon graduate competency assessments.

5 And we are going to begin with a
6 panel this morning. I will ask the panel
7 members, when we come to that, to introduce
8 themselves. And we will then have a questions
9 and answers discussion. And at 10:00, we will
10 resume our conversation with the Secretary of
11 Education Doctor Zahorchak.

12 Let me just note that, in
13 anticipation of the interests in this subject,
14 there are provisions for overflow. Those who
15 could not get into the room, there will be an
16 area for viewing the hearings in the 60 East
17 Wing. So if, indeed, we get to that point,
18 there is adequate room for everyone to hear the
19 hearings and to be part of the hearings.

20 With that, I would ask that we begin,
21 and ask that the panel would introduce
22 themselves and make their presentations, and
23 then we will, in fact, go to questions and
24 answers.

25 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: I am Pat

1 Halpin-Murphy, Government Relations Director for
2 AFT, Pennsylvania.

3 MR. OLEKSIAK: I am Jerry Oleksiak.
4 I am the Treasurer of the Pennsylvania State
5 Education Association, and my first year after
6 32 years in the classroom.

7 MR. STROUP: I am Stinson Stroup,
8 Executive Director of the Pennsylvania
9 Association of School Administrators. I think
10 we are here just to respond to your questions.
11 You have our written testimony that was
12 presented in the Senate.

13 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Fine.

14 MR. STROUP: I trust you have seen
15 our written comments to the Independent
16 Regulatory Review Commission and to the Board.

17 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Fine. With that
18 then, I would open it up to questions.

19 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: Mr. Chairman?

20 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Yes.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: I am not sure
22 who might be best to answer this question. But
23 I am a teacher, I am a certified teacher in
24 Pennsylvania, and much of the correspondence
25 that I have received from the school districts

1 whom I represent--there are six of them in my
2 legislative district--make reference to the fact
3 that, in addition to the PSSA, there are
4 numerous other standardized tests that we
5 administer throughout the commonwealth,
6 including Terra Nova, Iowa, and so forth.

7 And one of the issues identified in
8 most of the correspondence from my constituents
9 is that they believe sometimes we are a little
10 bit test happy. And that's a quote.

11 And I guess my question is: in your
12 opinion, how much time do you believe is
13 currently set aside to prepare for these tests
14 as opposed to using class time for bona fide
15 instruction?

16 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would be happy to
17 start with that.

18 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: May I just
19 instruct the board before we begin? Perhaps it
20 would be helpful if we would also introduce
21 ourselves so that our reporter will, in fact, be
22 able to identify us for the transcript.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: Thank you, Mr.
24 Chairman. I am Representative Tom Murt from
25 Montgomery and Philadelphia counties.

1 MR. OLEKSIAK: Thank you,
2 Representative Murt.

3 One of my biggest fears as a public
4 school educator is that what we are creating in
5 our schools is--and you use the phrase--test
6 happy. I would like to use the term, a culture
7 of testing.

8 And there is so much time and so many
9 resources devoted to standardized testing that
10 it really does get in the way of instruction.
11 I think it varies from school district to school
12 district, but I have heard figures--and my
13 colleagues may be able to give you other
14 information--as high as 40 days in the school
15 year that are devoted to either preparing for
16 tests, giving the make-up tests, that are not
17 directed towards specific instruction.

18 One of our teachers who testified
19 before the State Board of Education used a
20 phrase--and I love it--that we are testing the
21 love of learning right out of our students at an
22 earlier and earlier age.

23 In one of the -- I know there is --
24 In part of the answer to a question last week,
25 that these GCAs would only be about 12 hours'

1 worth of time, and for a teacher, the 12 hours
2 is two days of instruction. And that is not 12
3 hours isolated; that is 12 hours in addition to,
4 as you mentioned, the Iowas, the Terra Novas,
5 the PSSAs, and any other tests that the
6 districts do related to their own instruction.

7 So, yes, I agree that we are test
8 happy and we are creating that culture of
9 testing.

10 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Yes. And
11 yesterday, a group of our teachers from the
12 Pittsburgh School District were here to speak to
13 legislators, and this was one of the topics that
14 came up. And one of the Pittsburgh teachers
15 said that, in their school, they spend 21 days
16 directly on teaching for the tests, taking the
17 tests, and following up from the tests. And
18 that doesn't include remediation. And, you
19 know, that's like a month of school, and this
20 would be on top of that.

21 So we really are -- Your culture of
22 testing is very aptly phrased. And that is what
23 we are doing; we are turning schools into
24 testing institutions rather than learning
25 institutions. So I think that's a very good

1 question that your districts raised with you,
2 Representative Murt.

3 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: If I could, Mr.
4 Chairman --

5 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Yes.

6 MR. STROUP: -- may I address that
7 just a little bit differently? It seems to me
8 that much of the instruction is about preparing
9 youngsters for a test, and that it would be
10 unfair to give students a test for which they
11 have not received instruction; so the issue is
12 the quality of the instruction and to some
13 extent that is driven by the quality of the
14 test.

15 And one of the concerns I think that
16 you have heard from your districts is that when
17 you try to reduce a full course or a full
18 curriculum into one or two hours of testing, you
19 drive a pretty reduced quality to the
20 instruction that is designed to get folks just
21 to pass that test.

22 And the concern I think that you have
23 heard here is that a much richer instruction is
24 useful for youngsters and it may not be
25 reflected on a specific test, and the presence

1 of a specific test that has very high stakes may
2 appropriately drive teachers and systems to
3 teach to that test rather than have the test
4 test a broader breadth of knowledge.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: In addition to
6 the tests that I mentioned, the PSSA, the Terra
7 Nova, Iowa and California, are you aware of any
8 other standardized tests that we administer
9 throughout the commonwealth?

10 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: I am not. I
11 understand some districts may have local tests,
12 but that would be on a district-by-district
13 basis.

14 MR. STROUP: A number of districts
15 are using a variety of formative assessments as
16 a way of determining whether students are
17 meeting benchmarks for the PSSA, and I would
18 characterize those as standardized tests but
19 used more for instruction than for determining
20 whether to go on to the next grade or to
21 graduate.

22 MR. OLEKSIK: If I could add one
23 other point to this? Aside from that direct
24 time that is devoted to preparing for the test
25 and giving the test, there is a lot of

1 ripple-effect time, I think, that is used up by
2 administrators.

3 And in my district, it was counselors
4 who are the ones who are responsible for getting
5 the--there is some test security--getting the
6 tests ready for the teachers, collecting them
7 afterwards, getting them back to PDE or wherever
8 it may need to go.

9 And that is time that our counselors
10 are not counseling that is taken away from that,
11 their direct involvement with students. So
12 there is a lot of indirect time effects as well
13 as the direct loss of time giving the tests.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MURT: Thank you, Mr.
15 Chairman.

16 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: If I could just
17 ask a question? In the sequence of events that
18 you are suggesting that, you said, there were
19 some schools that use 40 days and there is
20 preparation testing and remediation, should not
21 the test, in fact, build, be an assessment of
22 knowledge that's not -- that's the general
23 knowledge that is the core of the curriculum,
24 not just a preparation for a test?

25 I mean, shouldn't there be a closer

1 way of evaluating a student's success other than
2 measuring it purely by whether or not you are
3 able to take a test and do well on that
4 particular test? Is that not the core of the
5 issue?

6 MR. OLEKSIAK: I agree a hundred
7 percent, Mr. Chairman. I think any research
8 will show that the best predictor of how well a
9 student is going to do, whether it's in college
10 or post secondary, is not the result of a
11 standardized test, but how they have done
12 throughout their school career based on a
13 variety of different assessments. Some of those
14 assessments being classroom assessments, some of
15 those being standardized tests, but standardized
16 tests that are appropriately designed for what
17 they are trying to measure.

18 So, yes. The short answer to your
19 question is, yes, there are ways to deal with
20 it.

21 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Perhaps my
22 teachers were particularly clever, but I never
23 remember classes in school where they taught me
24 what was going to be on the test. I wish they
25 had done that in some subjects, but I don't

1 remember that ever happening.

2 MR. OLEKSIAK: Well, and I would say
3 the same, not only as a student, but as a
4 teacher when I began, that it's a very different
5 world in public education now. And I did part
6 of my time in parochial education when I first
7 started.

8 But even as a public school teacher
9 for more than 20 years, it's a very different
10 emphasis that we have now.

11 And it is not just the loss of the
12 time, but in many districts we are seeing losses
13 of instructional time for social studies, whole
14 classes are being shifted around. There is loss
15 of art, music, all the things that keep many
16 kids in our schools, and that that is a concern
17 for me as well.

18 And one other thing I would like to
19 mention related to testing and what is being
20 tested. I know, as part of the panel last week,
21 what happens in Massachusetts was mentioned as a
22 model of what could happen here.

23 And I have a -- It's a very brief--
24 that I would like to read--statement that is
25 from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary

1 and Secondary Education web site dated May 1st,
2 2008. And it talks about, that the headline is,
3 Board Chairman Calls For The Creation of a 21st
4 Century Skills Task Force. And that is their
5 Chair of their Board of Education.

6 And that part of that release reads,
7 quote, in many of our schools, there is
8 insufficient time and attention given to broader
9 skills development and learning in areas such as
10 oral communication, information processing, the
11 application of technology to complex problems,
12 critical thinking, media literacy, creativity
13 and innovation, global awareness, cultural
14 competency, problem solving, teamwork/
15 collaboration, self-directed learning and
16 leadership.

17 In many cases, these skills can be,
18 and sometimes are, included in the strategies
19 teachers use to address core subjects; however,
20 too often these skills are neglected. And I
21 would make the case that those are the skills
22 that we need, not filling in standardized tests.
23 And those skills are often neglected to meet the
24 demands of taking those tests.

25 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

1 Representative Rapp.

2 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you,
3 panel. Thank you for being here today. After
4 last week's hearing, I would like to talk and
5 ask your opinions a little bit on remediation.

6 I am a very strong believer that
7 children should be taught to read, foremost, in
8 public education.

9 And I would like to get your input on
10 how you see remediation entering into this for a
11 student who is at the 11th grade or 12th grade,
12 students who have sat in the classrooms for 11
13 years, 12 years, and how do you see this
14 remediation working?

15 What would be your strategies when,
16 you know, the new Chapter 4 says that
17 remediation will start at 6th grade? I think
18 that's way too early.

19 And, if anything, schools should be
20 focusing on reading. Because if a student is
21 not reading and cannot read these tests in 11th
22 and 12th grade, how do you see your teachers,
23 your school districts, designing a remediation
24 program for these students?

25 MR. ALLWEIN: There are a number of

1 issues there. And let me just -- And I
2 apologize for being late. First of all, it's
3 important to know that school districts
4 remediate right now.

5 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: I am sorry, do you
6 want to introduce yourself for the reporter?

7 MR. ALLWEIN: I am sorry,
8 Representative.

9 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: All right.

10 MR. ALLWEIN: Tim Allwein with the
11 Pennsylvania School Boards Association. And I
12 apologize again for being late.

13 It's important to know, number one,
14 that while school districts remediate now and
15 the current regulations, at least in the section
16 that talks about local assessment systems,
17 requires them to remediate students who are
18 nonproficient, there are a number of districts
19 who are remediating kids now who do not score
20 proficient on the 11th grade PSSA test. The
21 proposal would require that remediation for
22 students who are nonproficient on the PSSA test.

23 The proposal also says that students
24 will have to demonstrate proficiency on
25 standards that are not tested by the state test,

1 even though it doesn't go into any detail about
2 how that would happen. So, presumably, there
3 would be some remediation involved there as
4 well.

5 So you are looking, at least
6 additional remediation costs in both of those
7 instances.

8 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: But could you
9 tell me how you think remediation would look
10 different than the instruction in the classroom?

11 MR. STROUP: Let me try to address
12 it, and start by saying that high school is much
13 too late to begin to teach youngsters how to
14 read.

15 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Okay.

16 MR. STROUP: That if the goal is
17 reading, that remediation needs to take place at
18 the time that youngsters are beginning to read
19 and it needs to take place throughout their
20 career until they are competent readers.

21 And that's why, when I referred
22 earlier to formative assessments, a number of
23 districts have begun to use formative
24 assessments, on a monthly or quarterly basis, in
25 order to identify specific reading problems

1 early so that they can begin to remediate them
2 before the 3rd grade PSSA assessment and
3 certainly before the 5th and 8th grade PSSA
4 assessments.

5 The problem is, if one hasn't learned
6 to read by high school, it's really, in many
7 ways, too late to get them to the competent
8 level that they are going to need to be to
9 perform well on these assessments.

10 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: I absolutely
11 agree. And personally, I think that this money
12 that we are looking at to establish this could
13 be better spent--if we are going to put more
14 money into education--into reading remediation,
15 more reading specialists. Because I do not
16 believe that at 11th and 12th grade, that you
17 are going to, unless you have reading
18 specialists at the 11th and 12th grades, and
19 students are very resistant to any type of
20 reading remediation at that grade level.

21 I have a specific question for PSEA.
22 For remediation summer school, this obviously,
23 in my opinion, might have to do with some
24 negotiation with your school contracts if we are
25 going to -- If we look at Massachusetts and

1 Virginia now, as an example, do you see any
2 problem with your teacher contracts if school
3 districts would be looking at more hours for
4 staff to be teaching after school, the weekends,
5 all year long during the summer?

6 MR. OLEKSIAK: Our contracts are all
7 negotiated at a local level. And I know in the
8 local where I was a teacher in the district, the
9 Upper Marion Area School District, it was
10 negotiated that teachers that worked summer
11 school, there was a set compensation per hour
12 for that and for any programs that we had that
13 were after-school programs for the students.

14 So they are all negotiated at a local
15 level. And, you know, there would be some
16 concerns at those, at the district level, about
17 that.

18 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: And I have one
19 last question and then I will defer to my
20 colleagues.

21 In your opinion, as people who work
22 in the trenches at the local level, students
23 have the right in Pennsylvania to stay in school
24 until they are 21, or their 21st birthday. In
25 your opinion, would that allow students to

1 retake these tests, until they are 21, to try to
2 acquire a regular high school diploma?

3 MR. STROUP: As I understand the
4 regulations proposed, youngsters could take it
5 at any time. So that even after 21, when they
6 are no longer a youngster, if they have not
7 received a high school diploma, I see no
8 prohibition from their trying to take the test
9 and demonstrate proficiency. I didn't see an
10 age limit on the assessment.

11 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: So does that
12 mean that they would also be eligible for a
13 remediation in summer school?

14 MR. STROUP: As long as they are
15 enrolled in school. And they could remain
16 enrolled, as you suggest, until 21. Yes.

17 MR. ALLWEIN: The only problem I see
18 with that is for--and I will stand corrected--
19 but under No Child Left Behind, as you know,
20 graduation rate is one of the criteria, for
21 schools districts to meet adequate year of
22 progress. And I believe that graduation rate is
23 defined as students graduating in four years.
24 So that could be a problem.

25 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

2 Representative Conklin.

3 REPRESENTATIVE CONKLIN: Thank you,
4 Mr. Chairman.

5 First off, please don't make it that
6 those of us who are older, just because of
7 grades, still have to take those tests. You
8 would be sadly disappointed.

9 I just have a quick question that,
10 over the last year, I have had the opportunity
11 to visit some of the schools in my area that
12 have done the classrooms of the future. And the
13 first-year classrooms of the future are doing
14 fairly well, but the second-year classrooms of
15 the future are absolutely phenomenal with the
16 amount of achievements the students are making.

17 In fact, the second-year teachers
18 told me, the only problem they are having is
19 that they have had to give up their old
20 lectures. Because by the time they are 10
21 minutes in it, these students, with the
22 technology, have already surpassed them.

23 And where this is going is, is that
24 at my age, I grew up with Father Knows Best,
25 and, you know, mother, father, sister, dog, cat,

1 church on Sunday, grocery store closed on
2 Sunday. Times have changed a lot since we were
3 children. And one of the things I think we have
4 a hard time understanding is the fact that times
5 have changed.

6 And this is a long question, but it
7 will probably be a short answer.

8 One of the problems I see that we are
9 having, especially within the urban areas, are
10 this dropout rate. Because the home life has
11 changed, things are changing a lot.

12 And I know what the intent -- What we
13 are trying to do is that we want to have our
14 children very proficient by the time they come
15 out of high school. We want to benchmark those
16 children to make sure they are living up to
17 their full expectation.

18 Back to what I was saying a few
19 minutes ago. Visiting the classrooms of the
20 future, it has shown they have changed the
21 teaching style to what was done five years ago.
22 And these students with the presentations they
23 gave me--and they went across the board, every
24 student; they didn't hand-pick out--they allowed
25 the class to be there, how far it exceeded those

1 students that did not have that new way of
2 teaching technology.

3 My question is simply this. Is
4 benchmark testing, which we need to have a bar
5 for these children to achieve, the best way? Or
6 what the real reason we want to do this, is to
7 make sure our children are proficient? And are
8 there more proficient ways that you, as
9 educators, have found to get those children to
10 that level which we want them to be?

11 How is that for you?

12 MR. STROUP: I'll begin by echoing
13 your comments about classrooms of the future.
14 The districts that have participated, they not
15 only have gotten some good equipment for the
16 faculty and the students to use, but they have
17 also gotten tremendous staff development. And
18 it shows in the quality of teaching. And it
19 shows in the change in which that has occurred
20 in the classrooms, in the way that faculty and
21 students interact with one another and with the
22 technology.

23 And I think you are absolutely right
24 to suggest that those changes may not be
25 accurately reflected in an old-style course,

1 test tradition.

2 And one of the things that we have
3 questioned about this particular proposal is
4 that it harkens back to the pre-1993 curriculum
5 regulations in which there were traditional
6 courses, with traditional content, that was
7 taught in a traditional way.

8 And we moved from that to the
9 standards-based instruction, have spent a great
10 deal of effort in developing the standards and
11 instruction to go with it, including the new
12 technologies, and now we are going back and sort
13 of superimposing on that a course, test
14 construct that doesn't really fit; and so, I
15 share in the concern that you have raised.

16 REPRESENTATIVE CONKLIN: All right.

17 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would echo that
18 concern, I think. As a teacher, I mean, I know
19 what works. What works is early intervention,
20 we have talked about; smaller class sizes,
21 particularly in the earlier grades; the proper
22 technology; the proper professional development
23 to go along with that technology; plans to
24 involve parents in the districts. That's what
25 will make a difference.

1 And as far as the assessment goes,
2 multiple measures of assessment done over time
3 to find those areas where there may be a need of
4 remediation or there may be problems. A test at
5 the end of 11th or 12th grade is not going to
6 tell us anything we don't already know, to a
7 large degree.

8 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: And just one
9 other comment on that. And it really, to some
10 extent, goes back to Representative Rapp's
11 question about, what do you do if the students
12 don't pass the tests.

13 And just yesterday, there was a
14 report that came out on No Child Left Behind,
15 and I was reading it this morning before I came
16 in. And among the things that it said were that
17 tutoring has been shown not to improve student
18 achievement on these standardized tests. So I
19 wanted to say that when you were asking that
20 question and the conversation just moved
21 forward.

22 But that was a remediation that has
23 not really worked out with the students who most
24 need it, and possibly because of what we talked
25 about, in that the reading is the basis for it,

1 for so many of the students.

2 And tutoring in subject matter
3 doesn't speak to that issue of reading and
4 reading comprehension.

5 And going to Representative Conklin's
6 question, which is really that the classrooms
7 for the future are reflecting the new way that
8 students are learning and these types of tests
9 are designed to reflect an older way of
10 learning.

11 And in many ways, I do not believe
12 they will even do that well, for this reason:
13 Pennsylvania's standards have two problems.
14 And we had someone from our National union, AFT,
15 in Washington, testify to this on the Senate
16 side.

17 Pennsylvania's standards for their
18 course work is so far behind the other states.
19 It lacks specificity that teachers can't really
20 know what it is that is expected under those
21 standards.

22 And the test makers, if they base the
23 tests on the standards, really do not have good
24 guidelines as to what is expected in this state.

25 Nor is there curriculum to back up

1 the standards. The standards are vague. The
2 standards are nonspecific. The standards don't
3 tell you in what grades what happened so it's
4 very hard to do sequential things.

5 So, in a way, what we are saying is
6 that we are not really well set up to do it even
7 under the traditional ways of teaching,
8 learning, and testing. And the classrooms for
9 the future are really looking at the new ways
10 that our children are learning rather than the
11 more traditional ways that we did. So I think
12 that imposing graduation tests on top of
13 everything that we currently have, one, is a
14 problem, in that we are not doing the
15 traditional measuring well because our standards
16 are so vague.

17 And we have state -- national
18 evaluations of this. And, Chairman Roebuck, we
19 usually send it to the committee every year, and
20 I will make certain that you receive copies for
21 every committee member so that they can see
22 where our standards setting is way at the bottom
23 of the barrel, as far as all of the states are
24 concerned.

25 So imposing these graduation tests on

1 top of a weak standards base is one problem, and
2 what you are focused on is the problem of the
3 future, which is switching the whole way of
4 teaching and assessing, to the way, in fact, our
5 young people are learning.

6 REPRESENTATIVE CONKLIN: Thank you.
7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have to
8 apologize. I have to go to a puppy mill
9 hearing.

10 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Okay. Thank you.
11 Representative Rohrer.

12 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Thank you,
13 Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the panel being out
14 there. I can look through and see all of you.

15 A question that I would have would be
16 this -- I think most of you were at the previous
17 hearing, so you got to hear what was said there.

18 (Panel members nod affirmatively.)

19 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: I don't have
20 your testimony in front of me, so I am not --
21 exactly said --

22 I don't know exactly what you had
23 prepared earlier. But in the context of problem
24 solving--one of the issues that we try to check
25 our students on--from your perspective, I would

1 like to know what problem it is that you think
2 the State Board is trying to solve. Two, then
3 you can comment on it, does it achieve it? What
4 do you think the problem is?

5 Because one of the things that they
6 said--and that was kind of mentioned as a part
7 of the Commission in the study--was that we know
8 we are not getting the performance, generally
9 speaking, the academic performance in our kids;
10 so, therefore, is that the problem? What is the
11 problem that is being solved?

12 And then I would like to know--
13 because it's always easy, as we sit here as
14 policymakers, it's always easy to complain about
15 than find why any given proposal comes short--
16 in this case, what do you think is the solution
17 if this, in fact, is not? I mean, I would just
18 like to hear it summarized from your
19 perspective.

20 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Representative
21 Rohrer, I would like to. I mean, as far as the
22 batting order here.

23 In response to your first question--
24 what problem is it that the State Board is
25 trying to solve with the proposal for graduation

1 tests--our organization, AFT Pennsylvania, must
2 respond that, really, we don't know what problem
3 you are trying to solve.

4 In terms of recognizing that there
5 are issues and there are problems, graduation
6 tests do not seem, in our view, to be a fit to
7 help any of the problems that we are really
8 focusing and need to focus on; so it might be
9 better to ask someone from the State Board how
10 they see graduation tests solving the problems
11 that they are identifying.

12 And we certainly recognize that there
13 are problems and issues. One of the
14 difficulties with graduation tests is that most
15 of the children who fail those kinds of tests in
16 high school really do have reading problems, at
17 least in that aspect of things. Setting aside
18 the math issue, there is numeracy problems as
19 well. But literacy, in many ways, is at the
20 heart of it.

21 And I have taught everything from 2nd
22 grade through high school through college. I
23 have taught in the parochial school systems. I
24 have taught in public school systems.

25 And as I say, I taught 2nd grade.

1 And if the child does not learn to read and read
2 well in 2nd grade, those problems escalate,
3 multiply. And by the time that that young
4 person is a junior in high school and has maybe
5 struggled through in past courses, but maybe has
6 not really learned what they should have, it's
7 very hard to remediate at that level if the
8 basic problem is reading.

9 And I don't mean to simplify all of
10 the problems in education, but if you had to
11 identify one, that would be my choice.

12 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: And can I ask
13 you a question on that?

14 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Yes, um-hum.

15 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Because we
16 have had a lot of discussion about that, I tend
17 to believe that the same way. But why are they
18 not reading? And why is it that our students
19 don't know how to read?

20 We don't need--I mean, in my opinion,
21 and that I think you would agree --

22 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Um-hum.

23 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: -- we don't
24 need something from the State Board --

25 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: I would agree

1 with you on that.

2 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: -- to tell
3 us. So what is and what has been inherent
4 within the system that has been the obstacle or
5 the reason why our kids are not reading?

6 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Well, I think
7 there are multiple reasons why young people may
8 not be reading the way they should or in some
9 cases reading at all.

10 One issue that is easy to point to is
11 that, particularly in urban areas like
12 Philadelphia, which is where I have done most of
13 my teaching, many of the children don't even get
14 to school until they are six, seven, eight years
15 old. And they arrive with no preparation. They
16 may not know -- Not only do they not know how to
17 read, they may not know their colors. They have
18 an extremely limited vocabulary.

19 And AFT has done a lot of research on
20 this, the number of words that a five year old
21 knows when they arrive at school--and it varies
22 enormously--if they come from homes that are,
23 quote, middle-class homes or homes where there
24 is reading material around and that's an
25 emphasis.

1 And there is reading material around
2 in homes of all classes--I am not excluding any
3 class--but they tend to be more common in higher
4 socioeconomic groups. If they have that, they
5 go to school with a rich vocabulary. And they
6 see their parents reading, they understand that
7 there is a connection between those black things
8 on the page and understanding and the whole --
9 It can open up the whole world to them, if they
10 understand that connection.

11 But if a child is arriving at school
12 for the first time at seven years old, hasn't
13 been in kindergarten and comes from a home that
14 has very limited opportunities for vocabulary
15 development and understanding the connection
16 between printing and reading, they are really
17 starting out way behind.

18 And I am thinking, when I taught 2nd
19 grade--maybe I shouldn't be saying this because
20 we are really discussing public schools--but I
21 was doing that in parochial school, and we were
22 able to get almost every child reading at grade
23 level by the time they finished.

24 And I remember in particular,
25 Patrick's family came in and apologized to me

1 that Patrick couldn't read. And said--and his
2 father was at the door--that his father couldn't
3 read either, but they had a family business so
4 he would be all right and I shouldn't be so
5 upset. Which I clearly was.

6 So that even in environments where
7 everything is working to help children read,
8 some have situations where they can't and they
9 need--under normal circumstances--and they need
10 particularly sophisticated and targeted help
11 with that.

12 And I know I am going on too long, if
13 you will excuse me, but this is a passion with
14 me.

15 Sometimes school districts do find
16 good ways of intervening. Philadelphia had
17 something called Reading Recovery. They got the
18 child in 1st grade. If, in 1st grade, they
19 weren't learning the way they should, it got
20 them right away with specially-trained teachers
21 who focus specifically getting them to read.

22 And it was tremendously successful.
23 And it was discontinued for funding reasons.

24 So I absolutely agree with you, it's
25 a puzzle to us as to the connection between what

1 the State Board sees as a problem and the
2 graduation tests as their proposed solution for
3 that.

4 And for those who are in the field,
5 the consensus really is, it's getting children
6 to read at an earlier level.

7 The chances of their catching up --
8 Not that we don't try; we do. But the chances
9 of tutoring an 11th grader, who is not able to
10 read, to pass a social studies graduation test,
11 is extremely problematic. And the chances of
12 that child getting a diploma in anything
13 resembling a timely manner, it would be a real
14 challenge.

15 MR. OLEKSIAK: I have been dying to
16 grab this, too. I think not only the GCAs, but
17 the federal program, No Child Left Behind, is
18 really based on a false premise that our
19 students are not doing well.

20 Now, clearly, there are our problem
21 areas. But we have five hundred and one school
22 districts in Pennsylvania and the great majority
23 of our students under conditions of wealth,
24 poverty, are doing very, very well. Our
25 district is doing an amazing job. Our teachers

1 are doing an amazing job.

2 Given the diversity, the
3 socioeconomic factors involved, the great
4 majority of students in Pennsylvania do very
5 well. And they go to excellent schools,
6 excellent universities, excellent
7 post-secondary, vocational training. So
8 sometimes I think we lose sight of that because
9 we are so focused on these problem areas.

10 And they do exist; I would not deny
11 it.

12 It reminds me, with all due respect,
13 I think if you were to ask people--I know this
14 is true of Congress--what do you think of
15 Congress? Well, Congress is a mess.

16 But my congressman is great. I like
17 my congressman.

18 And if you would ask people, what do
19 you think of the public schools? Oh, they're --
20 The public schools are trouble.

21 But what do you think of your public
22 school? It's great. I love my teacher. I love
23 my school.

24 My kids have had an excellent
25 education. I had the good fortune to teach in

1 Upper Marion. I live in Abbington Township. My
2 kids go to Abbington schools. I would put the
3 schools -- the vast majority of the schools in
4 Bucks and Montgomery counties up against any
5 public school or private school anywhere in the
6 country. We have outstanding schools.

7 And these, No Child Left Behind and
8 GCAs, are not going to help those schools at
9 all. They know what they need and they are
10 addressing those needs.

11 There are researchers that will tell
12 you that they don't need to look at anything to
13 tell you how a school's test scores are except
14 the Zip Code, and the Zip Code gives you all of
15 the socioeconomic information you need.

16 So it's a very complex problem that
17 is being addressed very effectively in many,
18 many places around Pennsylvania. And where
19 there are areas of concern, they clearly need to
20 be addressed in a targeted, specific way and at
21 an early age.

22 So I think I would agree,
23 Representative Rohrer, that it's addressing a
24 problem that we may not really have.

25 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Okay.

1 MR. STROUP: If I may speak to the
2 question? I think the State Board has been
3 pretty clear that the purpose of the regulation
4 is to increase the number of students who
5 graduate college ready and job ready. I don't
6 think adding a test or a combination of tests is
7 the proper way of addressing that problem.

8 And I think the Commission report on
9 which many of the recommendations were based
10 included a number of other recommendations that
11 obviously the State Board doesn't have authority
12 over but are prerequisites to moving toward any
13 kind of exit exam.

14 And those are not addressed here.
15 And I think they need to be addressed first.

16 But it seems to me that the real
17 issue for high school students, who presumably
18 have reading skills by the time they get to high
19 school, is to find things that interest them and
20 to imbed the skills that they will need in the
21 content that they find interesting.

22 And I am not sure that requiring all
23 students to take specific academic subjects is a
24 way to get them engaged in content that they
25 find interesting and that will be of use to them

1 in the future.

2 And one of the groups that I think is
3 hugely left out in this proposal are those
4 students who are pursuing careers through
5 vocational education and technical education.

6 MR. ALLWEIN: I would just take it
7 from a slightly different angle. I do agree
8 with Stinson that the purpose that the State
9 Board has voiced has been to make sure that kids
10 graduate proficient in state academic standards.

11 Our view from PSBA is that we think
12 we have a system right now that allows that to
13 happen. And, as you know, right now students
14 can graduate if they demonstrate proficiency on
15 their PSSA test or a local assessment aligned to
16 state standards and the PSSA test.

17 We think that the presumption has
18 been made, because there is these 57,000
19 students who graduated without being proficient,
20 that somehow the local assessments aren't
21 rigorous enough and they are not doing the job
22 and so we need to have state tests in order to
23 pick up of the slack.

24 But, as you know, there has not been
25 any work done in the last nine years that these

1 regulations were in place to look at what the
2 local assessments are, what school districts are
3 doing, which ones work and which ones don't; and
4 so, we think there's a lot of improvement that
5 can be made in that area.

6 We survey districts about their
7 graduation assessments. And while it's
8 difficult to tell whether or not districts have
9 acceptable local assessment systems from a
10 survey, what is clear is that a lot of districts
11 spend a lot of time, a lot of money, and a lot
12 of effort developing local assessments and
13 making sure they are aligned as the regulations
14 say.

15 So we are not -- It's not only a
16 dichotomy, I think, between what the problem --
17 the stated problem is and what the solution is,
18 but whether or not the solution is even needed
19 at all.

20 And, you know, we think with a little
21 money and a little effort, the current system
22 that allows local assessments, I think can get
23 to the point where it can produce students that
24 we can all be assured are graduating competent
25 in state assessments.

1 So the difference is, I think
2 proponents believe that the only way to do that
3 is with state assessments; we think that you can
4 do it with a mixture of state and local
5 assessments, as we have now.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Thank you
7 all. And that was a longer question, but I just
8 wanted to summarize what I heard because I think
9 this underscores why we are having real issues.

10 I have one response: I don't know
11 what the Board of Education is trying to solve.

12 The other was --

13 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: With the tests.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: -- I believe
15 that there is a false premise that the whole
16 thing is based on to begin with.

17 The other was, Stinson, you said and
18 believe that the department is trying to
19 increase the number of college-ready or
20 job-ready applicants.

21 And then, Tim, you said, trying to
22 increase the number of students who are PSSA
23 proficient.

24 They are all different. And that was
25 kind of why I asked the question, because we

1 have got to have some agreement on what problem
2 we are trying to solve. And otherwise--which is
3 the question I raised last time--how in the
4 world do we know if we ever get to the point we
5 think we are going to get to, if we have ever
6 gotten there, if we don't know what it is we are
7 trying to solve?

8 So I think we have got a very
9 fundamental, foundational issue here that has
10 got to be answered before this thing goes
11 forward. You just -- There is a disconnect.

12 Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
14 Representative Grucela.

15 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Thank you,
16 Mr. Chairman.

17 I wanted to start with, I realize we
18 ran out of time the last time. And I appreciate
19 the panel, the last time, waiting, and being
20 here today.

21 But I happen to know a person that
22 teaches in Massachusetts and I wanted to -- I
23 made a phone call just to find out. Because the
24 gentleman, Mr. Roosevelt, I believe is the
25 superintendent in Pittsburgh, seemed to draw the

1 picture that Massachusetts took off and is one
2 of the greatest states in the nation now because
3 they have a graduation test. That's not totally
4 accurate. There are a lot of reasons.

5 First of all, I would even question--
6 I apologize to starting the comment--I would
7 even question why we measure Massachusetts as a
8 peer state; there are probably more students in
9 Philadelphia than in the entire State of
10 Massachusetts.

11 And this person also told me what
12 Massachusetts does in some of their districts,
13 is they identify those students that they know
14 are not going to pass the test. They can
15 identify them. They can identify them early.
16 They put them all together.

17 This person actually helped the
18 tutoring, if you want to call it. He called it,
19 just telling them, teaching them to the test, so
20 they can pass the test so the school looks good.
21 And that's the bottom line.

22 So I just wanted to make that
23 comment. I am sorry, Mr. Roosevelt, I didn't
24 want to do it last time because I already used
25 up all of my time. But I wanted to tell my

1 colleagues that, you know, I did a little
2 research on Massachusetts and what they do up
3 there.

4 Also, I don't know if you know, but a
5 couple of years ago, there was a student who
6 found a mistake on the number two pencil bubble
7 test which allowed eleven hundred other students
8 to graduate in Massachusetts because the student
9 found the mistake on the test.

10 And there is no doubt. I mean, there
11 is an old saying. You know, those of you and
12 some of the panel have been teachers. You know,
13 bullfight critics row on row, line the enormous
14 Plaza full, but there is only one who really
15 knows, that's the one who fights the bull.

16 And I wanted to dovetail with a
17 comment and maybe see whether or not the panel
18 agrees, but my 30 years at the high school level
19 tells me that the kid that doesn't pass the
20 test--I am going to sort of dovetail on what
21 Representative Conklin was talking about--is
22 going to quit.

23 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Yeah.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: He is going
25 to quit. And Oregon and in California, the

1 dropout rates soared when they took these
2 high-stakes tests. Because the kids that didn't
3 pass the test -- And I believe that.

4 And this, I know times have changed
5 in the modern world and the classrooms of the
6 future and everything else, but my sense tells
7 me, these kids will quit. And then I guess
8 that's my question and the comment, as to
9 whether or not you would agree on that. But,
10 you know.

11 And I had gone through all of these.
12 And many of us and -- I tried to jot some of
13 them down. In 30 years, I went through a
14 classroom without walls, schools within a
15 school, outcomes-based, strategic planning,
16 cooperative learning. And you know what--as
17 Representative Rapp said it and I said the last
18 time--it all comes back to reading.

19 And I don't know why they don't take
20 this 15 million dollars -- Which, by the way, I
21 would like to know what we are getting for 15
22 million dollars. I mean, does it cost 15 --
23 That's not a question for you guys.

24 But, I mean, does it take 15 million
25 dollars to prepare the test? God forbid, to

1 correct it. I mean, Bernie O'Neill and I will
2 do it a lot cheaper than 15 million, if they
3 need somebody to correct the test. But, you
4 know, I am not exactly sure --

5 You know, I don't know if, Tim, that
6 the schools are going to get the money or if
7 it's going to be an unfunded mandate.

8 But, you know, I just think if you
9 take that 15 million dollars. And, boy, are you
10 right. You can't teach kids at the high school
11 level to read. You know, I taught seniors and
12 there is no way that you are going to teach 16,
13 17, 18 years--I had kids 20--you know, to read,
14 you know, at the high school level.

15 So I guess my basic question is, do
16 you think or agree that this will lead to a
17 higher dropout rate which may in turn make our
18 statistics worse than if that's what --

19 And I agree with Representative
20 Rohrer. I don't know what kind of -- Nobody
21 seems to come up with the real reason of what we
22 are trying to solve.

23 And that might, if the reason is that
24 we have a high number of kids unprepared, that
25 statistic is going to look worse because these

1 kids are going to quit, they are going to
2 dropout.

3 The dropout rates are going to soar,
4 as it did in the other states. Washington state
5 did the same thing. So those three western
6 states are -- just did away with this whole idea
7 of this number two pencil bubble test, so.

8 I know that was a rather long
9 comment, but it really comes down to what you
10 think about the dropout rate, whether or not we
11 are not going to really -- You know.

12 And, by the way, one last thing. We
13 have all of these panels, all of these panels
14 and all of these experts, and you know who we
15 forget to ask? We forget to ask the students.
16 We never have any panel of students, pro or con,
17 that we talk to. We never ask the kids, you
18 know, what they think.

19 And I see the State Board -- And they
20 did a tremendous step and they put a student on
21 the State Board. Of course, they didn't let
22 them vote. God forbid, the kid should vote.
23 You know. But at least it's a step in the right
24 direction.

25 But maybe be at some point, we ought

1 to have a panel. And we could mix the panel,
2 kids that are for it and kids that are against
3 it. Why don't we ever listen to the students?

4 Thank you.

5 VOICE: Lunch money.

6 MR. STROUP: I will attempt to
7 address that. I think in most of the states, if
8 not all of the states that have instituted a
9 high-stakes exit exam, the initial experience
10 has been an increase in the dropout rate.
11 Although, that tends to rebalance after a couple
12 of years of experience with the test.

13 My concern is not that it will make
14 our statistics look bad, but that it will be bad
15 for the lives of those students. And bad for
16 the lives of those students who are maybe denied
17 a diploma, who currently would get a diploma and
18 get access to community colleges, get access to
19 four-year institutions, and get access to jobs
20 that they would be denied if they do not have a
21 diploma.

22 And we see, from the HumRRO study of
23 the PSSA, that there are a number of students
24 who do not score, quote, proficient on the PSSA,
25 who go on to college, some of whom take

1 remediation courses in college, some of them who
2 do not and yet have very successful college
3 careers. So I have some concern about its
4 impact on students, not just the dropout.

5 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would agree with
6 that, what Stinson just said, that they're --
7 You know, I think we can expect an initial
8 increase in the dropout rates that may or may
9 not level off later on.

10 I would like to correct one thing you
11 said, Representative Grucela. You forgot
12 adaptive curriculum, writing across the
13 curriculum --

14 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: I couldn't
15 remember them all.

16 MR. OLEKSIAK: -- differentiated
17 instruction. And I am sure there are others
18 that I am forgetting, as well.

19 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: We'll have
20 some new ones next year.

21 MR. OLEKSIAK: Right.

22 One thing I would like to comment on
23 that you said and I think it's important, you
24 referred to this as a high-stakes test. And
25 then, it is. I note that some of the proponents

1 say that it is not.

2 But if you are a student who is
3 facing this test and this is going to determine
4 whether or not you are going to graduate, it is
5 a high-stakes test. If you were a teacher in a
6 classroom who is instructing these students, and
7 you know that what is going to happen is going
8 to determine whether or not the student gets his
9 diploma, it is a high-stakes test.

10 And one other final comment. My
11 youngest daughter just graduated from high
12 school. And I did ask her, so what do you think
13 of these? And her response was very simple,
14 they are stupid. That's from an 18-year-old
15 expert, so.

16 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
17 Representative O'Neill.

18 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Thank you
19 very much. And thank you all for coming back
20 today. And I am sorry you had to sit last week
21 and not have an opportunity. So I really
22 appreciate it.

23 A couple of things. First of all,
24 you know, I can't agree more with Representative
25 Rapp and Grucela. I think this committee should

1 take on the task of looking into elementary
2 education and what's going on.

3 You know, I see studies and I see
4 reports in the papers all the time about how our
5 high schools are doing compared to other states
6 and compared to each other, but rarely do you
7 see how our elementary schools are doing.

8 And I can tell you for a fact, that I
9 know when school districts have to cut their
10 budget, a lot of times one of the first things
11 they do cut are the reading specialists and that
12 sort of thing because they are not required.

13 But there is a lot of truth. I think
14 we need to look in and see what is going on in
15 the elementary schools, because the kids aren't
16 coming up to us and I think we should definitely
17 look at that. On the exam, I --

18 Oh, I wanted to -- The Secretary is
19 not here, but I wanted to make this statement.

20 VOICE: He is here.

21 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Oh, he is.
22 Hopefully, he will hear this then. When he was
23 speaking last week, you know, he was citing data
24 about the results on the PSSA testing and the
25 number of kids that are proficient and

1 everything. And I can tell you, I have
2 administered the PSSA test. And as far as I
3 know, I am the only person in the state who has
4 not only administered it but graded it and went
5 through the process.

6 And I am going to tell you this,
7 because it's something I strongly, really
8 believe in, and that's the fact that if
9 Pennsylvania used another test other than the
10 PSSA test--for example, the one they use in
11 Arkansas--these figures wouldn't be anywhere
12 near as bad as he stated last week.

13 And I don't think our schools and our
14 teachers get enough credit for what they do.
15 And I am not saying that because I am a former
16 teacher; I am saying it because it is the most
17 difficult No Child Left Behind test in the
18 country. Bar none. So, you know, I think
19 sometimes you have to compare apples to apples
20 and oranges to oranges.

21 But there are a lot of kids out there
22 who aren't succeeding and are falling behind
23 and it is a huge number. But it is not because
24 of a test that they are taking in 11th grade;
25 it's because of what got them to 11th grade and

1 what happened when they were a child and their
2 lack of success in elementary school. There is
3 a lot of, lot of truth to that.

4 But as far as the competency exams
5 go, I am going to play the Devil's advocate. I
6 might sound like, you know, especially being a
7 former teacher. But these exams -- Now, you can
8 all correct me. Because you are saying, you are
9 worried about the people teaching to the test
10 and that sort of thing, but aren't these exams
11 designed to replace the final exams of the
12 courses, of the specific courses in high school;
13 isn't that correct?

14 MR. STROUP: That's been discussed.
15 I don't think it's clear in the regulation that
16 they have to. But, clearly, a district could
17 make that choice.

18 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Um-hum.

19 MR. STROUP: But there is no course
20 now. Although the regulations call for the
21 department to develop a course, there is no
22 course now for which this would be the final
23 exam.

24 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Explain it
25 to me, there is no course for the --

1 MR. STROUP: For instance, the
2 regulations call for one exam in the high school
3 history, U.S. history and World history. We
4 don't have a statewide course in U.S. history or
5 World history.

6 We have courses in high schools in
7 World history and U.S. history, but it is not a
8 course that is designed around the tests that
9 will be given in that content. So there is
10 no -- currently, there is no alignment between a
11 course and one of these tests.

12 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay. Well,
13 then what you are saying is that there is no
14 standard as to what you would need to put in the
15 U.S. history or World history across the state?

16 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Right.

17 MR. STROUP: Well, it's tough to use
18 the word standard because we do have a set of
19 academic standards on history, but you can use
20 those standards to teach a variety of content.
21 The content in some other history course may be
22 different from the content in another history
23 course and both in written standards.

24 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: But there is
25 not a written curriculum?

1 MR. STROUP: Correct.

2 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Correct.

3 MR. STROUP: Okay, and statewide
4 curriculum --

5 MR. OLEKSIAK: And --

6 COURT REPORTER: Excuse me. One
7 moment. We need one at a time, so I have a
8 clear record.

9 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: I didn't
10 even know there was a stenographer here. I
11 thought you were a panelist.

12 COURT REPORTER: Oh.

13 VOICE: A quiet panelist.

14 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Chime in.

15 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: On our
16 agenda, there is a woman who is missing,
17 who is supposed to be sitting at the table. I
18 apologize.

19 COURT REPORTER: That's okay. All
20 right.

21 MR. STROUP: I think that is the
22 issue that Pat Murphy addressed earlier, and
23 that is that the AFT study really did focus on
24 the difference between standards and the
25 curriculum.

1 And we have standards. I think they
2 are better than AFT does. But we have standards
3 in place. We do not have a statewide curriculum
4 in place; we have curriculum developed in each
5 district to teach the individual courses.

6 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay. Then
7 I guess I could see that in history. But if you
8 take something like -- And maybe it's the same
9 problem because there is not a written
10 curriculum for Algebra. Which it was thrown
11 around all the time. But I can tell you, from
12 my own experience, I am shocked that--take
13 Algebra--what is being taught in Algebra I,
14 could be different from district to district.

15 I am even more shocked because I know
16 from my own experiences, that my own school,
17 that what could be taught in Algebra I, in the
18 two sections, by two different teachers, could
19 be different. So that's a huge problem.

20 And their final exams could be
21 totally different. So you could have two kids
22 having an A in Algebra I at the same high school
23 and not being taught the same thing or mastering
24 the same material. That is a, to me, a huge
25 problem.

1 And I can tell you from experience
2 that some of my students who were mainstreamed
3 into certain courses, particularly some math
4 courses, I was shocked that they passed the
5 final. I mean, I knew the kids very well, and I
6 was shocked that they could pass the final.

7 So I am on the bubble of all of this
8 because, you know, I am very pro education, pro
9 teacher, but I see the need of things that need
10 to be addressed at the high school level that,
11 you know, that you have got now.

12 Now, I know at one time, at my
13 district, all of the math finals were the same
14 in a particular course. And then you ran into
15 the problem where, because it was that the
16 teachers got together and wrote the final, it
17 was approved by the department head and then it
18 was approved by administration; however, what
19 happened, the problem they were running into,
20 was that the teachers weren't necessarily
21 teaching or covering all of the material.

22 And a lot of that has to do with the
23 learning rate and speed of a particular class.
24 So, you know. So then there is a case where the
25 finals weren't being -- or weren't justifying

1 what was going on in the classroom and so forth.

2 So do you have any suggestions?

3 Because I understand your reasons why
4 you oppose this. I can make an argument for
5 some reasons why we should go down this road.
6 But what I think, I guess what I am looking
7 for--and I think it's the person in me, I guess,
8 the glass being half full--what suggestions do
9 you as a group have to try to address the
10 problems that have -- Although you said earlier,
11 you don't know what the problem is that they are
12 trying to address, but I guess the best thing
13 is, what are your suggestions?

14 And then if you don't have them, I
15 would love to have another hearing and have you
16 come back and tell me what your ideas would be
17 to try to bring in mind a coordinated curriculum
18 across the school district, across the state.
19 Because -- You know.

20 And I agree with what the gentleman
21 from PSEA said. I mean, there is no way you are
22 going to tell me that the schools in Bucks
23 County are not as good if not better than every
24 high school in Arkansas. Although, four years
25 ago, every school in Arkansas was being

1 proficient. It just doesn't make sense to me.

2 So what's going on in the schools are
3 good in certain areas and the teaching is good
4 and the product that is coming out is good, and
5 I think it is being tested unfairly in a lot of
6 ways with the type of test. Not necessarily the
7 test, you know, the fact that they are testing,
8 but the testing material they are using.

9 So I guess -- And, unfortunately,
10 that's the federal government, and we have to
11 fight them on this.

12 But what do we do to come up with a
13 way to provide to the taxpayers, to the people
14 and to employers and everybody, that we are
15 doing everything we can to get these kids most
16 proficient as possible? I don't know if you
17 have any suggestions.

18 MR. STROUP: I am not sure that I do.
19 But I think if the goal is to have a uniform
20 curriculum in every high school, in every
21 classroom, then let's have a discussion about
22 what that curriculum looks like, rather than
23 have a test and then let the test that is
24 developed by a test company drive what that
25 curriculum is going to be.

1 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: That is a
2 very valid point, very valid. I appreciate it.

3 MR. OLEKSIAK: I think we -- You
4 know, if districts were provided a model
5 curriculum, model assessments by the department,
6 if there were targeted audits done of districts
7 to find where the kinds of problems you are
8 pointing out are occurring, that would be fine.

9 I guess, for me, I am thinking of the
10 example you used with the two different Algebra
11 classes. And I don't see that as a problem,
12 necessarily, unless there is a high-stakes exit
13 test at the end. That, you know, here are
14 students that may have learned different things,
15 but they have algebraic skills. They have
16 demonstrated competency in the assessments that
17 the teacher has done, that the district has done
18 and that shows that they are -- they may know
19 different things, but they are capable of
20 learning Algebra. And if they are put into
21 another class, then that skill will serve them
22 well.

23 But the short answer to your question
24 I think is, let's provide model assessments and
25 model curriculum for districts that need it, you

1 know, and see what they can do.

2 MR. ALLWEIN: I would want to make
3 sure that we do mention the fact that there is a
4 model curriculum offered in this proposal, and I
5 think there probably will be a number of
6 districts that accept it.

7 But I agree strongly with Stinson, if
8 we are going to talk about a statewide
9 curriculum, then let's talk about that. Let's
10 not have the test drive the curriculum. That is
11 putting the cart before the horse.

12 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: And I
13 appreciate that. You know. And I have got to
14 tell you, as a special educator, I was in a
15 very, very highly specialized field in special
16 education. There were very few people that
17 actually did what I did.

18 But what amazed me was I -- Because
19 of testing, you know, and so forth, I was forced
20 by the district to give final exams because
21 everybody gives final exams. But yet the reason
22 why the kids were in my classroom was because of
23 their extreme behavior and ability not to sit
24 still.

25 But I had to give them a final exam.

1 Thank God I was the one who created it and
2 graded it. I mean, you know. So I can see both
3 sides of the story.

4 And I am sorry to interrupt you
5 before you had a chance to speak.

6 MR. OLEKSIAK: It's just, I did
7 exactly the same thing that you did and I didn't
8 have exactly the same circumstances. So there
9 are two of us.

10 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: So we think
11 alike.

12 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Two thoughts on
13 this. If you are going to be looking at
14 graduation tests, which I seem to insist on
15 calling them, because I found when I talked to
16 anyone outside of the education community or
17 even some inside it, graduation competencies and
18 assessments don't seem to ring a bell with them.
19 Graduation tests, in fact, they understand what
20 we are talking about.

21 You need standards that are clear,
22 and you need a curriculum that are a curriculum
23 that are aligned to those standards, and then
24 you need tests that are aligned to the
25 curriculum and the standards. And we don't have

1 that, and it is a very interesting discussion as
2 to whether we should have that.

3 But two of my colleagues here pointed
4 out that these graduation tests, if they are to
5 go through on a statewide level, are, in fact,
6 backing into that. They are coming at the far
7 end and then backing in through the curriculum
8 through the standards and whether or not they
9 will be statewide. Because that's the issue
10 that you pointed out about the differences
11 between one classroom and another.

12 And it would be a very interesting
13 conversation to have, as to whether or not we
14 really do want a uniform curriculum throughout
15 the state in every school district. That debate
16 hasn't been taking place.

17 If we adopt the State Board's
18 recommendation, we will be in that process from
19 the back end forward rather than from the front
20 end on.

21 But having said that, we would like
22 to emphasize that, when talking about how to
23 handle these graduation tests, when really --
24 And it is not that we don't know what the
25 problems are. And I do understand what the

1 State Board is trying to focus on. My comments
2 were that the solution that they had devised,
3 the graduation tests, did not, in fact, from our
4 view, match what the issues were.

5 The issues, although there are high
6 school issues, are really rooted in the
7 elementary schools and in the beginning of the
8 education process. And we would hope that we
9 would put as much time and energy and resources
10 into that aspect of things, as we are into the
11 ideas of graduation tests, which are very
12 problematic at best.

13 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Thank you,
14 Mr. Chairman.

15 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. I see
16 we have three more members who want to ask
17 questions. We have the Secretary here as well.
18 So without asking that we compact this exactly,
19 if we could move our discussion forward and that
20 would be helpful.

21 Representative McIlvaine Smith.

22 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:
23 Well, I have been chomping at the bit. You
24 know, I don't want to grandstand or do too much
25 getting up on my soap box, but I can't resist as

1 a former teacher either.

2 But I have to say, first of all, when
3 I went back to school in 1990 to become a
4 teacher, it's because I had three -- My three
5 children learned differently, and I found it
6 fascinating. I am a theorist when it comes to
7 education; I am not a practitioner. I found
8 that out, very quickly, when I taught school.

9 But I remember when I went back to
10 school that there was a little story that I
11 found, and I can't remember it exactly. But
12 there is a bat and a rabbit and a blue bird who
13 all went to school. Now, they had to take final
14 exams. And the bat could hang upside down all
15 day long, and the rabbit could run fast and hop
16 beautifully, and the blue bird could fly. But
17 the bat couldn't fly so he failed that test, and
18 the bat couldn't run fast so he failed that
19 test; but he could hang upside down. And,
20 obviously, the rest of them, you know, failed at
21 what the others were good at.

22 And that, for me, expressed why I was
23 back in school, because I wanted to make sure
24 that when I became a teacher that I was trying
25 to help each child learn, to their best ability,

1 to try and find the potential of each of those
2 children and to bring that out because none of
3 us are perfect.

4 To answer a question that
5 Representative Rohrer brought up--you know, what
6 is the problem we are trying to solve--there was
7 testimony given before the Pennsylvania Senate
8 Education Committee by a man named Joseph
9 Merlino. He was a principal investigator, and I
10 don't know what that is, but I found his
11 testimony fascinating.

12 And he says that, in 2006, he served
13 on Governor Rendell's Commission on College and
14 Career Success, and worked on the subcommittee
15 that studied the issue of state-mandated,
16 graduate requirements.

17 He said, our subcommittee faced two
18 questions. In number one, it said, what could
19 account for the large discrepancy between the
20 percentage of 11th grade students who do not
21 score proficient on their PSSA test--and that
22 was between 47 to 53 percent--yet who still go
23 on to graduate from high schools? So, to me,
24 that was the problem that everyone was trying to
25 solve.

1 In number two, he said, given this
2 discrepancy, how could colleges, employers,
3 parents and taxpayers be assured that
4 Pennsylvania high school students were, in fact,
5 graduating with the necessary knowledge and
6 ability to be ready for two- and four-year
7 colleges, and later, career success, in a
8 knowledge-based economy?

9 Chairman Roebuck asked a question the
10 last time that we met, talking about, had
11 anybody spoken to the professors in college, in
12 trying to match up what it was they needed? And
13 this gentleman said that they -- he had, indeed,
14 had.

15 He said that his -- that their
16 commission had looked at, instead of having a
17 system such as what this GCA is being proposed
18 to do, they were looking at a system of interim
19 assessments akin to SATs. He says, such
20 high-value standards aligns well with the
21 thinking of hundreds of college professors
22 across our state, who met in five separate
23 sessions across the state in 2006 in order to
24 define what Pennsylvania higher education
25 institutions saw as knowledge and skills

1 necessary for college success. He said he
2 chaired one such meeting.

3 And here is the bottom line for me.
4 It says, however, the proposed Chapter 4
5 Regulations ignored the input of these college
6 faculty. End-of-course exams beg the question
7 as to what kinds of standards these exams should
8 be based upon. How could one end-of-course test
9 for Geometry cover all the variations in length
10 and tract levels of courses?

11 So my question to you is -- Well,
12 actually, let me finish this one last thought.
13 I am sorry.

14 In short, he says, I saw that basing
15 GCAs on courses rather than a learning program--
16 that's his emphasis--would make the Pennsylvania
17 standards impotent and render local control
18 nonexistent. The test maker would be the
19 arbitrator for all of Pennsylvania. For these
20 reasons, I reject it then, and now, the concept
21 that the GCAs should be end-of-course exams.

22 And what do you think of these
23 statements? And do you agree? Or disagree?
24 And why?

25 MS. HALPIN-MURPHY: Well, that's what

1 I was referring to in the response to
2 Representative O'Neill, in that the graduation
3 tests would, in fact, back us into the statewide
4 curriculum. So I think I have already responded
5 to that.

6 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:

7 Thank you.

8 MR. OLEKSIAK: I would agree, that
9 the test will become the curriculum.

10 MR. STROUP: I obviously respond
11 sympathetically to that statement. And I think
12 it raises the huge question of what level is
13 proficient in order to pass one of these tests
14 and be geared eligible for the diploma.

15 A lot has been said about
16 Massachusetts. When Massachusetts set its cut
17 score for graduation, it set it not at the
18 proficient level but at a passing level which
19 was about a quartile below proficient. So that
20 when they established that score, eight years
21 after they had established their curriculum
22 framework, they established the test for
23 graduation purposes. 75 percent of the
24 students, then in Massachusetts' schools, passed
25 the test.

1 When Pennsylvania set proficient as
2 its level for passing, it was not for graduation
3 purposes and about 50 percent, as that statement
4 indicates, were passing the test.

5 So we have to re-benchmark everything
6 that we are doing for the purpose for which we
7 are doing it, and I think that's reflected in
8 that statement.

9 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:

10 Thank you.

11 MR. ALLWEIN: And I would simply
12 agree with my colleagues, if I go back to the
13 earlier statement, that it's important that
14 local assessments be a part of whatever package
15 we end up with. And it is our opinion that,
16 this proposal, even though it pretends to
17 continue the local assessment, but in all
18 intents and purposes, it will get rid of it.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH: And
20 I just want to finish with the statement that
21 when I graduated from West Chester University,
22 we had to take a Praxis. It was a big test.
23 That did not keep me from graduating, but it
24 certainly could affect the type of job that you
25 got, you know, depending on how poorly or how

1 well you did on that.

2 And the one thing that sort of
3 bothers me about this GCA, the way that I have
4 been informed that it is going to work, is that
5 you can take it as you have taken these courses.
6 And, to me, that doesn't seem to be an
7 accumulative, you know, sort of assessing
8 accumulatively what you have learned; it seems
9 like it is almost a final exam. And I know that
10 question has been brought up.

11 But that sort of bothers me, too,
12 because many of us learn just for that test.
13 You know, I am very good at being able to cram
14 something in and spit it back out at you, but
15 that doesn't mean I have learned it. So this,
16 the GCAs, are problematic for me.

17 But thank you very much, Mr.
18 Chairman.

19 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
20 Representative Metcalfe.

21 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: Thank you,
22 Mr. Chairman. I don't have any questions so my
23 time will be condensed. But I do have a few
24 comments on what we have talked about here and
25 what the panel has offered this morning.

1 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Okay.

2 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: Especially
3 what I thought was very good was Representative
4 Rohrer posing the question, what do all of you
5 believe the problem is. And it was interesting
6 that there were really four different answers.

7 And it was interesting throughout
8 discussion this morning that there, I think, are
9 a number of areas that we all can't agree on.
10 And I think the one that was started off, being
11 stressed by Representative Rapp, the area of
12 reading. That without learning to read early on
13 in our school years, you are not going to do
14 well in the rest of the school years, whether it
15 is trying to read word problems for mathematics
16 or your history lessons or whatever else that
17 you are dealing with at your school.

18 But I think where I found agreement
19 with the Secretary, when he testified last week,
20 was that there is a problem. And I think to try
21 and look the other way and ignore that there is
22 a problem, we are really ignoring the elephant
23 in the room.

24 And I think to say that we don't have
25 a very defined problem in the United States in

1 our education system, that some people are
2 trying to address it with this type of approach,
3 is like saying that the United States doesn't
4 have an energy crisis.

5 If we continue to look the other way
6 and ignore the fact that there are a number of
7 our students making it through the system and
8 not being prepared at the end of their school
9 years for the workplace or for college, I think
10 if we can continue to ignore that there is a
11 large number of students in that position, we
12 are not doing a service to the taxpayers, to the
13 students, or to the future of this nation.

14 So I think the Secretary was pretty
15 clear in defining the problem when he -- I don't
16 agree with him on the solution. But I think if
17 we at least start off in that problem-solving
18 mode, as Representative Rohrer tried to start us
19 off with his question to identify the problem,
20 so that we can all then work toward a common
21 solution, I think we will be making progress.

22 But I think that the testimony back
23 and forth--and since I have been here now for 10
24 years--part of my objection to the PSSA being
25 used as a high-stakes test is that it will drive

1 curriculum.

2 And I believe that the best
3 curriculum will be driven locally and not by the
4 state. I think there are components that we
5 need to make sure are covered, as we already do
6 in state law. And further, in state
7 regulations, history, and so on.

8 But I don't believe that we should
9 have a high-stakes test that is going to test
10 the students at the end of the day, because it
11 is a snap shot of their performance and it is
12 not going to identify. Even with the former
13 representative giving her analogy with a bat.
14 There are kids that are going to do well in
15 certain things and not in others, but it doesn't
16 mean that they are not going to be able to
17 succeed in life.

18 And I think we need to help every
19 child realize their full potential, and that the
20 system that we are going to use to ultimately
21 make sure that they have achieved is a system
22 that allows for them to be able to realize their
23 potential and for the educational system that is
24 judging their achievement to recognize their
25 potential.

1 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

3 Representative Longietti.

4 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Thank you,
5 Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the panel
6 members for this opportunity to have some
7 discussion and hear some input.

8 A question. And I realize that the
9 School Board Association--I assume the
10 Administrators Association--do not believe that
11 this is the right approach and that the bulk of
12 your members feel that way.

13 The question, though, are there any
14 school districts that would be interested in
15 this approach, that you are aware of?

16 MR. STROUP: We have a number of
17 members who support it. And I presume they
18 would be interested in piloting it, if it were
19 available.

20 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Okay. So
21 that was going to be my next question, is why
22 not try this as a pilot program for those that
23 are interested in doing it, see how it works,
24 and see whether it is worth pursuing by others.
25 That way you have advocates in the system, who

1 say, we have tried it, it works, or we find out
2 that it doesn't work. Does that make sense to
3 you? Does that appeal to you?

4 MR. ALLWEIN: As long as we are very
5 clear on what it means to say that it works and
6 what it means to say that it doesn't work. We
7 have to have a -- I think we have to have a
8 clear measurement of what we expect and a clear
9 acknowledgement of what it -- if it doesn't
10 work, what that looks like, too.

11 But just to answer your original
12 question, we have board members, as well, who
13 support the concept also.

14 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: I think
15 that maybe to dovetail that into my next
16 question. You know, when it comes to community
17 college, for example, we have been thrown some
18 statistics that--and not every kid goes to
19 college and I think we need to make sure that we
20 understand that as well--that some of these
21 folks are not prepared, so to speak. They need
22 to be remediated.

23 And maybe that's a measurement. A
24 way to measure things is, well, this school
25 district, you know, these number of kids went to

1 college before and 20 percent of them need to be
2 remediated since we have done this pilot
3 program, let's drop down 10 percent. So maybe
4 that's a way to measure it.

5 Let me get to that question. What do
6 you think the role of community college is? Is
7 that their role, to be remediating kids anyhow?

8 And let me expand that a little bit
9 because we have some numbers for the state
10 system of higher education, where they are
11 saying that 22 percent of the entering freshmen
12 require remediation. Is that a role also of the
13 state system? And what are your views on that?

14 MR. STROUP: Let me just point out
15 that, in Massachusetts, which was held up as an
16 example that does have an exit test, 30 percent
17 of their college entrants are in remediation
18 programs, for noncredit-bearing courses, at the
19 beginning. So I am not sure a test is the way
20 of preventing the need for remediation.

21 It would be wonderful, I think, if
22 the exit exam from a high school was also a
23 placement exam for a college. And there is that
24 kind of dialogue going on now between community
25 colleges and school districts in various regions

1 of the states. And I think that's a very
2 important discussion to continue.

3 But I would really hate to deny a
4 student an opportunity to enroll in a community
5 college or a four-year institution because they
6 didn't pass their test. And if they at some
7 point need remediation in order to be successful
8 in college, then I think that is a legitimate
9 role for the college to provide.

10 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: A
11 philosophical question here. I understand that,
12 you know, we would like to see all students be
13 able to do certain things. But I remember
14 reading some literature, not too long ago, where
15 for some reason, in the United States, unlike
16 other countries, we tend to identify somebody's
17 weaknesses and say we have really got to focus
18 on that weakness and make you better in this
19 area; whereas, in other countries, they look and
20 they say, well, here is a person's strengths,
21 let's accentuate those strengths and develop
22 them and that's where that person's gift is.

23 I mean, what are your views on that
24 in how it relates to what we are talking about
25 here?

1 MR. OLEKSIAK: Well, I agree. I
2 think Representative McIlvaine Smith's story
3 speaks directly to that.

4 One of my favorite analogies for No
5 Child Left Behind is: imagine if we said to our
6 Olympic athletes, in order to qualify for the
7 Olympic team, everybody has to run a five-minute
8 mile. That includes our weight lifters and our
9 equestrians and our skiers and our whoever and
10 our track stars as well. And I think that's the
11 same sort of issue that we deal with all the
12 time. You know, is it doesn't make sense, in
13 some instances, to focus on let's make everybody
14 run that five-minute mile or let's make
15 everybody hang upside down when that is clearly
16 not what they are capable of doing.

17 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: But the
18 last -- You know, you don't necessarily have to
19 respond to this. The last comment that I would
20 make is, you know, as Ms. Halpin-Murphy was
21 answering a question--and I think she answered
22 it well--she was talking about, you know, well,
23 what we would really need is standards and then
24 you have a curriculum that fits into the
25 standards and then ultimately the test.

1 The Secretary is nodding his head
2 yes.

3 And it just seems to me that we are
4 not that far apart on all of this. It just
5 seems like there ought to be a way for all of us
6 to get together and figure out -- I mean, I
7 think everything seems to sort of agree with the
8 logical progression.

9 And I think we are all afraid --
10 Representative Metcalfe alluded to, we are all
11 afraid to talk about a statewide curriculum, you
12 know, because we have had such a tradition of
13 local control here in Pennsylvania. But it
14 seems like that we all agree on this
15 progression, and somehow we need to find a way
16 to sit down and agree on how do we implement
17 that.

18 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

19 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

20 I would like to thank the panel for
21 their discussion. And, certainly, we appreciate
22 having the dialogue. And this is probably a
23 starting point for further discussion as we move
24 forward. But I thank you very much.

25 MR. ALLWEIN: Thank you.

1 MR. OLEKSIAK: Thank you.

2 MR. STROUP: Thank you.

3 MS. HALPIN-STROUP: Thank you, Mr.
4 Chairman.

5 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: And I would like
6 to ask the Secretary if he would like to come
7 forward as the panel leaves. And give our
8 reporter just a few minutes, if she needs it,
9 to break.

10 COURT REPORTER: No.

11 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Are you ready?

12 COURT REPORTER: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Good morning.

14 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Good morning,
15 Mr. Chairman and the members. Well, thank you
16 for allowing me some time. May I get started?

17 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Sure.

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Okay. I
19 thought, just briefly, I want to address the
20 issue at hand, of course, and then respond to
21 your questions and allow you to hear my -- those
22 responses.

23 I have to -- I want to go back to my
24 travels across Pennsylvania because one story
25 that sticks with me, sort of like the bat story,

1 was the Nick story. This is a real live person.

2 Nick was about 24 years old,
3 Westmoreland County, Greensburg. He came out of
4 school with a disability and had IEP from
5 probably the 5th grade on, according to him.

6 And said, as the story goes, he went
7 into a tool and dye manufacturer where there was
8 a need for employees. He got onto the floor and
9 he had all the soft skills. He was there every
10 day and worked hard and the people liked him and
11 they wanted him to be a tool and dye apprentice.

12 But, of course, in most of the trades
13 in apprenticeships, the first thing that happens
14 is an assessment. And for tool and dye in this
15 trade, there is Trigonometry as the expectation
16 for your mathematics ability. Now, that's well
17 beyond Algebra, in terms of math progression.

18 And Nick says, as the story goes,
19 look, in 5th grade, I didn't want to do
20 fractions and my mom agreed that we are probably
21 not going to be good at fractions. A real kid.

22 Our standards say, in 12 different
23 areas, here are the things we want all kids to
24 be good at, at at least a proficient level. Not
25 a five-minute mile, but perhaps running to a

1 proficient level. Not a 300 bowling game, maybe
2 everybody--and some kids with
3 accommodations--can bowl at the one twenty
4 level, if we work at it.

5 So we declared a long time ago in
6 Pennsylvania, as a result of transposing from
7 outcomes, to the standards, what those standards
8 areas are. And they became regulations, your
9 regulations, as a state. Ours. So we have
10 already declared the things we think children
11 should know and be able to do. And we have
12 marked a lot of places, in terms of reading and
13 mathematics.

14 Nick, by the way, had convinced the
15 whole system that he had disabilities. Learning
16 support was the category. And so, his words
17 were that, look, I just didn't want to do this.
18 But now it became so relevant that I backed up,
19 learned fractions, percentages, decimals,
20 started it, understood, and took myself through
21 Calculus, self-directed, and handled it with
22 lots of support, through remediation, at the
23 workplace, and I now have 24 dollars an hour as
24 opposed to seven and I am in a tool and dye
25 apprenticeship.

1 Our trades folks are telling me,
2 across Pennsylvania, ratchet this up. You get
3 what you expect. If you start telling people,
4 probably a lot of you won't be good at math, 45
5 percent, 57,000, will come out the other end not
6 so good at math, because the systems didn't work
7 for them, starting with the expectations.

8 Nick's story is a powerful one.
9 Thanks for the opportunity to continue our
10 conversation. And I hope you will recon back to
11 a lot of people who sat before you last week, on
12 an esteemed panel, as well as today's, and have
13 lots of passion as leaders of higher education,
14 as superintendents who also had experience like
15 yours of leading--like determines experience--
16 the educational reform movement in another
17 state. Those kinds of testimonies, I think,
18 tell you something that might be not represented
19 in the push opposing GCAs.

20 But if you think about the special
21 interest representation here from the School
22 Boards Association, they were really, really
23 pushing at our school boards to make sure they
24 let everyone know, with a copied resolution,
25 that they are opposed. Yet seven out of ten

1 school boards didn't do that--that's a powerful
2 thing to think about--even with all of the
3 pressure of being against the measurement.

4 When we are building standards-based
5 systems, here is what we are doing and all of
6 the things that we are hoping for in terms of
7 curriculum framework and building simultaneously
8 a system. A system includes standards, includes
9 assessments, includes curriculum, as big
10 concepts in competency go, per grade level, or
11 per area like Trigonometry or Calculus.

12 Assessments, standards, curriculum
13 framework, ways to remediate and intervene for
14 children who have disabilities or are
15 struggling, ways to guide resources and
16 materials, and best teaching practices. I just
17 listed six component parts that are dynamic,
18 interface, and must be aligned.

19 If you go onto the department's web
20 site for mathematics from prekindergarten
21 through 12th grade, you will see all six of
22 those component parts, voluntary. But you will
23 see we are building the model set of concepts
24 and competencies. Not what page to be on or
25 what book to use, but some of the best practices

1 in terms of identifying what students should
2 know conceptually and what they should be able
3 to do, like fractions, competently.

4 All of the industrial countries that
5 are beating us as a country in international
6 comparisons in math and science have that kind
7 of framework. And it is no surprise, as we are
8 building this kind of framework in Pennsylvania,
9 we call it standards-aligned systems, and we are
10 teaching our principals, through your
11 legislation of the bill, how to build those
12 standards-aligned systems at the local level,
13 too. It is no surprise; we are getting results.

14 Folks asked about elementary school.
15 Our elementary schools went from 50 percent to
16 now 70 and 80 percent of the children from 3rd
17 grade through 8th grade in both reading and
18 math. We have tripled the number of children
19 with disabilities who are making proficient
20 scores. We have doubled the number of African
21 Americans. We have doubled the number of
22 Latinos.

23 That's what it is about. It is about
24 people. Young people coming to potential with
25 standards we have already identified. We have

1 identified the standards. We need to know that
2 the instruments we use to measure whether or not
3 a student has reached those standards have been
4 well calibrated.

5 You heard questions about, will they
6 be higher-order-thinking-type assessments? And,
7 of course, that's our command to the assessment
8 makers, that it can't be perfect, where I am
9 watching each of the 1.8 million students, one
10 on one, demonstrate a science experiment.

11 But it can be really good and
12 literacy rich, built into the assessments, with
13 some open-endedness as part of those
14 assessments, where we explore the higher-level
15 thinkings and we are pushed thinking and we are
16 pushing at the taxonomy of learning through the
17 assessment, related to our standards, that can
18 be met by our curriculum framework, best
19 teaching practices, intervention, and guiding
20 the resource and materials.

21 Now, if that makes you yawn, it is
22 probably because it is tough work. We are
23 asking the federal government to do that kind of
24 tough work. Show the leadership, not just the
25 assessment. Show all of the component parts in

1 a dynamic system. That's what we are about.

2 And when you do those kinds of
3 things, guaranteed, you get student achievement
4 like we are getting in many of our schools, and
5 in the state, from our elementary grades,
6 statewide.

7 We have done a lot of work in our
8 first 3 through 8th grade, all together, as a
9 state. Our high schools have not moved.
10 America's high schools have not moved, and it is
11 a completely different environment when you get
12 to the high school level in terms of those
13 systems and what is expected there.

14 So we are pushing at it. This isn't
15 an isolated piece. This is a part of systems
16 thinking. And I just want to be clear that we
17 are addressing that.

18 So I am happy to take members'
19 questions. And thank you for allowing me the
20 opportunity just to reiterate where we are at.

21 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you, Mr.
22 Secretary.

23 I wanted to ask Representative Rapp
24 if she would like to ask questions. I know she
25 has a time restraint and I would like to give

1 her that opportunity.

2 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you, Mr.
3 Chairman. And thank you, Mr. Secretary, for
4 being here.

5 I was impressed by your story about
6 Nick. I am assuming he had a transition plan as
7 part of his IEP that maybe would have helped
8 prepare him for his job.

9 But I would like to use your example
10 of Nick, too. Because here is a young man, I am
11 assuming--I am just going to assume--that he had
12 a high school diploma, was able to get a job,
13 and was able then to go back. And realizing
14 that he needed more skills for that job, and not
15 having a high school diploma, was not a barrier
16 to him to get that job. So he was able to go
17 back and get the skills that he needed.

18 And I will tell you that, as a
19 parent, when my son was in a vocational program,
20 I had to fight for him to get math skills
21 because I was told by the system that, oh, he
22 isn't going to really need math. You know.
23 And I knew, as a parent, that he absolutely was
24 going to need math in the future.

25 And so, what I am saying here is --

1 And in a way -- And I agree that we need to
2 raise our standards, but I think what we are
3 doing here with this high-stakes testing is
4 punishing students for a failed system.

5 And you have talked before, when you
6 were here, about the remediation. School
7 districts need to develop individualized
8 instructional plans for students. 63,000 of
9 them, possibly.

10 And we have talked a lot about
11 remediation. My belief is that remediation
12 needs to start in the elementary school. I
13 believe that. Tutoring with teachers who know
14 how to teach reading, and I think that is
15 lacking.

16 It's been stated here that reading
17 specialists are the first to go in a
18 budget-tight school district, and those reading
19 specialists who actually know how to tutor and
20 teach reading. Because you can tutor, you can
21 remediate all you want, but if you are not an
22 instructor who knows the right methods of
23 teaching remediation, real remediation in
24 reading.

25 And the National Reading Panel, as I

1 am sure you are very aware of, has come up with
2 all the methods that need to be used. But
3 unless our teachers are trained in those
4 methods, remediation, tutoring is not going to
5 do anything.

6 So will school districts need to
7 develop individualized instructional plans for
8 students? And how is this remediation going to
9 be targeted for these students who cannot pass
10 these tests?

11 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Well, again,
12 part of the standards-based aligned system
13 includes their interventions. And, as you know,
14 we intervene now, early on. We have joined the
15 other states. As a matter of fact, recognized
16 as first in the country in making improvements
17 in this area. From prenatal to preschool, we
18 are doing a tremendous, new job at ensuring the
19 students are closing the gaps early on, those
20 gaps caused by the economic conditions of a
21 student's household.

22 But we are also building to capacity.
23 One of our subsystems is, remember, is
24 interventions, tutoring, or accommodating
25 students. We are building capacity for Reading

1 Recovery, the internationally-renowned, best
2 program at intervening for kids coming out of
3 kindergarten who are absolutely declared by
4 their kindergarten teachers as least likely to
5 read.

6 Well, least likely to read students
7 will come into a 20-week, one-on-one program
8 that is intense, with an extraordinarily
9 well-trained teacher, who has the reading
10 specialist and beyond, in most cases, and
11 continuing education expectations beyond that,
12 to remain certified as that tutor.

13 So we are going to get, employ, and
14 building capacity this year for those teachers.

15 But, again, I am going to remind you,
16 we have been at this work of elementary. When
17 we are bringing forward now, after this year's
18 results, you will see almost -- beyond 70
19 percent of the 8th graders proficient. And then
20 all of a sudden, after spending three years,
21 that goes down to 55 percent.

22 That's not the direction we want to
23 project towards. When you get to high school,
24 we should be, again, improving the number of
25 kids making proficient scores.

1 And we have had a history, nationwide
2 and in the state, where, especially in the
3 state, where we are bringing students with the
4 capacity, making proficient scores, or above,
5 and then watching that drop after three years in
6 their high school experiences. So we are
7 serious about the tutoring and serious about
8 putting research-proven programs to practice.

9 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Well, thank
10 you, Mr. Secretary. And I certainly have a lot
11 more comments and questions. But I am time
12 restrained today so I will defer to my
13 colleagues.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

16 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you for
17 being with us here today. And I am still
18 opposed to the testing.

19 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Okay.

20 Representative McIlvaine Smith.

21 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:

22 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 And thank you, Mr. Secretary, for
24 being here. You are a great salesperson on
25 this. When I listen to you, you know, the

1 vision and the energy that you put into it and
2 the passion is very obvious.

3 But it goes back to my comment that I
4 am a theorist in education, and there is a
5 difference between theory and practice.

6 You know, back to your story of Nick.
7 I had a Nick of my own. My son, Matt, who was
8 the middle child, really hated school from day
9 one. He was very creative. Still is very
10 creative. Couldn't wait to get out, wanted to
11 dropout when he was 16. And thankfully I kept
12 him in school until he could graduate.

13 But I never thought he would want to
14 go on to college. Well, he did, and he did very
15 well in college because application,
16 application, application. If a kid can see what
17 the reason is that he needs to know this --

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: I'll bet.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH: --
20 that kid will take it on. And so, I agree with
21 you on your story.

22 I also have to quickly add that I
23 have a grandchild--and only grandchild--but she
24 is so verbal and she knows huge words and she
25 says them beautifully. She is the most verbal

1 child I have ever known at the age of four, but
2 she can't tell a rectangle from a square from a
3 triangle. And no matter what I do to try and
4 help her, she will look at it and she'll just
5 guess, so. But the point about --

6 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Eventually she
7 will, though. She is --

8 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:
9 Yeah, some day she will. Which brings me to
10 something else. There was a book that was
11 called, Why Johnny Can't Read. And I can't
12 remember the guy who wrote it, but I read all of
13 his books. And it was about, every child has
14 sort of their own time clock, every child will
15 learn in their own time if we give them enough
16 time. And Maria Montessori was one who proved
17 that.

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Sure.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH: She
20 had taught children that had special needs. And
21 she was able to teach these children how to
22 read, but it was because there was enough time.

23 I guess what I am trying to say is
24 that, in theory, what you are pushing on this,
25 sounds great. But I would like you to respond

1 to what I asked the panel. You know, this Mr.
2 Merlino, the principal investigator, which I
3 still don't know what that is.

4 But he was really saying that, you
5 know, after weighing the disadvantages of using
6 the current 11th grade PSSA, his subcommittee
7 advanced the idea of a series of common, quote,
8 interim benchmark assessments, end quote, akin
9 to the New York region's math A and B exams.
10 And they were later named graduation competency
11 assessments so they became GCAs.

12 But the original idea was to provide
13 for a progressively more difficult series of
14 assessments that would start earlier in a
15 student's high school career and that could
16 cover more of the high-valued standards than
17 just one test could cover.

18 The GCAs could include all four core
19 academic subject areas and students would
20 accumulate competencies as they progressed.
21 They didn't see them as end-of-course exams. So
22 what do you think of his statements that the GCA
23 testing end-of-course work instead of this
24 learning program? How do you respond to that?

25 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Well, I served

1 on the same Commission --

2 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH: Oh

3 good.

4 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: -- and knew Mr.
5 Merlino, Doctor Michelini (phonetic), very, very
6 well.

7 Well, let me say this. As we said
8 today, not everybody runs a five minute or bowls
9 a 300. That's not the expectation; that's
10 foolish.

11 But we could say, everybody could get
12 to a one twenty, and some people with the rails
13 or supports, combinations that make sense, but
14 not lessening the game. Not saying, you won't
15 bowl, or you are not going to learn rectangles,
16 Kiddo. You are. And we are going to make sure
17 you do, and we are going to give you the
18 supports you need to get those conceptual
19 understandings of little geometric shapes.

20 Mr. Merlino, though, wanted to say,
21 we can go higher than that. We can get the
22 five-minute mile out of all of our science
23 students and math students and be much more
24 intense and progressive.

25 So if you go into the context and the

1 better understanding of that challenge, he was
2 asking to push a little more than we are even
3 pushing, but bringing up everyone as that
4 expected five-minute mile, so.

5 By the way, if I may, Representative
6 Rapp talked about Nick finding his way anyway.
7 But think about it. For the three years Nick
8 was remediating on the job, it was probably a
9 couple hundred thousand dollars in lost
10 productivity to Nick.

11 He may have even been depending on
12 some systems that would have cost him from our
13 end of it. So it is nice to say, everything is
14 going to be warm and let everybody do their own
15 thing and we sort of grew up that way, but I
16 think we can also have a coherent set of
17 expectations and bring kids to those
18 expectations.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH:

20 Well, and my closing comment would be
21 that I really believe that reading
22 comprehension, not just when people talk about
23 reading, it is reading comprehension that is the
24 foundation of all learning. And that if we put
25 all of the money we are willing to spend on

1 these, this, sort of, end of their career, their
2 educational career, into the beginning of their
3 career, into reading competencies --

4 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Okay.

5 REPRESENTATIVE McILVAINE SMITH: --
6 that, to me, that would be the better use of
7 money.

8 Because my school district, the West
9 Chester Area School District, is very
10 interested. I talked to the president of our
11 School Board. He's very interested in these
12 GCAs. But he said, give us time on the PSSAs
13 where we are testing our kids on reading and
14 let's bring those reading scores up before we
15 slap another test on them.

16 So that's my end comment. Thank you,
17 Mr. Secretary, for being here.

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.

20 Representative O'Neill.

21 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Thank you
22 very much, Mr. Chairman.

23 Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being
24 here again today and coming back. And I want to
25 personally thank you for taking the time out of

1 your schedule to come down to my district and
2 county and meet with all of the superintendents
3 from my school district on this subject. I
4 think you did a wonderful job, and I think they
5 really appreciated your efforts.

6 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Thank you.

7 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: So I thank
8 you.

9 I have a series of questions for you.
10 Just to kind of get out on the table everything
11 about -- that what is being proposed in these
12 tests.

13 I guess my first question is
14 concerning special education students. And just
15 correct me if I am wrong, but it is my
16 understanding that, of course, the federal law
17 and their IEP, it would supersede any of these
18 exams; is that correct?

19 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Because you
20 have a -- We have law in Pennsylvania that says
21 so.

22 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.

23 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: So graduation
24 requirements can be superseded in Pennsylvania
25 by the IEPs.

1 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.

2 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: I do want to
3 add, though, that our expectation--and we would
4 get serious about kids--we believe all kids can
5 come to these, many with accommodations, but not
6 changing the goal.

7 So don't change the game or the goal,
8 but do provide the accommodations, bring those
9 learning and bring those support services to the
10 child, and hopefully at the place that the child
11 attends school, and hopefully that's the regular
12 school.

13 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.
14 Thank you. And I think that should be the goal
15 for any special education student.

16 I guess my concern with special
17 education students is -- And I am a big believer
18 that an IEP should not be a crutch, and I think
19 sometimes it is used as a crutch, and I think it
20 is used as a defense mechanism for parents,
21 sometimes.

22 But if you have a student, who is a
23 special education student, who has an IEP, but
24 is mainstream--and I will use Algebra I, again,
25 say Algebra, Algebra I--and they are there,

1 okay, they are in that classroom, because it is
2 believed by the IEP team that they can do well
3 in that classroom and should be able to be
4 proficient at the end of the year, at least that
5 is my understanding.

6 When I mainstreamed my kids, I
7 expected them to be able to do, with the
8 accommodations, and yadda, yadda, yadda, what's
9 expected in that classroom.

10 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Yeah.

11 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: So my
12 question to you would be, if it says on the IEP
13 that that student is to be in this Algebra I
14 class, then they would be required to take this
15 exam?

16 If they fail the exam, then my
17 question is, do you see some legal ramification
18 for a parent, or something, saying, well, you
19 can't deny him graduation or something because
20 he has an IEP?

21 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: No, the parent
22 would be on the making of the IEP, as part of
23 the IEP team, of course. And the parent would
24 be on --

25 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: You would

1 hope. I want to point that out: you would hope
2 the parent would be.

3 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: And we would
4 also want, in the IEP, the testing environment
5 to also reflect the learning environment. So
6 the accommodations that are used during the
7 learning days should be the same accommodations
8 that would be provided during the testing days.
9 So that student has what he or she needs in
10 terms of the supports to respond to the testing
11 environment, again, in the same way that that
12 student has accommodations.

13 And that does not mean modifications
14 of the curriculum or a lessening of the
15 expectations for the student, but it does mean
16 providing the supports.

17 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.
18 Okay, great. Thank you, I appreciate that.

19 The next one would be, and it is
20 probably going to shock some people coming out
21 of my mouth, but home schoolers. How does this
22 affect the children who are home schooled? Are
23 they required to take these exams?

24 Because my understanding is--and
25 correct me if I am wrong--a parent has to

1 submit, to the superintendent, their curriculum
2 that they are using or whatever. If they are
3 teaching Algebra I, would they be required to
4 take this exam?

5 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: No, they are
6 going to stay under their own schooling laws and
7 the rules for home schooling which are -- you
8 know, speak for themselves.

9 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay, great.
10 And I thank you. I guess another one of my
11 questions then would be -- which concerns local
12 assessment. I spoke earlier--and I think you
13 were here--about the difference between one
14 Algebra class and another Algebra class.

15 And I was discussing with
16 Representative Mackereth that you could have two
17 very gifted teachers teaching Algebra I. The
18 one teacher might have good math students,
19 better than average students in that class. And
20 then you could have, at the other classroom, a
21 teacher who has kids who struggle in math and
22 who don't really care to be there, that type of
23 thing. That teacher's job is far more difficult
24 than the other teacher's job.

25 So my question would be, what about

1 local input on part of these exams or something
2 from a teacher?

3 And I say this because it -- Now, I
4 was a special education teacher, you know, and
5 so my curriculum time frame was designed by
6 myself, based on my kids' specific needs and
7 their growth.

8 You have a regular classroom teacher
9 who is filing a curriculum, and both of these
10 teachers are filing the same curriculum, I
11 guarantee it, by the mid point of the school
12 year, that the teacher with the good math
13 student is going to be ahead in the curriculum
14 of the other teacher, if that teacher is doing
15 his or her job to teach the kids. Not try to
16 keep up, but curriculum. Or to teach it. You
17 know. Or with the test.

18 So that it may take him or her three
19 weeks to get through a section, where it may
20 only take the other teacher one week, with their
21 kids showing that they are doing well in that
22 area. So how do you address a problem like that
23 when at the end of the year both of those
24 classes are going to have to take the same exam,
25 but the other kids are -- just have the better

1 skills and have been able to and are more,
2 better motivated, and are able to, you know,
3 reach that point of taking the exam sooner than
4 the other students?

5 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Our curriculum
6 framework that's being applauded by the National
7 Council of Teachers of Mathematics, who -- and
8 is congruently aligned with the President's most
9 recent Advisory Panel on Mathematics, have a
10 curriculum framework that is based on the
11 concepts like place value or problem solving or
12 algebraic expressions or measurement that are
13 rooted maybe in preschools, sometimes, or 3rd
14 grade, and it comes spiraling upwards as a
15 concept.

16 Our assessments will be dedicated to
17 the curriculum framework--these large concepts
18 and competencies that children, who were already
19 through Algebra I, let's say, would have
20 mastered--so whatever you put in front of them
21 related to those concepts and competencies, we
22 call it an assessment, they should be able to
23 attack.

24 And if you watch other cultures, who
25 do this approach very well of its conceptual and

1 its competency building, simultaneously, and it
2 is not this contents stuff of a book with a
3 thousand pages that, you know, who can get
4 through it fastest is best. It's building those
5 concepts from early on and building the
6 competencies early on in mathematics or in
7 reading or other subject areas and then
8 assessing those.

9 And when we see, sometimes, students
10 who participate in competitions here in our
11 state, we ask them about their cultural
12 experiences. Because they are winning some of
13 these math competitions so fast, they almost
14 look supernatural. And then when we study the
15 systems of where those students come from, it's
16 completely different than the systems that we
17 were used to.

18 And we are making that see change,
19 and we are doing it with lots of teacher input.
20 All of our standards-aligned system pieces have
21 been done with Pennsylvania's teachers,
22 Pennsylvania's best at mathematics, for example,
23 from the IAUs, to the classrooms, and beyond.
24 So we have taken more than two years, so far, to
25 build this thing.

1 And you can see it on the web site
2 under standards-aligned system. And you can
3 start to see the framework for what we are
4 talking about. But if you don't have the
5 assessment piece in the clock, that gear is out,
6 oh, the clock doesn't work. So you absolutely
7 cannot have a system.

8 I heard someone earlier in the
9 conversation say, but the time it takes to give
10 these tests. Look, our students, by your rules,
11 are required to be in high school nine hundred
12 and ninety hours a year. In four years, 3,960
13 hours. We are talking about 12 hours of
14 assessing all of their work.

15 The important social areas, 12 hours.
16 That is one-third of one percent of the time
17 those spend in school geared towards taking the
18 blood pressure, or taking the measurements, to
19 see how well they are doing according to
20 standards.

21 And I don't think there is a better
22 analogy than the medical model. We take tests
23 to see how well we are doing against standards,
24 and then we would do remediation or follow
25 protocols to make sure we are doing better at

1 living our age. Do the same thing in education
2 with the same kind of systems arrangement.

3 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: The next
4 question, I guess, is still dealing with
5 assessment. Will teachers, administrators, from
6 across the state, have any input on the
7 assessment or is it just going to be a private
8 company from wherever?

9 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: No, the process
10 is very, very thorough. It starts with our
11 conceptual framework of what are the concepts
12 and competencies, and that's the only thing we
13 will be assessing. It starts with our
14 expectations for literacy rich, meaning, up the
15 higher-level thinking skills.

16 And then when we start to design what
17 makes the one twenty bowling game, it's our
18 teachers who will work to determine that,
19 through the process of spending days, that
20 determine where do you put that marker to say
21 this is the level that we think all students
22 because the standards --

23 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Can you
24 define our?

25 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Our teachers?

1 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Well, you
2 say our. First of all, you said, it was -- it
3 will be our --

4 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Oh, yeah. So
5 if you look online at what the teachers in
6 Pennsylvania have come together in mathematics
7 to design for the concepts and competencies from
8 prekindergarten through 12th grade for
9 mathematics, it was our teachers who did that.
10 They are ours now.

11 So we will be giving instructions.
12 And any testing company that has the statistical
13 and, you know, this vast array of capabilities
14 to design valid and reliable tests, this is what
15 we are testing; not your own stuff.

16 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay.

17 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: And this is our
18 expectation for higher-level thinking. Then
19 when it comes to marking, what is proficient?
20 Again, it's back to days and weeks and our
21 educators at the high school level saying, this
22 is it, this is what proficient will be in
23 Pennsylvania, and we will stick to those
24 declarations.

25 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay, great.

1 And another question that's towards assessment.
2 I heard, when you were here before--and I
3 apologize--you talked about voluntary. I am
4 somewhat confused. Because, to me, this sounds
5 like a mandate, then I am hearing the word
6 voluntary. So can you explain that?

7 And if a district chooses not to use
8 these exams, I think I heard that they can
9 create their own, but it has to be approved by
10 your -- Is it your department? Or will it be
11 that company? Or is it just your department
12 based on the criteria you just stated?

13 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: We will develop
14 the ways to make the determinations of whether
15 or not this is inter-rater reliability and there
16 is validity. Inter-rater means those two
17 teachers you used as your example.

18 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.

19 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: When they give
20 their locally designed assessment, are they at
21 the same work assessing validly what they think
22 they are assessing? And do they score it and we
23 can rely on the score being the same which --
24 regardless of which of those two do the
25 assessments? So if they can check out and do

1 those things, we are pleased.

2 We'll, also, in terms of -- Well, I
3 think that explains it well enough. I will
4 stop.

5 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay, thank
6 you. And real quick. Cost. Okay. And I
7 apologize, I don't think I have them in front of
8 me. Because I wanted to ask this question
9 before. But can you explain the cost?

10 You know, I am understanding it is --
11 Well, I remember. I guess I read a statement
12 that you made in front of the Senate that said
13 part of the cost incurred on the school
14 districts will be made-up by the money that they
15 will be receiving in this new funding formula or
16 something like that. Can you explain that for
17 me?

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Sure. The
19 costing-out study was predicated on one goal:
20 what does it take in each district to have 100
21 percent of the kids reach proficiency? How much
22 money?

23 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Right.

24 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: So you have
25 covered the cost of the districts when you enact

1 your own legislation to get to the results of
2 the costing-out study. Every school district
3 will have the capacity then to get the job done,
4 period. For all of the things that you could
5 possibly think about, they will have the
6 capacity.

7 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: That's where
8 you and I will greatly, greatly disagree.

9 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Okay.

10 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Okay. You
11 are talking at the two brain trusts behind the
12 cost-out study.

13 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Yeah. I'm --

14 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: And we will
15 greatly disagree on that, especially after
16 seeing the Governor's funding formula. So go
17 ahead. And I apologize.

18 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: And I am not
19 disagreeing with you. From my part, it will
20 always be done with great respect. I will be
21 discreet.

22 But I can tell you, the cost of the
23 assessments, our schools will be spending well
24 over 20 billion dollars. Just thinking about
25 that, you say, we don't want 45 percent coming

1 out the other end already. Over 20 billion
2 dollars. This 45-million-dollar annual cost for
3 assessment will represent, from just the state
4 side of that 20 billion, one-third of one
5 percent.

6 But from that whole 20 billion, you
7 know, it's about one-tenth or less. Maybe
8 one-twentieth of one percent. I would have to
9 do the math. I am not going to do it right
10 here. But let me tell you, it is a very minor
11 cost for a major piece of standards-aligned
12 systems assessment.

13 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: Yeah. But
14 given that, there is 99 school districts in the
15 Governor's formula, who will be receiving zero
16 percent after the first year, this school year.
17 So that's where I have an issue that you are
18 putting a mandate on them.

19 I am getting eyes, so I have got to
20 hurry up. So I apologize. But --

21 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: We will go to the
22 back row.

23 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: I apologize.
24 Thank you.

25 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Thank you.

1 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Let me go to
2 Representative Mackereth. I know you have been
3 very patient.

4 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Hi, Mr.
5 Secretary. I really don't have time. And you
6 and I have met several times to go over this.
7 And I think probably I would like to do that
8 again.

9 I guess, really, the only thing I
10 would like to ask you today -- I mean, you are a
11 big-picture person, a visionary, and I think
12 that your vision for what education should look
13 like in Pennsylvania is very similar to my
14 vision.

15 My only -- My concern, though, is, is
16 this really the right, next piece?

17 And you talked a lot about the amount
18 of dollars the schools will have, you talked
19 about some remediation things, you talked about
20 some tutoring things, but I am not sure that
21 exists today. Because I don't know that every
22 kid, who was not doing well in 5th grade, is
23 going to get that extra reading today, I don't
24 think the resources are there for it.

25 I clearly believe that this

1 assessment test will -- does -- it has a
2 purpose. And that we need to be sure that, with
3 20 billion dollars being expended on education,
4 that the kids are getting what they need.

5 The problem is, I am afraid more are
6 going to fail because all of the things that you
7 talk about that aren't there. I wish they were
8 there.

9 And we are moving that way. You have
10 done tremendous things with Nurse Family
11 Partnership, pre-K education, the block grants,
12 which I think are tremendous, where schools can
13 focus on doing the extra tutoring and extra
14 remediation. So, on and on, I really believe
15 that we are on the right course. I just think
16 we are putting the cart before the horse by
17 creating the assessment when we are not there
18 yet.

19 So my argument, I think, is very
20 different than what we have been hearing. It's
21 just -- I wish we were there, but I don't think
22 we are. And I think we are going to set our
23 kids up to fail, if we don't have all of those
24 pieces in place before we do the assessment.

25 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: This is,

1 Representative, a very dynamic set of things to
2 do. But we are, and we have been for six years,
3 building these subsystems. So we are closer
4 than anybody imagines in terms of the system's
5 development. The assessments that we are
6 talking about for high schoolers are three years
7 out, if the regulations come through. So it is
8 the children who just left 6th grade, before
9 they will start taking the first of these
10 assessments.

11 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: But what
12 will we do different in 7th, 8th and 9th than we
13 are doing today to prepare, to be sure that they
14 are where they need to be? Because you know and
15 I know -- I have four children. I have watched
16 them. You know, you don't just start, begin
17 learning Algebra in 9th grade; you have to have
18 had those concepts of piece after piece after
19 piece in order to build you to that --

20 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Right.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: -- if they
22 are failing in 7th today.

23 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: But the fact of
24 the matter is, look at 7th and 8th grade PSSA
25 results. And I am going to bring this year's

1 results to you sooner, hopefully sooner than
2 we -- Well, I would like to bring it for you
3 today.

4 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: That would
5 be good.

6 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Because we have
7 been making steady progress.

8 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Right.

9 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: We have that
10 cohort group that gets to 2014. I mean, we are
11 close, closer than we could imagine. And we
12 have work to do with a large percent, but it is
13 not 45 percent.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: And that's
15 my issue with -- Oh, I agree with you. I see
16 all of that, too. But what about that
17 percentage of kids that we aren't doing it for,
18 are the resources there for our schools to do
19 the remediation, the tutoring, everything else
20 that they need to do to get -- Because those are
21 the kids that we are going to lose. Those are
22 the ones I am most concerned about.

23 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: Let me say,
24 from my own practice as superintendent and
25 principal, we are going to make sure we are

1 doing that for every child in my care. If I am
2 the steward of that building or that school
3 district, you better believe I am going to know,
4 by name, who is not there, and what kind of
5 intervention we are using, and is it a proven
6 intervention.

7 You know, I left the school that had
8 a 3rd grade that, you know, it was 70- and
9 80-percent low income, yet only three kids not
10 there at the end of that year I was leaving.
11 Three kids in 3rd grade.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: I would
13 love to believe that everybody is like you, but
14 that's not been my experience.

15 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: But do we
16 expect them not to be? You are not going to do
17 triangles? You probably won't. If we expect
18 our superintendents not to be like that, they
19 probably won't.

20 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Let me
21 tell you one of the things I have been --

22 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: We, for 20
23 billion dollars -- And I am sorry about -- that
24 means so much about that.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: That's

1 okay.

2 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: But for 20
3 billion dollars, we have to expect everybody is
4 going to be like that.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Right.
6 And I agree, I think we do need to expect that.
7 I just don't think we are there yet, that they
8 are meeting those expectations even at the lower
9 levels to ensure the success at the higher
10 levels. That's my concern.

11 The only thing, I just want to say,
12 I have been reading a lot about the different
13 states and what they are doing. And some of
14 them have these and some of them don't. And
15 some are successful and some aren't as
16 successful. But one of the things I saw is
17 that, with some, they clearly have that
18 infrastructure in place so that the chance of
19 success for every student is greater.

20 I was looking at what Florida is
21 trying to do. I don't know how far along they
22 are. You know, they have tracks. Now, that's,
23 of course, a philosophical debate, also. Should
24 kids be on a career track or should all kids --
25 You know, I don't think all kids should go to

1 college. I don't think that's the right thing
2 for all kids.

3 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: So it wouldn't
4 make any sense.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Right, it
6 doesn't make any sense.

7 SECRETARY ZAHORCHAK: So, I mean, I
8 just want to be sure all of the pieces are in
9 place. I don't want to rush something through
10 that is going to cost this amount of money
11 without having continued to do what you have
12 been doing, you are right, for six years. Get
13 us to the point where we need to be for these to
14 be effective.

15 So please just think about that.
16 Because that is my fear. I look at my own
17 districts and I am not sure we are there. Okay?

18 Thank you. I have got to go because
19 we are in session.

20 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. We
21 will be meeting again tomorrow. We have a
22 voting session.

23 Also, there are various options
24 before the committee, as to how they want to
25 respond to the proposed regulations. And I

1 think we have a memo, we'll circulate, on that.

2 But we should be prepared for a
3 continuation, in part of this discussion, also
4 of a more substantive meeting tomorrow with
5 legislative proposals. We will stand then in
6 recess until tomorrow.

7 (At or about 11:10 a.m., the hearing
8 was adjourned.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Roxy C. Cressler, Reporter, Notary Public, duly commissioned and qualified in and for the County of York, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and accurate transcript of my stenotype notes taken by me and subsequently reduced to computer printout under my supervision, and that this copy is a correct record of the same.

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Dated this 15th day of July, 2008.

Roxy C. Cressler - Reporter
Notary Public

My commission
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