

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
EDUCATION COMMITTEE

RYAN OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 205
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

JUNE 18, 2008
9:00 A.M.

BEFORE:

HONORABLE JAMES R. ROEBUCK, JR., MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE JESS M. STAIRS, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE PATRICK J. HARKINS
HONORABLE LAWRENCE H. CURRY
HONORABLE THADDEUS KIRKLAND
HONORABLE BARBARA MCILVAINE SMITH
HONORABLE MIKE CARROLL
HONORABLE H. SCOTT CONKLIN
HONORABLE RICHARD T. GRUCELA
HONORABLE DAYLIN LEACH
HONORABLE MARK LONGIETTI
HONORABLE FRANK ANDREWS
HONORABLE JAKE WHEATLEY
HONORABLE JOHN T. YUDICHAK
HONORABLE THOMAS P. MURT
HONORABLE BERNIE O'NEILL
HONORABLE BEVERLY MACKERETH
HONORABLE KATHY L. RAPP
HONORABLE MIKE FLECK
HONORABLE DARYL D. METCALFE
HONORABLE DUANE MILNE
HONORABLE SAM ROHRER
HONORABLE CURTIS G. SONNEY

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ALSO PRESENT:
CHRISTOPHER WAKELEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR(D)
TRACY L. MARKLE,
COURT REPORTER/NOTARY PUBLIC

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2 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Good morning. I'd like
3 to call the House Education Committee to order. This
4 morning we meet on a hearing on Chapter 4 regulations,
5 which focuses upon graduation requirements. The members
6 of the Committee have been sent, in advance of the
7 meeting, the proposed Chapter 4 regulations, a summary
8 of the regulations, and testimony on the regulations
9 that was given at the Senate Education Hearing; and
10 hopefully the members had a chance to review this
11 material.

12 The hearing today is in a different format
13 that gives members a greater opportunity to ask
14 questions and engage in discussion of a panel of
15 supporters and opponents of the proposed Chapter 4
16 regulations. Given the format of the hearing, I'm
17 asking both the members of the Committee and our
18 panelists to be as succinct as possible, to be as
19 succinct as possible in their questions and statements
20 so that every member will get a chance to ask their
21 questions and to be heard.

22 We begin with an opening presentation that
23 comes from Karl Girton, Chairman of the Pennsylvania
24 State Board of Education and Gerald Zahorchak, the
25 Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

1 It's my understanding that Dr. Zahorchak has a time
2 restraint and would endeavor to respect that restraint.

3 Good morning.

4 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Good morning.

5 MR. GIRTON: Thank you. And good morning,
6 Chairman Roebuck, Chairman Stairs, distinguished members
7 of the House Education Committee. I am Karl Girton, and
8 I'm here this morning to represent the State Board of
9 Education.

10 I think it's important to take a very brief
11 moment to first review how the State's current high
12 school graduation requirements evolved. The State Board
13 of Education first approved a policy in 1964. It
14 required students to successfully complete 13 course
15 credits in grades 10 through 12. The courses and course
16 content were prescribed by the Board. Over the next
17 three decades, the Board gradually increased the
18 requirements, eventually raising the credit requirements
19 to 21 for students in 9th through 12th grade. The Board
20 first began a statewide testing program in 1970 that was
21 designed to assess statewide academic performance, which
22 was eventually expanded to measure achievement in ten
23 subjects, including reading, writing, math, citizenship,
24 science and technology, based on the State's standards
25 of quality education.

1 In 1993, in recognition that seat time in
2 class does not equal knowledge of the subject, the Board
3 eliminated the State's course credit requirements,
4 replacing them with 56 student-learning outcomes. The
5 outcomes represented what students were to know and be
6 able to do in order to receive a high school diploma.
7 The Board established the Pennsylvania System of School
8 Assessment, the PSSA, which was originally designed to
9 measure how successful schools prepared students to meet
10 the learning outcomes.

11 In 1999, the Board adopted its current
12 policy. This policy requires school districts to
13 include at least four criterion in their high school
14 graduation policies, beginning with course completion in
15 grades, including completion of a culminating project,
16 proficiency in all State standards not assessed by the
17 PSSA, and proficiency in reading, writing, and math, as
18 determined by the PSSA or local assessments that are
19 aligned with the State standards and the State
20 assessment.

21 Since 2003 and 2004, the State Board has
22 continuously reviewed the gap between the number of
23 students issued diplomas and the number who are
24 proficient on the PSSA tests administered in reading,
25 writing, and math given in the 11th grade and for those

1 who do not pass in 11th grade the 12th grade retest.

2 The numbers are startling. More than 57,000
3 high school students are awarded high school diplomas
4 each year without being able to pass the State test.
5 This indicates to the Board that school district local
6 Assessments are not aligned with State standards and/or
7 the level of rigor of the PSSA. This means that far too
8 many students are awarded diplomas without showing they
9 have the fundamental knowledge and skills in reading,
10 writing, and math that they will need to succeed in life
11 beyond graduation.

12 Over the past five years, the Board has
13 explored ways to address this challenge, culminating
14 with the unanimous vote on January 17 this year to
15 approve the proposal that is now before you. The Board
16 now believes that it is possible to improve the existing
17 language by making Assessments more student friendly,
18 and at the same time, grading some basic uniformity to
19 the high school diplomas issued by the 501 school
20 districts in this Commonwealth.

21 The proposal expands and refines the options
22 school districts often may use to determine whether
23 students are proficient in reading, writing, math
24 science, and social studies. School districts would
25 have a menu of options, beginning with the current PSSA,

1 or a new set of end-of-course exams, which could replace
2 final exams, which will be made available at no cost to
3 districts. These are called Graduation Competency
4 Assessments. Ten would be given, and students would
5 have to pass six. Students who do not pass the first
6 time, would receive extra help and could retake the
7 GCA's up to three times per year until they pass, or
8 students could earn a diploma by using Advanced
9 Placement or the International Baccalaureate tests; and
10 finally, schools would be permitted to use their
11 existing rule of Assessments as long as they are
12 certified to be at least as rigorous as the Graduation
13 Competency Exam.

14 We believe it would be beneficial to expand
15 the ways and opportunities for students to demonstrate
16 they have mastered the content necessary to earn a
17 diploma. The new proposal will permit students to take
18 a validating State assessment or validated Local
19 Assessment at the conclusion of ten other traditional
20 courses, such as Algebra I and Algebra II, Geometry,
21 English, English Composition and Literature, World
22 History, American History, Biology, Chemistry, Civics
23 and Government. These tests would be taken as the final
24 exam at the end of the course. The State's Graduation
25 Competency Assessment would be offered three times each

1 year in each content area so students would have
2 multiple opportunities to take and retake the exams.
3 Additionally, the Assessments would be constructed in
4 modules so that a student struggling with one major
5 component of a particular course could be tutored in
6 that specific area and then be allowed to retake only
7 the module of the assessment that they were unable to
8 pass on the original administration. This has the
9 distinct advantage of moving the assessment much closer
10 to an instruction so that students would not need to
11 wait until the 11th grade to discover that they have a
12 knowledge gap that is related to content that they
13 studied several years earlier. Students would still be
14 able to demonstrate that they have earned a diploma by
15 scoring proficient on the relevant 11th grade PSSA
16 content areas, and they would also be permitted to use
17 the results of the AP and IB exams which are taken by
18 many more advanced students already.

19 This plan opens multiple pathways to a
20 diploma for all of our students; and because all the
21 Assessment instruments being used to assess the same
22 body of knowledge at the same level, high school
23 diplomas in Pennsylvania would uniformly represent that
24 the person whose name appears on the document has a
25 basic set of skills and knowledge regardless of which

1 school district awarded the diploma.

2 We believe this is important for employers,
3 colleges, and universities, but most importantly to the
4 young men and women who earn the diploma. There are
5 other important parts of this proposal, including a
6 requirement that the Department of Education develop and
7 publish a model curriculum for use by any school
8 district that chooses to use it.

9 Also, The Department is required to provide
10 schools with interventions necessary to help struggling
11 students gain proficiency. There are a couple of
12 important things this proposal is not. This is not a
13 single high-stakes test. Quite to the contrary. It
14 provides multiple assessment options and opportunities
15 for students to demonstrate that they have earned a
16 diploma. This is not more testing. Schools would test
17 with the same frequency, but would have a greater
18 variety of assessment instruments from which to choose.
19 This will not, in any way, change how special-education
20 students are currently permitted to earn a diploma.
21 This will not lower the standard for high-performing
22 students and schools. They will all be encouraged and
23 expected to expand course offerings and enrich their
24 content. And based on what we have learned from other
25 states, this will not increase the dropout rate.

1 The one thing I think most of us agree on is
2 that the status quo is not acceptable. This builds on
3 what we know works, it is fairer to our students, and we
4 are convinced it will improve academic performance when
5 it is implemented in 2014, six years from now.

6 I'll be happy to respond to questions after
7 Secretary Zahorchak makes his comments. Thank you very
8 much.

9 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Thank you. Chairman, thank
10 you very much, members of the Committee. I appreciate
11 the opportunity. Once again, I want to thank you before
12 starting. Republicans and Democrats in this State, for
13 the last six years, have done a great job at making sure
14 education was at the top of the agenda; and your support
15 is indeed appreciated by me and so many students and
16 educators and so many others.

17 This really, I think, is an issue about
18 ensuring that many kids make it to their full
19 opportunities, that poor kids and disabled kids and
20 African-American kids and Hispanic and Latino kids and
21 kids who have English as a second language have the high
22 expectations that we need. And you have, for a long
23 time, decades ago, understood that measurement was an
24 important way to determine whether or not young people
25 are making progress. Indeed, if we're to have the

1 standard day system, measurement is one of the vital
2 component parts of that system. Graduation
3 requirements, as you know, are not new to the history of
4 Pennsylvania. We've had graduation requirements for
5 some time. Improving those is where we're at. Current
6 regulations allow students to meet graduation
7 requirements in two ways, proficient or advanced on the
8 end of 11th grade PSSA test in the fundamentals of math
9 and reading, writing, or local Assessments of equal
10 rigor aligned to State standards. Nearly all, if not
11 all, districts make available that second option, local
12 assessments; but it's the equal rigor part that we want
13 to talk about.

14 I looked at this second option, both as a
15 practitioner -- as you know, I was a principal and
16 superintendent and have great experience with that
17 second option and understand from years of practice what
18 that second option looks like in a different place. We
19 recently looked at a few districts that we have
20 highlighted to just unpack that second option. What
21 does it really look like on the ground? Without the
22 rhetoric, what does it look like? And, at best, it's a
23 patchwork, different content, different measure,
24 different rigor, different standards.

25

1 I have a friend whose young son was advanced
2 in mathematics and complained this year, I wish I
3 wouldn't have taken the accelerated course because my
4 friends are taking a different teacher this year, a year
5 later, for Algebra I, and having a whole different set
6 of expectations. On their transcript, they'll have A
7 plus, while I'll have B minus; but the rigor and
8 expectations of my teacher in that course were
9 completely different in one building. It's a patchwork
10 across the State. And instead of objective measures of
11 skills and clearly identified core content, districts
12 allow students to satisfy readiness, in many cases, by
13 attending the class, completing course work, earning a
14 passing grade, even in courses that are not upfront
15 known to measure the rigor of our expectations of
16 Pennsylvania's standards. These are lesser courses,
17 where students' attendance and perhaps a B minus is then
18 at the end deemed proficient, equal, as the regulations
19 currently say, equal with our expectations for our
20 standards. That's an injustice, because those people
21 will leave on graduation night and go out to 35 and 40
22 years of a career with the need to backtrack, if they
23 have that opportunity.

24 We have an absolute moral obligation and
25 more. I'm going to give you two examples based on

1 strategic plans filed by districts with the Department
2 of Education. In District A, one of the wealthiest,
3 high-performing districts in the State, students who
4 fail to score proficient or advance on the PSSA can
5 submit a portfolio to meet graduation requirements. If
6 the portfolio doesn't pass muster, students then can
7 meet the requirements after review of all assignments
8 required for remedial class. This is a not a uniform
9 standard. And I would ask, Can we expect that a student
10 will be ready for entrance into a career where there's
11 unforgiving entrance requirements in most of our
12 careers? And it's going to be more unforgiving going
13 forward or entering into postsecondary education.

14 In District B, in suburban Harrisburg, other local
15 assessments, in quotes, are identified as the pathway to
16 meet the graduation requirement. But that's all it
17 says. No detail in the strategic plan with regard to
18 the rigor of the assessments. We know this over and
19 over again. Last night, I asked my staff to randomly
20 pull twelve strategic plans. Virtually all of those
21 failed to meet the rigor. Half of them did not identify
22 a local measurement of readiness beyond course grades.

23 And I already told you that story, the tale of two
24 algebra courses in one school. So how can I be sure
25 those grades really signify readiness? Can we have

1 confidence that a B plus in one classroom's the same as
2 a B plus in a different building, let alone across the
3 State, hundreds of miles away from each other? Without
4 uniform assessments, how can we be sure courses are
5 aligned to the State's academic standards? And how do
6 we know, again, that Algebra I in District A is roughly
7 the same course and content as Algebra I in District B?
8 We can all agree on two things, good paying jobs require
9 training beyond high school, and our population is more
10 mobile, meaning students are going to be about the State
11 post-high school in their career pursuits, etc.

12 As an educator, I want every student to be
13 confident of their skills and confident that that
14 diploma meant as a standard they've met proficiency in
15 the fundamental content areas of math and reading,
16 social studies, and science. Very few districts clearly
17 articulate what local assessments consist of and how
18 they tie to State academic standards. The Pennsylvania
19 School Board's own much touted survey of local
20 assessments failed to secure responses from half of the
21 school districts. Among the roughly 240 districts that
22 reported details in their Local Assessment, there was
23 huge variability. For these reasons, I can't be
24 confident that students who meet the requirements by
25 passing local option are ready, ready to enter the

1 workplace without remediation, ready to start freshman
2 year without remediation. I can guarantee you this,
3 59,000 times 40 years of the workplace, our current
4 workplace, if you listen to those human resource
5 directors, people who are looking for our workers,
6 they'll tell you, there's a readiness problem that's
7 real. If you take that 50-plus thousand and multiply it
8 times 40 years, we have 2 million people underearning
9 less than their capacity who could have been in
10 remediation, on the job, or at college on our dependency
11 system roles or incarcerated. I can promise you this,
12 we bring more and more students to proficiency, we'll
13 see less and less of that. And as your colleague,
14 friend, educator, I tell you, this is about the poor,
15 the African-American, the Latino, the disabled, students
16 who need us most; but it's also about all students
17 getting to their fullest potential.

18 Thanks very much.

19 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. Let me just
20 make a preliminary announcement. As we move forward,
21 it's my understanding there will be an overflow area set
22 up in the Ryan rotunda where, indeed, the hearing can be
23 viewed by those who, perhaps, find that a more
24 comfortable venue at this point. And, also, the hearing
25 is being streamlined on www.pahouse.com.

1 With that, we open the questions.

2 REPRESENTATIVE STAIRS: Yes. Thank you,
3 Mr. Chairman. It's a pleasure to be here today. And I
4 have a couple questions, one for Mr. Girton and then one
5 for the Secretary. I serve with Mr. Girton and others
6 on the State Board, so I'm very keenly aware of their
7 efforts to certainly improve the quality of our students
8 and, you know, I guess the question is, we know there's
9 a problem, you know, we're keenly aware of that. And
10 the problem, I think, will be is, How do we get there?
11 How do we solve it? I mean, that's where we're going to
12 have differences of opinion.

13 But I just want to first ask Mr. Girton, and
14 I'm sure you're aware that just recently the Senate and
15 I think the vote was 48 to 2, if I'm not mistaken, to
16 certainly go ahead with your ideas you're proposing, but
17 still have the legislature kind of leading the charge,
18 so to speak, instead of going through the regulation
19 process. And, also, you're aware there's a House Bill
20 2452 that has really quite a few cosponsors to have the
21 legislature kind of lead this effort; so I guess there's
22 a question of whether it's a statute or else a
23 regulation.

24 So I'd appreciate, Mr. Girton, if you would
25 maybe comment on, you know, what's happening over here

1 versus meeting the accomplishments, getting the job
2 done.

3 MR. GIRTON: Well, thank you, Representative
4 Stairs. That's a good point. And I want to begin by
5 saying that the body, the State Board of Education not
6 only respects but understands that it has statutory
7 limits. These limits were imposed by this body when it
8 was created and all of the work that we do that's
9 regulatory moves through a process that you developed
10 and defined many years ago; and so our assumption is
11 that we aren't working with you in this process. In
12 fact, as it relates to graduation requirements, three
13 and a half years ago, we forwarded to this body a
14 proposal to address this same problem that we're talking
15 to you about this morning. At that time, we suggested
16 that the Secretary be required to call forward those
17 districts that had the most significant gap between
18 students proficient on the PSSA and students awarded a
19 diploma. And, at that time, we had someplace in the
20 neighborhood of 187 districts, with 50 percent of the
21 students that were graduating were not proficient on the
22 PSSA; and we asked that the Secretary have a conference
23 with the chief school officer, the superintendent of
24 those, what we considered to be excessive gap districts
25 and talk to them about how to impose them. And it was a

1 fairly complex proposal. But the idea, at that point,
2 was to try to shrink this gap over time, beginning with
3 the districts that appeared to have the most significant
4 problem. This body, as well as the Senate, was not
5 comfortable with that proposal; and so we withdrew it.
6 So we do respect the fact that you are the ultimate
7 authority, that you have the ability to make your wishes
8 be known and that the regulatory process works, we
9 believe. And I think that's a classic example of we're
10 in the instance of addressing this problem. I think we
11 all concede it exists around how you define graduation,
12 what the diploma means in Pennsylvania, and how
13 ultimately to be fair in an equitable way to all the
14 124,000 students that graduate from our high schools in
15 this Commonwealth every year.

16 REPRESENTATIVE STAIRS: Yeah. Thank you.
17 And I guess you're probably just as much aware as I am,
18 and probably everybody in the room is aware, that
19 sometimes the legislature needs a little prodding and we
20 probably do our best work under crisis in the 11th hour,
21 as we're probably going to find out maybe in the next
22 week or so on the budget. So we sometimes aren't as
23 quick and mobile as we should be, but I would hope that
24 as this goes forward that the legislature certainly has
25 a role to play and we can work in a cooperative manner

1 on this issue. But we can talk about that a little
2 later on, because I know there's a lot of questions and
3 I want to limit one to each of you.

4 Question for the Secretary. The Secretary
5 and I have become quite close friends over the years. I
6 guess we're from the same area geographically with the
7 same upbringing and same concerns, and I really
8 appreciate his great leadership as Secretary.

9 But the question to me is, one of the
10 options for school districts is certainly a Local
11 Assessment; and maybe you can elaborate on that.
12 Because, you know, we have many districts in
13 Pennsylvania. Some are doing a great job, some are
14 doing maybe an average job, and some aren't meeting our
15 expectations. But would it not be quite feasible for a
16 district that's doing a great job that even today as a
17 high percentage, and even that's not good enough, that a
18 high percentage of kids that are meeting the achievement
19 levels that we want, that we would encourage them or let
20 them come up with their local assessments that would
21 still present a high standard and maybe give them the
22 feeling that they're not being kind of getting the heavy
23 hand of the State because we have a local control issue
24 in Pennsylvania, which I think we're all very much aware
25 of. But I'm just looking for a way that districts can,

1 you know, solve this problem without, you know, the
2 State looking over their shoulder and maybe -- I don't
3 want to use the word harassing them, maybe pushing them
4 a little too much, if they could do it in a more
5 friendly manner but still get the results done.

6 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Yeah, I think student
7 achievement occurs when there are high demands and high
8 expectations for all, and equal levels of support.
9 You've been very, very good as a legislature with the
10 support side of things; and you see in this proposal our
11 support of a voluntary model curriculum, the
12 diagnostics, the opportunities for retakes for students
13 and multiple methods of measurement from the PSSA to the
14 AP and IB, this, or we've been responsive in saying --
15 or the Local Assessment. As long as that Assessment can
16 be validated as meeting the rigor, so it replaces these
17 more common portfolios or grades on some course that
18 necessarily isn't consistent with our standards. So we
19 want to give that opportunity, and we'd want schools to
20 take it.

21 But today we have to all understand, even in
22 our best performing school districts, on average, one
23 out of six students are not meeting those standards
24 demonstrated by the PSSA; and then we're told are
25 meeting them through a collection of courses that we're

1 not sure about that rigor. And if you look inside that
2 one in six, those kids that are being left out are the
3 poor kids, the African-American kids, the minority
4 students, students who are speaking a language other
5 than English as their primary language. This is hard
6 work, we all agree. And it is changed when we say we're
7 going to continuously increase the support, but we also
8 think the high expectations need to be real and need to
9 be uniform in measurement as a platform for kids to
10 spring off of going into their futures.

11 REPRESENTATIVE STAIRS: Yes. Like I said, I
12 appreciate it and we can certainly talk about that issue
13 later on; but I would certainly encourage, you know, a
14 cooperative effort between the State and the local
15 districts to have, you know, a vigorous assessment that
16 still would let them have the, if you might want to use
17 the word wiggle room or the ability to do things on
18 their own. So I guess this is a discussion we can
19 continue, but I wanted to bring this to your attention;
20 but I think that's important on the Local Assessment.

21 I have other questions, but I think other
22 members have questions. To let everybody have a chance,
23 I'll pass at this time.

24 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
25 Representative Leach.

1 REPRESENTATIVE LEACH: Thank you, Mr.
2 Chairman. This, I guess, is to Secretary Zahorchak.
3 And I would just like to first say that the Secretary
4 and I have had discussions on this, and he knows that I
5 have some issues with this and that some of my local
6 officials have issues with this, yet he came to my
7 district and came into the lion's den and met with like
8 25 people who are not entirely enthusiastic about the
9 proposal and made a very compelling case and really was
10 a class act all the way; and I'm very grateful for that.
11 That said, I still have a couple of issues with it. I'm
12 going to try to distill into the essence of one broad
13 comment which you can reply to, and then I'll pass the
14 microphone reluctantly as always.

15 You know, my concerns in this area go to the
16 sort of unintended consequences for individual children;
17 and one of the things I said to you when we spoke is
18 that I recently read the Walter Isaacson biography of
19 Albert Einstein and it occurred to me as I read that
20 biography -- it's actually a myth that he failed math.
21 That's not true. But he could not pass a literature
22 test to save his life and if that had been the case in a
23 protocol such as you're suggesting, both he and the
24 world would have been poorer because he never would have
25 had the opportunity to go to Zurich Polytechnic and

1 pursue the scientific career he did.

2 I'm concerned about a series of very
3 high-stakes tests requiring the school districts to
4 spend more and more time teaching to the test rather
5 than teaching what I think is more broad. But in my
6 particular districts, the districts I represent, and
7 we've discussed this as well, 84 percent of the students
8 go to college on average and 97 percent of the students
9 either go to college or go into the career that they
10 want to go into and overwhelmingly succeed in that
11 career. The diplomas from the school districts I
12 represent are not worthless. I understand that there
13 may be problems in other parts of the State, and I
14 personally think that's a function of getting
15 appropriate resources to those other districts; but I'm
16 struggling with how I justify it to the folks in my
17 community who have school districts that are succeeding,
18 that have diplomas that are worthwhile, and then have
19 children that are going on to do great things, to
20 require them to change their protocol and, in fact, more
21 specifically, I am worried about the net damage to
22 individual children who are currently through a broad
23 assessment of their achievements, getting a high school
24 diploma, going to college and succeeding, who will
25 because they're not good at taking a test or they're not

1 good at one narrow area or something like that, will
2 literally be stopped, their careers will be stopped in
3 their tracks and I don't think that that benefits them
4 or Pennsylvania. So, as you know, I am in favor of sort
5 of more broad alternatives than you must pass this test
6 even though you've taken it three times a year and all
7 that or else your career is essentially over. And I'm
8 just wondering if you can speak to your thoughts on
9 whether there will be individual children who actually
10 as a result of this protocol have lives that are much
11 poorer and are able to make much less significant
12 contributions to society because we've put so much
13 emphasis on one measure of achievement.

14 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Well, thank you very much.
16 And I think that's a great question within a very
17 complex concept of what happens when a student who is
18 high achieving or a district that apparently seems to be
19 high achieving has students in places that can't
20 succeed. As it stands today, we recognize some of those
21 deficiencies at the end of 11th grade; and it's sad.
22 And with respectful disagreement conceptually, I believe
23 the opposite will happen. I think that we're going to
24 see students who are recognized early on at the point of
25 instruction. For example, in Algebra class, a student

1 might have thought they were not good at mathematics,
2 but when we start diagnosing because of the
3 end-of-course exam that's uniform and the diagnostics
4 that are there, we can back up on the developmental
5 path, find out where that student started to show
6 deficiencies, was it adding, subtracting, multiplying
7 and dividing or was it decimals, and begin to intervene
8 at that level. We can also discover more than ever
9 before in the Child Find through this of children who
10 may have some type of learning difficulty; and if that's
11 the case, write an IEP for that student that they would
12 overcome. As in the case of Einstein, in some cases,
13 there may have been disabilities at the same time in
14 this very gifted human being; so that can be prevented.
15 So I think it's the antithesis. I think we get more
16 information than ever before; and again, we have higher
17 expectations and we start producing tens of thousands of
18 students per year who are at that place of full
19 potential.

20 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
21 Representative Grucela.

22 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chairman. And thank you, gentlemen, for your
24 testimony. My first question is, Is this the movement
25 to a statewide curriculum? And by that I mean, are we

1 going to be teaching the same thing in all the schools
2 with all the same textbooks and all the same lesson
3 plans and we're going to have everything one size fits
4 all, one uniform statewide curriculum?

5 MR. GIRTON: And I'll ask the Secretary to
6 speak at greater length to that question, but it is not
7 the intent of the State Board of Education to use
8 certain local control by imposing a curriculum on the
9 school district. That's why specifically this proposal
10 says it will be modeled for its curriculum, available to
11 districts that choose to use it; and I will ask the
12 Secretary to comment.

13 MR. ZAHORCHAK: I think it's important not
14 to design what you do tomorrow or today or what page or
15 textbook, etc. Those are the means to our good ends.
16 We can share some of the best teaching practices that
17 we've discovered among each other in learning
18 communities or some of the best nationally or
19 internationally research practices for teaching in a
20 particular concept area. But I think it's important,
21 Representative, that we have targets that are big ideas,
22 big concepts in competencies; because if you look across
23 the country at the first quintile, science, technology,
24 engineering, mathematics, countries that are always
25 showing up first in competition of knowledge of their

1 general student body, those places have one thing in
2 common as a nation. They have a set of targets, a
3 curriculum framework, if you will, the ends that the
4 State in this case would say, these are good ends,
5 voluntary ends, but good ends nonetheless that meet
6 internationally. They're benchmarked against the
7 country and against the world in science and math, etc.
8 Now, the means to those ends in this loose type of
9 framework is what the school district best determines
10 and so it will continuously be that way because we'll
11 always learn through the inventiveness, through the
12 creativity of individual teachers and their colleagues
13 across the State. But right now, it's sort of, you
14 know, analogous to the wild west. I mean, everybody's
15 shooting, but there's no target. We don't know what the
16 big concepts and competencies for mathematics at the
17 senior high level would be because this nation hasn't
18 done that work, afraid to do it, and should be
19 embarrassed by that because of the studies that have
20 been done internationally that tell us time and time
21 again there's a framework that everyone can target and
22 then educators can be about getting to that. In this
23 case, it would be a voluntary framework.

24 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: But how are you
25 going to do that if the test is the same? If the tests

1 are the same across the entire Commonwealth, how are you
2 going to do that? How are you going to now have the
3 same curriculum -- how can you be different to shoot for
4 the same target?

5 MR. ZAHORCHAK: You can be different in a
6 wide variety of ways, materials, resources. The best
7 research and mathematics say it's not about books, it's
8 not about computers. It's really about teaching
9 strategies and driving home some of those strategies, so
10 there's a wide variety of ways to get to that target.
11 When we were talking about assessment, a very important
12 component, we're talking about assessing our standards;
13 and that's been in Pennsylvania as part of graduation
14 expectations for a long time. Have they met our
15 standards as a State?

16 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Let me address one
17 more thing. My understanding is, the students will have
18 to pass one social studies test. But if you follow the
19 sequence, if you took a final exam in social studies in
20 9th grade, you took a final exam in social studies in
21 10th grade, a final exam in 11th and final exam in 12th,
22 now with the graduation tests, you only have to pass one
23 social studies assessment test. Aren't you dumbing down
24 the test?

25 MR. GIRTON: Here again, I think it's

1 important to understand that we're trying to respect the
2 right of districts to define graduation --

3 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: But my question is,
4 Are you dumbing down the test?

5 MR. GIRTON: No, we're not dumbing down the
6 test. We're saying to districts that you offer in any
7 scope and sequence the courses and the content that you
8 choose; and when you have satisfied the State's
9 requirement of one of those social studies examinations,
10 meeting the graduation requirement for that student, you
11 can impose two or three or four. Our vision was in
12 putting this forward is that we would have a significant
13 number of districts in this Commonwealth that would say,
14 this is the basic set of skills and knowledge that our
15 students need and we will exceed that and we know, in
16 fact, there are many high performing districts in this
17 Commonwealth that already exceed this defined
18 expectation. We would expect that that will continue to
19 happen. This is just a basic set of skills and
20 knowledge that we need to make sure can be measured
21 uniformly for all students that earn a diploma.

22 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: If a student fails
23 three of the four social studies tests and passes the
24 State test, then he graduates. He failed three, passed
25 the one. But he passed yours, he graduates? It's

1 either yes or no.

2 MR. GIRTON: That's the district's option.

3 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Okay. Thank you.

4 MR. GIRTON: No, the district can say all
5 four.

6 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Thank you.

7 Secondly, the No. 2 pencil bubble test is all about
8 reading. And can't we take the \$15 million for the No.
9 2 pencil bubble test and turn it into better reading
10 programs, especially in the elementary program? These
11 standardized tests are about reading. I don't care what
12 anybody tells you. They're about reading. That's the
13 number one thing. And if the student can't read, he's
14 not going to pass these tests. And that's where we're
15 falling out, in my opinion. Why not take the \$15
16 million and put it into better programs, especially in
17 the elementary level, toward increasing the reading
18 programs?

19 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Very quickly. Understanding
20 assessment is different than the conversation you were
21 having about bubble tests. This year -- this summer
22 we'll have an institute that's set up for reform in
23 education. It's going to be about assessment. We're
24 going to have international respected folks at the
25 conference with us, Doug Reeves, Jim Poppin, Dugan

1 William (phonetic) from London will be in Hershey.
2 We're going to have this conversation of what is a
3 higher order of thinking skills assessment, how we make
4 sure assessments are literacy rich, that they don't stay
5 at the comprehension literal level, that they go upward,
6 move upwards or up whomevers taxonomy you want to go up
7 in terms of literacy rich. Our call to the
8 organizations who will help develop the test is just
9 that. We want open-ended; we want to get closer to the
10 effect, and we want to have a policy on assessment that
11 is practical and you really can get done. So the
12 combination of getting up the higher order response from
13 students to demonstrate that they can read well,
14 comprehend, but also infer and analyze and create going
15 forward, evaluate. Those are the kinds of assessments
16 that are different than a kind of multiple choice, low
17 level test.

18 REPRESENTATIVE GRUCELA: Finally, if I may,
19 Dr. Zahorchak, I just want to address from my own
20 personal experience your example of the two different
21 tests in Algebra, the same school, two different
22 Algebras, Algebra I, etc. The best principle -- in my
23 opinion, it all starts at the top and it all starts with
24 a school or it all starts with an administrator. The
25 best principal that I ever had, we had to turn our final

1 exams into the department head who then turned them into
2 the principal. He then decided that if your test was
3 the same or too easy or whatever, you know, make
4 recommendations and send it back to you. I think that's
5 the way it should work, and I think that would correct
6 the example that you gave.

7 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
9 Representative Metcalfe.

10 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chairman, and thank you both for your testimony this
12 morning. I think there's many of us that would agree
13 with some of the foundation of your arguments that you
14 lay out before us regarding ensuring that all of our
15 students, when they do graduate, that their diploma does
16 mean something and that when they enter into the
17 workplace that they're actually able to achieve and
18 succeed because they've been given the proper skills
19 through our educational system that we've spent so much
20 money on, billions per year here in Pennsylvania, well
21 over \$20 billion a year when you factor in the local
22 component of property taxes and earned income tax and
23 such. But I think we're in disagreement as far as how
24 do you get there. And as Representative Stairs had
25 said, Pennsylvania has a history of local control and

1 this issue -- I've been here 10 years, and I know it was
2 an issue when I ran for office, the PSSA tests, and the
3 State trying to dictate to our local school districts
4 how they're going to design their curriculum ultimately
5 through, as Representative Grucela said, through trying
6 to meet a certain objective that's been set and in
7 tailoring a curriculum to get there. So I think many of
8 us have had that concern for at least as long as -- and
9 I know Representative Grucela and I came in at the same
10 time -- as long as we've been here, and we fought many
11 battles through the years and I've not been prejudiced
12 in how I deal with either administration, whether
13 Republican or Democrat, because I had similar problems
14 with some of the things that the Ridge Administration
15 had done with the PSSA test. We actually had a
16 subcommittee that was formed to study the PSSA test, as
17 I'm sure you're both aware, years ago, and made a number
18 of recommendations out of that subcommittee; and I know
19 that the State Board and the Department have utilized
20 some of that information, although not all of it.
21 Actually, I sat down with several other representatives
22 and Secretary Hickok years ago; and we expressed the
23 concern to him that the PSSA test ultimately was going
24 to become a high-stakes test and that it would be used
25 as an exit exam for our students to graduate. And we

1 had assurances at that time, no, the regs say, you know,
2 Local Assessment, also, and that could be whatever the
3 local school district determines and that's where we
4 leave it up to local control. And now we're back here
5 once again engaged in the same battle, all these years
6 later, once again battling out whether or not the PSSA
7 tests should become such a high-stakes test. And I know
8 that you've given some other alternatives there that
9 could be used; but ultimately, you're going to have
10 somebody at the Department determining whether those
11 local assessments meet the rigor of the PSSA, if you
12 consider the PSSA a rigorous test. I think there's many
13 of us that have a lot of problems with the PSSA test,
14 both in content, use, and there's just a host of
15 problems that we've been dealing with the PSSA test over
16 the years. And I think many of us share -- and it's
17 across the aisle, I believe.

18 But I wanted to specifically ask you about
19 part of the controversy that's been ongoing around this
20 debate and that is if the legislature actually moves
21 forward with legislation to stymie this effort of the
22 State Board to promulgate regulations that force this
23 test on our school districts and that we would choose to
24 grab hold of that issue for ourselves to be the
25 determining body that would set that requirement or not,

1 that we in some way have shut off public comment. I
2 think those comments have been made, and I think my
3 greatest concern is when you look at the Governor's
4 proposed budget that he had actually placed \$15 million
5 in his budget proposal prior to soliciting any public
6 comment on this issue. Could either of you address why
7 that money was put in the budget prior to even trying to
8 vet this out in the public arena?

9 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Well, I can say that, as
10 administration, we anticipate the process, and the
11 process for regulation includes the proposal that's on
12 the table while preparing for the class of 2014; and as
13 you know, oftentimes, we have marred in the budget,
14 things that we anticipate but we always know that those
15 things are contingent upon the budget being improved.
16 But to wait every year until July on things that may
17 come and then spend a half year preparing to execute, we
18 would be always far behind. You did mention,
19 Representative, the number of people who have made
20 comments in opposition and the public controversy.

21 But I also want to state and place on the
22 record that there's an overwhelming number of people who
23 get this, and you're going to hear from panelists in
24 just a bit; and I'm hoping we provide the time to have
25 this discussion of people who are representing people

1 who really understand this. We've had hundreds of
2 favorable public comments delivered to the State Board
3 of Education, editorials from just about every major
4 newspaper in the State in favor, leading superintendents
5 from large, small, urban and rural districts. You'll
6 from one in just a few minutes, higher education,
7 including 14 state university presidents --

8 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: I do appreciate
9 that, Mr. Secretary. I do have a couple of other
10 questions, I mean, without prolonging the other --

11 MR. ZAHORCHAK: But I just want to make sure
12 the record's prepared here, stating there's an awful lot
13 of people --

14 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: But I would also
15 like to interject, Mr. Secretary, that we, from the
16 Republican Committee staff, have received an
17 overwhelming number of responses against this proposal,
18 in lieu of the ones that you've received for it; so an
19 overwhelming supermajority against this, as well as in
20 my own district which has been against it, as I said,
21 since I've been elected. For the last ten years, this
22 has been an issue that we've battled back and forth on.

23 And I appreciate the fact that you're saying
24 that the money was put in the budget to try and
25 anticipate what you were going to do. Again, I think

1 that really speaks to whether or not you're going to pay
2 attention to public comment when you're already
3 budgeting for it. But I'm also concerned that the
4 Department of Ed had issued a request for information
5 already back in February for testing companies to
6 develop the Graduation Competency Assessments, once
7 again, before we found out about it, which I believe was
8 when we received copies of the regs in May, that we
9 ultimately saw the copies of the regs, you're already
10 three months prior, a couple of months prior, putting
11 forth requests to develop those tests that ultimately
12 you need to get public comment on, you ultimately have
13 to have our approval of.

14 Although, the way the system's been set up,
15 and I know you said we do have the ability -- you said
16 that we have the ability to make our wishes known. As
17 you've mentioned, we did create the State Board in the
18 legislature and the existence of the State Board, which
19 I would ultimately like to do and I think there's some
20 of my colleagues across the aisle that would also like
21 to do so, especially based on these actions and past
22 actions that I think the State Board has really exceeded
23 its authority, and you very well know that when we do
24 have resistance within the legislature, it's very hard
25 to get both bodies to agree on almost anything,

1 especially when you're going to take the State Board to
2 task and to overturn a regulation, whether it's a State
3 Board, Department of Labor, whoever; it's very hard for
4 us to overturn these bureaucratic regulations because of
5 the process we have set up, and I think that needs to be
6 addressed and it's an issue that's, I think, really
7 harming us as a state. But I think for you to already
8 ask for testing companies to develop tests is a concern,
9 especially regarding really wanting to listen to the
10 public and wanting to follow the direction that the
11 legislature, who has the Constitutional responsibility
12 for providing for a thorough and efficient system of
13 public education, is setting.

14 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Well, we knew we were
15 speaking to these potential providers of the assessments
16 in very broad terms. We also knew that we had been, for
17 years, having this conversation; and we knew that the
18 round tables have occurred. We learned a lot over the
19 year plus of the State Board's work in listening to the
20 public on things like, what about children with
21 disabilities, things like, there should be an
22 alternative assessment from the school district; so
23 we've been listening and working. But we, again, have
24 absolute respect for the legislative process; nothing
25 happens until there is an approved budget for us to go

1 forward from -- or until there is a regulation for us to
2 move forward from.

3 MR. GIRTON: And just from our vantage
4 point, I think it's irresponsible for us to put forward
5 a proposal to this body absent some meaningful cost
6 analysis which can really only come by the Department
7 doing some kind of advanced planning with the
8 prospective contractors, so that we can give you some
9 fiscal notes with this regulatory package. It's not
10 based on somebody's conjecture; but is, in fact, based
11 on some informed input that we would expect to receive
12 from the Department through this kind of advanced
13 planning in anticipation. If it doesn't happen, there
14 is no authority to proceed with.

15 REPRESENTATIVE METCALFE: I appreciate both
16 of your answers, although, respectfully, I would say
17 when people look on and see this type of activity
18 occurring, they look on it more with a cynical analysis
19 to say, do they really want to hear from the public or
20 are they ultimately just going to try and ramrod this
21 through the legislature and through the regulatory
22 process if not through the legislature?

23 So, I mean, if there is that great respect
24 for our body that created the State Board, I would
25 recommend that this proposal be removed and that you

1 allow the legislature to move forward with our own
2 legislation to determine what direction we're going to
3 take regarding graduation tests, if that would be the
4 way that we choose to go. I personally don't believe
5 that a test is going to give you a valid assessment of
6 whether or not someone is ready for the workforce and
7 actually have learned all that they can learn out of the
8 system that we have. I think it has to be a test,
9 plus -- and I don't think any one student can just be
10 assessed based on any test because it's a snapshot on
11 any given day, at any given moment in what's going on in
12 their life.

13 So I thank the Chairman for his indulgence
14 and turn it back over to the Chairman. Thank you.

15 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you.
16 Representative Wheatley.

17 REPRESENTATIVE WHEATLEY: I don't know if
18 this was planned, Mr. Chairman, me to follow
19 Representative Metcalfe. We share so many common
20 interests in perspective; however, on this one, we are
21 different. Actually, I think that there should be -- we
22 should be congratulating, and again, supporting and
23 encouraging the Governor and the Administration and the
24 State Board who have, I think, since the Governor has
25 taken office, really tried to drive this State towards

1 higher energy around improving our educational culture;
2 and this is just one more part, piece of that
3 conversation. And it's a difficult piece, because as
4 we're finding out, there are a lot of explosive emotions
5 around change in general. But change in the educational
6 community is one of the most difficult things I'm
7 finding that happens in politics because of so many
8 people's perspectives and concerns around what happens
9 to the future of the children. But currently, in my
10 opinion, it's not just indicative to the Commonwealth of
11 Pennsylvania, but to this country. There is a massive
12 crisis that's happening inside of our educational
13 buildings, and there's a number of reasons for why
14 that's occurring. But, certainly, when we talk about
15 this requirement, and just for clarity's sake, because I
16 do believe you are following your regulatory process. I
17 think this is an open process. I think we've had a
18 public comment period; and no one, in my opinion, is
19 trying to ram this through, but it is moving this
20 discussion.

21 Had you not even proposed this, had you not
22 even taken on the roundtables to look at this, we would
23 not be having this conversation today. So there should
24 be some recognition of the fact that you are trying to
25 move this conversation to where we can have students who

1 are graduating highly trained, highly skilled and
2 educated to complete in the 21st Century global economy.
3 With certainty, we do not have that in massive numbers.

4 So if you could help me, because I keep
5 hearing this, and I've read from the e-mails that people
6 have sent and the concerns of many, that this places
7 major emphasis on the high-stakes test that will
8 determine, I think one of my colleagues said this again
9 today, that will determine our students' future to move
10 forward.

11 From what I read in both of your
12 testimonies, currently speaking, the graduation
13 requirements are course completion in grades, completion
14 of some type of graduating project, a show of
15 proficiency in all State standards not assessed by the
16 PSSA and there is proficiency in reading, writing and
17 math as determined by the PSSA or a local assessment
18 that is allowing State Senators at a level of
19 proficiency set for the PSSA.

20 Now, help me understand the difference,
21 since we already have graduation requirements that have
22 testing as part of it, that has an option for either the
23 PSSA showing proficiency or a local control mechanism
24 for showing proficiency, right, the difference in what
25 you're proposing, because sometimes it gets very murky

1 in my own brain, so I'm assuming it is like to people
2 out in the rest of the part of the Commonwealth, you're
3 proposing that what change to that process, and help me
4 understand the rationale, because some are saying, Why
5 not just let local school districts who already are
6 doing it right continue to do it right and not impose
7 anything on them as -- because, also, the part of --
8 this is voluntary, too. This is an option, not
9 voluntary, but this is an option that says as part of
10 the menu of things that you will consider, consider the
11 GCA's or Graduation Competency Assessments that would be
12 approved through something or through the Department.
13 So help me understand the difference. We have something
14 in place now. We're asking for change. And what are
15 the critical changes, and how does that impact locals?

16 MR. GIRTON: Thank you, Representative
17 Wheatley. Let me first thank you for acknowledging the
18 fact, and for the record, that the State Board of
19 Education has accepted public comment and has engaged in
20 roundtable discussions for more than a year across this
21 Commonwealth. We have tried diligently to engage all
22 stakeholders in this discussion. We've heard from
23 literally hundreds and hundreds of people who are vested
24 in this issue, and the current proposal that you're
25 looking at today is significantly different than the

1 original draft that was circulated, because we listened
2 to people and that we did have these broad-based
3 discussions across the Commonwealth.

4 As relates to your question about what would
5 change from the current proposal, this is an option that
6 the local district would have to make, and the simple
7 answer to the question is, they will need to make
8 absolutely no change in the way they're currently doing
9 business if they're confident and happy with the local
10 assessment, except that it would need to be
11 independently validated, that is, it is aligned with the
12 standards and meets the same rigor as the PSSA. Other
13 than that, can continue to do business precisely as they
14 are.

15 If they have a very rich, robust, local
16 assessment that they want to continue to use, they can
17 do business exactly as they are today. They would just
18 simply have to have it independently validated.

19 Now, if they choose not to do that because
20 of cost or they don't have confidence in it, then the
21 State is prepared to make available to them an
22 end-of-course examination that would measure and meet
23 the validity test that we're proposing; but a district
24 would not need to change the frequency or the assessment
25 instruments that they're currently using if, in fact,

1 they would be willing to just simply take the one step
2 of having it independently validated.

3 So other than that, they can continue
4 business as usual; but we will continue to give them the
5 option in addition to those two current practices, PSSA,
6 a validated local assessment, these other end-of-course
7 exams validated by the State, AP, IB and so forth.

8 REPRESENTATIVE WHEATLEY: And -- I'm sorry.
9 And if we go to the students then, if this was to become
10 a regulatory change, it would not, in essence, be in
11 effect until 2014, which is six years from now. And so
12 from whatever point that this change would happen, there
13 would be time put into place to help districts, one,
14 understand the new changes; two, be able to interact
15 with the Department. Are there other resources that
16 would be put into place to help ramp up and prepare
17 students themselves for what was coming in 2014, as it
18 relates to the graduating or doing the requirement of
19 graduating? Because one of the biggest concerns is, now
20 you're going to have some students who will drop out
21 because of this additional burden on them and their
22 ability not to pass or the fact that this will affect
23 African-Americans or lower performing students more.
24 And so could you talk to me about what will be done to
25 actually help districts, which is what the ultimate goal

1 is, prepare our students for success beyond high school?

2 MR. ZAHORCHAK: One is, we're making
3 coherent what we expect with the standards by having
4 the concepts and competencies for math, social studies,
5 clearly defining what those targets are; two is, it's a
6 voluntary model curriculum approach; two (sic.) is,
7 we're making sure there are diagnostics so when you
8 receive a kid, a young person in 5th grade, the
9 diagnostic tools, or in 8th grade or 11th grade are
10 there, you can find out where along the developmental
11 continuum that student actually is and help that student
12 grow to the next level and accelerate.

13 But, also, in a very macrosense, the money
14 you're putting into pre-K counts, the Early Childhood
15 Accountability Block Grant, the tutoring funds, these
16 are the kinds of tools that schools have needed for a
17 long time. When we funnel education to get the
18 adequacy, remember, we're saying adequate is defined as
19 getting all students to proficient at core academic
20 standard areas. That's what we're about, all students.
21 Measurement's only a part of it. Let me tell you, when
22 we talk to our friends, and you'll hear from people for
23 and against this particular thing in terms of this
24 approach to the assessment, but you're going to know
25 that our Education Department and the State Board's work

1 and the work of many of those leading education,
2 teachers and others, has been really uniform work.
3 We've been about getting students to achieve coming down
4 the other side of the pipeline, so we're having this
5 conversation aloud. But let me tell you, I think when
6 you get to the core of it much of the same things are
7 approaching in mostly the same way; and I think most
8 people will tell you the Department of Education has
9 turned from a compliance place to an absolute support
10 place, an educational leadership place over the past six
11 years. I'm proud to be a part of that organization
12 staff as we go forward.

13 Mr. Chairman, if I may segue, my 10:00
14 meeting is in progress soon. I would like to apologize
15 for leaving, but I do want to tell you about four
16 panelists who are coming subsequent to me, if I may.
17 We're pleased that we have some folks that are going to
18 talk with you from Higher Education, from K-12,
19 nonprofit and employer communities, Mark Roosevelt,
20 Steven Ender, Joan Benso, and Bill Brock bring important
21 perspective to the conversation. Mark Roosevelt will be
22 on this panel, and Mark is the Superintendent of the
23 Pittsburgh Public Schools. Importantly, Mark came
24 through a growth process to gain a lot of capacity of
25 being a great superintendent; he's doing a terrific job

1 there. It's the second largest school district in the
2 state. He understands graduation requirements, because
3 he was also the Chairman of the House Education
4 Committee in 1993 in Massachusetts when they put a
5 Comprehensive Education Reform Act in place. The key,
6 according to Mark and according to the 20-plus year
7 Secretary of Education there, Dave Distrital, there was
8 the graduation exams; it's why Massachusetts is the most
9 literate state among the 50 year after year and closest
10 to the NEAP results and leading the country. Mark was
11 the chairman of that committee; there were sweeping
12 efforts. He understands this, he's been there, he's
13 had these conversations, had these arguments; and
14 fortunately, for the students of Massachusetts,
15 prevailed.

16 As President of the Westmoreland County
17 Community College, Steve Ender can speak to the
18 challenges students face when weak preparation meets
19 postsecondary expectations. We appreciate his efforts
20 to be here this morning to discuss the high cost of
21 remedial education and how our plans help to address
22 that problem.

23 Joan Benso leads one of Pennsylvania's most
24 respected child advocacy organizations and served on the
25 Governor's Commission for College and Career Success.

1 Joan will be able to discuss the gains and achievement
2 resulting from Virginia's, and wait until you hear those
3 results. It's nice being 29th; we get to pick and
4 choose. And, remember, Virginia was in 1998,
5 Massachusetts in '93 and 28 other states are in front of
6 us. Many, the US Chamber of Commerce, the Gates
7 Foundation; so many support this effort inside of a
8 comprehensive standards baseline system which results in
9 student achievement. And Bill Brock serves as the
10 Executive Director of the Central Pennsylvania Workforce
11 Development Corporation and is here to highlight
12 competencies that young people in his 9-county region
13 need to secure a good paying job and advance
14 professionally.

15 Again, I apologize for my scheduling
16 problem; but I really appreciate the opportunity to be
17 with you today.

18 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Mr. Secretary, we
19 certainly appreciate your being here. And what I'd like
20 to do is to merge the first panel into this discussion,
21 if they'd come forward and --

22 MR. GIRTON: I'll be happy to stay right
23 here and --

24 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: You can stay right where
25 you are. I would observe, Mr. Secretary, as you leave,

1 it takes four people to replace you.

2 MR. ZAHORCHAK: Thank you very much.

3 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: And we'll continue with
4 our discussion, moving forward, as they merge into the
5 panel. We have a long list of members who want to ask
6 questions, so we now have a broad number of individuals
7 before us.

8 And, Karl, remain up here, please. Thank
9 you. Let me go then to Representative Longietti.

10 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Thank you, Mr.
11 Chairman. I want to preface my comments on the fact
12 that clearly there is a passion and a commitment
13 exhibited this morning to improving public education in
14 Pennsylvania. I certainly appreciate that, and I share
15 it as well.

16 Some of my concerns, however, I am concerned
17 that we are going to kill creativity in schools.
18 Creativity to me is paramount. It's what we need in our
19 society to solve problems and to be innovators. What
20 impresses me the most, I considered myself a good
21 student, and one of the reasons why, and I think I
22 continue to be, is because of a love to learn; and I
23 think we need to instill a love of learning in our
24 students. And I'm concerned that, perhaps, we're on the
25 wrong direction. Because we're lifelong learners; we

1 need to learn throughout our lives. I'm concerned about
2 students who are heading on to career and technical
3 schools. How does this proposal speak to them? In my
4 district, I hear time and again manufactures saying, We
5 have skilled jobs, but we can't find skilled people.

6 I heard this morning that there's some
7 support for this at the university level. It makes me
8 ask the question though, What colleges and universities
9 support uniform assessments at their level, that a
10 college degree at one institution is comparable to
11 another because we're going to assess what they teach
12 the same way?

13 And I'm most concerned about a lack of
14 support. We heard from the Secretary, and I respect
15 that he has heard support. In my legislative district,
16 the overwhelming response has been a lack of support,
17 across the board, from the teacher in the classroom,
18 good teachers, good teachers that visited me last week,
19 to school boards, to administrators; it makes me think
20 through my life experience, How do you successfully
21 implement something? You know, when I worked in the
22 private sector, if the boss told me something and my
23 heart wasn't in it, it was difficult enough to implement
24 it. But when the boss, when the educational leader of a
25 school district is sending the message and the school

1 board is telling teachers, We don't believe in this, we
2 don't think this is the right approach, how is it going
3 to be successful?

4 And I note in the comments that we're
5 talking about a voluntary model curriculum. Why not
6 take the same approach here? Why not go to school
7 districts and say, We will work with you on your local
8 assessment; we will provide a model assessment? Why not
9 try a pilot program with those districts that are
10 interested and build support that way? I think without
11 that kind of support, I just think it's going to be
12 extraordinarily difficult to be successful. I think we
13 may kill creativity, we may frustrate good classroom
14 teachers like the ones that came to visit me last week.

15 And I'm open to any response, but those are
16 my concerns. I share your passion to improve public
17 education.

18 MR. GIRTON: Let me make a quick response,
19 and then I'll offer it to Chairman Roebuck.

20 First of all, at least it's the vision of
21 the State Board that this will actually require greater
22 creativity than the current way that we're delivering
23 instruction and how learning and teaching takes place;
24 because it's -- what we really need to do is be able to
25 individualize this at a more intense level so that all

1 of our students are engaged, and so we actually think
2 that, quite the contrary, rather than destroy
3 creativity, this will require more intensely prepared
4 professionals in the classroom.

5 And, Representative Roebuck, in deference to
6 the four panelists who are here, I promise you I will be
7 happy to return, at your call or request for -- if, in
8 fact, you would make it possible for these individuals
9 to make their comments, because some of them have
10 traveled great distances to be here.

11 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: I guess my understanding
12 of the way we were doing this, and maybe my
13 understanding was wrong, was that we were engaged in a
14 dialogue rather than presentations. And I think --

15 MS. BENSO: That's the plan.

16 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: -- we got somewhat off
17 track at the beginning, because what we were looking for
18 were brief summaries and then a chance to ask questions;
19 and you are an integral part of that discussion, so I'd
20 like --

21 MR. GIRTON: My apologies.

22 MR. ROOSEVELT: This question's actually
23 right in my sweet spot, and I apologize. Mark Roosevelt
24 from Pittsburgh. And the last thing, by the way, as a
25 former legislator, former Chairman of a House Education

1 Committee, I believe in coming to lecture legislators on
2 how to do business, and especially from my point of
3 view, when you do the vast majority of my budget. So
4 I'm not here to do that.

5 I will tell you I lived this issue, and I
6 mean lived it for 20 years. And when Massachusetts did
7 -- I mean, guys, do you have any idea how late we are to
8 this in Pennsylvania? The one place I disagree with the
9 Administration is 2014 is way too late to do this.

10 When Massachusetts enacted this, and it was
11 the legislature that enacted it in Massachusetts, to
12 overwhelming opposition. Okay? The school boards, the
13 superintendents, the principals, the teachers' unions,
14 they all opposed it. That's the bad news, folks. The
15 good news is, it will make more of a difference in
16 improving state education results than any other single
17 thing that the State of Pennsylvania could do.

18 How do I know that? Because it did in
19 Massachusetts. In '93, when we passed this
20 comprehensive bill, we added billions of new dollars to
21 the school systems. I mean, six years before the
22 graduation exam kicked in, we doubled, doubled, what
23 poor districts spent on educating kids. Okay? Doubled
24 it. Nothing moved. When the graduation exam kicked in,
25 in I think '97 or '98, movement started happening and

1 very fast.

2 When Massachusetts and Pennsylvania were
3 compared back in '93 by what comparison data we had, we
4 were roughly equal in state performance. Massachusetts
5 now outperforms Pennsylvania by gigantic margins,
6 gigantic margins. I can promise you, and we can get
7 into any level of details, and I don't mean to resurge
8 this, that the graduation was the primary leverage point
9 that pushed Massachusetts.

10 Representative Wheatley made an excellent
11 point, change is as hard in this venue as in any other
12 venue in American life; it is explosive, it is
13 emotional. And most of my colleagues that are here from
14 education associations are going to tell you that they
15 oppose this. They did in Massachusetts as well. I
16 think their intentions are good, but educators are
17 incredibly conservative folk; and the system is
18 incredibly slow to change.

19 If you compare us at any level now to other
20 states that are making more progress or to other
21 countries that are making more progress, one would have
22 to see that the differences between us and them are the
23 absence of clear standards of what kids need to know and
24 when they need to know it by. You really can't do much
25 without that. So creativity, all these questions, I

1 mean, this is like for me dejavu all over again, all of
2 these questions are the same questions; they have been
3 in every state, in every place, and they're profound
4 questions and meaningful questions.

5 But I can tell you, no time in the history
6 of the nation has any one state lead in every
7 educational category, SAT scores, NEAP scores, SAT
8 participation; and it is primarily due to the graduation
9 exam.

10 MS. BENSO: I just want to build on
11 Mr. Roosevelt's comments in two ways. It's the exact
12 same experience that's happened in the State of
13 Virginia, where who implemented something as close to
14 Pennsylvania as any other state you could look at.
15 We've looked at all these other states, as did the
16 Governor's Commission, which both your caucuses have
17 representation on, as did the State Board. And
18 proficiency rates for kids in Virginia now, in math,
19 reading, science, social studies, are over 85 percent,
20 all kids, all kids, kids with disabilities, low-income
21 kids, kids who are African-American, kids who are
22 Latino; those numbers have gone through the roof.

23 And when you talk to Virginia officials, you
24 hear exactly what Mark tells you about Massachusetts, it
25 was tough, they dug their heels in, everybody opposed

1 them in the classic, you know, sort of education
2 advocacy world with very few exceptions, and it's a much
3 better state of affairs for children in that state.

4 Now, I just want to make one comment about
5 opposition. And, again, I sort of feel like Karl today,
6 I've had a great opportunity to talk to you on this
7 issue personally and as a Committee a number of times.

8 Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children
9 decided to figure out what Pennsylvanians really think
10 about this, so we polled on this. And you, I believe,
11 in your packet today have a poll. So we asked --
12 Susquehanna Polling asked two questions for us and asked
13 the exact proposal the State Board made, rather than,
14 should we have a high-stakes graduation test.
15 Fifty-eight percent of Pennsylvanians think this is a
16 good idea, 58 percent; 24 percent are opposed; it will
17 reduce local control. Over 80 percent of
18 Pennsylvanians, when you tell them that half of our
19 incoming freshmen, recent high school graduates, have to
20 be remediated in all community colleges in the State,
21 says the State needs to do something. So I just want to
22 urge you again, as I've urged you before, that if it is
23 not this proposal, then what proposal is it? And I want
24 to urge you to ask the next panel who says, no, and who
25 says other districts, how and who? And I'll stop at

1 that.

2 REPRESENTATIVE LONGIETTI: Just a quick
3 comment, because I know there are other members. Two
4 things. One is, if this is going to improve creativity,
5 we have not sold that to the classroom teacher. Number
6 2 is, the other proposal is pilot it in this state;
7 build support for it in this state. And number 3 is --
8 you know, we get criticized all the time up here for,
9 All you want to do here is just do what's politically
10 popular at the moment and not do what's right. And I
11 think this Committee's trying to do what's right,
12 regardless of what the poll tells.

13 Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. Actually, I
15 have a question; but I'm going to defer to
16 Representative Mackereth and let her go, because she's
17 been very patient.

18 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Thank you, Mr.
19 Chairman. I will try to make it quick. I've been
20 trying to get my arms around this for months now. And
21 the Secretary, it's a shame he left, because I really
22 wanted to congratulate him and thank him publicly. He's
23 been meeting with me regularly to talk about this issue,
24 and I do appreciate it.

25 There's still a couple things that I just

1 have some concerns about; one being, are we testing too
2 much? And it's just -- I mean, it seems like -- we have
3 the PSSA's now, which -- and I don't have a problem with
4 anything you said. I agree wholeheartedly, actually,
5 with everything you said. However, we have PSSA's. I
6 understand most of my districts are testing to make sure
7 that their kids will pass PSSA's, then we add this test.
8 I mean, can we somehow look at the spectrum of tests
9 that schools are using, whether it be for local or for
10 state and make some sense of it before we add another
11 test?

12 MR. GIRTON: Very briefly, Representative
13 Mackereth. The truth is, the proposal before you at the
14 moment requires not a single new test of any district in
15 this Commonwealth. It just makes available more options
16 of tests that measure the same content at the same rate.
17 There is no district that would be required to add a
18 single test based upon this proposal.

19 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: But will they
20 have a knee-jerk reaction and believe they do need to to
21 ensure -- and maybe you two can answer. From prior
22 states, is that what happened? Did they -- was there a
23 knee-jerk reaction, fear of not being able -- their just
24 not passing a test, because now we have accountability
25 and so they added other tests in, do you know?

1 MS. BENSO: Well, by Virginia, by and large,
2 local school districts offer this as their core
3 curriculum final exam. If kids are taking honors
4 courses or advanced placement courses, they augment the
5 questions. And if you looked at all the testing you
6 would need to do, it would represent 12 hours. It's six
7 tests. They're two hours each. So this will cause, you
8 know -- over four years, this will be so many more tests
9 is a little, when you dig into it, not quite so
10 believable. But, again, in Virginia, replaced final
11 exams in most places.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: And I guess maybe
13 I'd like to see whether or not -- you know, one of the
14 things that we don't do a very good job of, at least in
15 my opinion, up here is, we don't look back over what
16 we've asked districts to do 10 years ago, 20 years ago,
17 whatever. I think some of them are still doing some of
18 the things they don't need to do anymore.

19 So I'm just throwing that out there, because
20 I think that's important. I do believe we need to move
21 forward. I don't believe we ever had the accountability
22 we needed. I see all of this as a good thing. I just
23 want to make sure that districts don't believe they have
24 to do what they used to do and then all this new stuff
25 on top of it. I'm hearing that, so maybe we need to

1 clarify.

2 MS. BENSO: One more comment about Virginia
3 as well. Now, you couldn't do this immediately in
4 Pennsylvania because you have to go through a transition
5 period where the exams would be validated; but Virginia
6 no longer offers a comprehensive NCLB Exam. This is
7 their NCLB Exam now, and every piece of legislation
8 pending in Congress, R and D alike, on NCLB
9 reauthorization allows this model; but we'd have to do
10 both for two years.

11 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: For two years.
12 Okay.

13 MS. BENSO: Because you have to validate it.

14 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Got it. Okay.
15 Well, that's my next question. I know. I'll make it
16 real quick, I promise. I have one more after this.

17 Validation, how do we know we're testing the
18 right things? Who's checking it, and what is the
19 standard we are asking? Is it basic, is it advanced?
20 Can kids who are not going to be college bound ever but
21 need to have that basic math, English, Science, will it
22 harm them or will they be able to -- will they succeed
23 in this and still be able to, you know, go on and
24 graduate?

25 MR. BROCK: Well, if they succeed, I think

1 what it will allow them to do is have a better
2 opportunity to find work. One of the problems we're
3 having, and I represent a Workforce Investment Board
4 that covers nine counties, the issue that we see in
5 this, we're not educators and we don't personally have
6 knowledge of the process. The biggest challenge that we
7 see right now is the value of the diploma. Employers
8 are frustrated. They will try to screen through 25, 30
9 applicants per job. And really what we're looking for
10 out of this process -- and we agree with the timing. We
11 don't have a lot of time to make this happen -- is what
12 does the diploma mean and what is a basic level of
13 proficiency that an employer can be ensured when they
14 see a high school diploma? We have 31 districts in my 9
15 counties.

16 One of the issues is that when we have a
17 major employer not hiring from one district, they could
18 be hiring from 6, 7, 8, 10 districts. And, again, how
19 we can ensure them what that diploma means for those
20 jobs that may require just employment for the
21 entry-level positions?

22 The other issue we're worried about is we
23 work with site selectors and they come into our regions
24 and they say tell us about the educational level within
25 your communities. Again, what does that high school

1 diploma tell us? And right now, we -- and it's
2 certainly not criticizing the education system; but
3 right now, as a workforce for an economic development
4 agency, is the reason we cannot get our arms around it.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Okay. Well, and
6 actually my third question is, and this is kind of
7 simplistic. But I'm a parent. I have four children,
8 and my last one is 16. He's an 11th grader. And all I
9 want right now is, I want to make sure he's going to do
10 well on that SAT. He is college bound. If he wasn't, I
11 wouldn't be concerned. But I want to make sure he has
12 learned what he needs to do well on that, because our
13 institutions of higher education believe that that's an
14 important piece to getting into college.

15 That being said, what -- is everything
16 consistent -- I mean is he going to be learning --
17 because one of the things I have seen happen within even
18 in his district is, you know, we see the vocab, they
19 don't do vocab. There was a time when -- I have other
20 kids who -- they went through a period where they didn't
21 learn how to spell. I mean, so, you know, education is
22 cyclical and it changes constantly. But is everything
23 we're doing consistent with that SAT that institutions
24 of higher education expect kids to score well on?

25 MR. BROCK: A very quick answer to your

1 question to give you comfort about your son is that you
2 will find that there is a very strong correlation
3 between proficiency on tests, the PSSA and the SAT. So
4 there is a strong correlation between results of the
5 PSSA and the SAT. So the -- in fact, HumRRO did the
6 study for the State Board of Education a few years, said
7 kind of half in jest that there was no particular reason
8 for students to take the SAT's because the same result
9 was indeed represented by the PSSA. The study exists,
10 copies are available to anybody --

11 MS. BENSO: Of course, you can only be
12 comforted, you know, you know this Representative
13 Mackereth, I also have a son who is heading into his
14 senior year in high school. You can only be comforted
15 if you are one of the parents, the 55 percent of parents
16 who have kids who score proficient on the PSSA in the
17 Spring of their junior year. And if you're one of the
18 45 percent of parents, maybe you have something to be
19 worried about.

20 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: How about if we
21 move to the GCA and maybe wait for the PSSA's, will
22 this be consistent as well?

23 MS. BENSO: Yeah.

24 MR. BROCK: They will be aligned.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: They will be

1 aligned?

2 MR. BROCK: So that schools do not have to
3 guess whether in fact students are on track for
4 proficiency on the PSSA, because this process would
5 begin -- you have the PSSA's starting in 3rd grade,
6 running through 8th grade. You would conceivably have
7 the Graduation Competency Exams beginning at 8th grade
8 and running through 12th grade, so we have strong
9 tracking all the way through 3rd grade through
10 graduation. The schools wouldn't have to guess where
11 students were on that continuum.

12 REPRESENTATIVE MACKERETH: Thank you, all of
13 you. I could go on forever, but I won't.

14 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: No. Representative Rapp.

15 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Thank you, Mr.
16 Chairman; and thank you, panel, for being here today.
17 And I also am sorry that the Secretary had to leave. My
18 children are grown, thank the Lord for that; and they're
19 all productive citizens. But I had the experience of
20 having a child who was gifted, took many AP courses,
21 saved us a bundle of money when she went to college, had
22 a child with a disability and a child who was a great
23 social butterfly, you know, did well, average student,
24 but struggled.

25

1 I listened to comments from my colleagues,
2 comments from you; and then as I heard you state about
3 your survey. I don't know what kind of survey you took,
4 but if I surveyed people in my community, I can tell you
5 that the majority of them would not be in favor of this
6 graduation assessment. None of the school districts
7 that I represent are in favor. My IU9 directors are
8 totally opposed to this, so I don't know where those
9 figures came from.

10 Does the public believe that our students
11 should be graduating being able to read, write, and do
12 math and fill out a job application? Absolutely.
13 My concerns, also prior to being a legislator, people
14 probably get tired of hearing me say this, but I was an
15 advocate for children with disabilities. And what I saw
16 through many years of advocating for those children is
17 -- and the biggest percentage of children in special
18 education are there because they have learning
19 disabilities. And the most specific disability, if it's
20 properly diagnosed, is a reading disability.

21 And, so, I want to go back to comments from
22 Representative Grucela, Representative Leach. I'm
23 extremely concerned that we're looking at this at the
24 graduation end; we should be looking into the elementary
25 level. Representative Grucela is right. There's a lot

1 of reading that goes into these tests; and,
2 unfortunately, I do not see that we are doing enough to
3 address reading instruction in the State of
4 Pennsylvania. Are we now getting children earlier?
5 Absolutely. Are we getting those children at risk?
6 Absolutely. Are we looking at funding? You bet we are.
7 But, you know what? I represent a school district
8 that's projected to get \$36,000 in six years, and this
9 is the most depressed school district in the state.
10 It's also a district that transports children 4,000
11 miles per day. Now, you can imagine what they're going
12 to be paying for fuel. And if you think their biggest
13 concern right now is this, this is just on top of just
14 trying to keep the school district solvent without a
15 state takeover.

16 There has been an education review in that
17 district, and that review team -- I have talked to two
18 of them. There's absolutely no way, unless they want to
19 cut cafeteria aides to cut down on spending on that
20 district. So those are just some of the concerns. I
21 would say that reading is still my number one priority
22 in education; because, again, this is exactly what we
23 are testing.

24 And I just had a parent talk to me just last
25 week. She had asked for an evaluation of her child

1 because she was struggling in reading, and the
2 psychological evaluation -- there wasn't even an
3 established baseline in that report as to where that
4 child is reading. So if we don't know where that child
5 is reading now, how can we -- or what level, how we can
6 get them to the next? Where do we show progress in
7 first, 2nd or 3rd grade, let alone 11th and 12th?

8 So my question to you is, What do we do with
9 all these students? And I understand Mr. Brock's
10 concerns, too. Mr. Brock, I served on Pennsylvania's
11 Rehabilitation Council under Ridge and Schweiker and the
12 area that we worked mainly with is the Workforce
13 Investment Board for people with disabilities. I
14 understand exactly where you're from, because I also
15 served on a Vo-tech Advisory Board as well, back home.

16 What do we do with these students who do not
17 pass? What is Massachusetts doing? What is Virginia
18 doing? Because I also agree with Representative Leach.
19 Are we putting up barriers to these people who cannot
20 pass these tests when we know of many students who
21 struggle in school and at the end of the day beyond that
22 12th grade, they get beyond the high school level, they
23 turn their life around, they go back to school, they go
24 in the military, they get a good job and they become
25 good, productive citizens, some of them way more than

1 our academic people in society. And my biggest concern
2 is, What do we do with those -- how many tests do you
3 expect them to take? And if they never pass, what do we
4 do with this segment of society?

5 MR. ENDER: If I can respond to that. I've
6 been working in this field for 35 years, this field of
7 remedial developmental education in three states in this
8 country. My experience has been that the need of
9 remedial education over those 35 years has increased,
10 not decreased. So it's not just a Pennsylvania problem;
11 this is a national problem.

12 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: Excuse me, if I may
13 then, don't you think that remediation should begin in
14 the elementary level, not at 11th and 12th?

15 MR. ENDER: Yes, clearly, not at the age of
16 24 and 25. I mean, my concern is -- you are absolutely
17 right. I meet students at the community college every
18 day that come back to us at 24, 25, 30 years old that
19 are tired of working for minimum wage and now have the
20 motivation and desire to do something and they begin to
21 apply the natural talents that they have, having not
22 applied them in high school and earlier in their life.

23 I'm not here to advocate one method over
24 another. I can tell you from the data that we look at
25 in the community colleges and that I look at in

1 Westmoreland, that we have thousands of young people
2 graduating from high school that cannot pass our basic
3 placement tests in reading, math, or writing.

4 In this past Fall, the 14 community colleges
5 tested over 28,000 students. Over half of them, 15,000
6 or 53 percent, were placed into one or more remedial
7 courses. If you look at it, I think many of you
8 represent districts who have a community college in that
9 district, and you might be saying, Well, that's not my
10 district. I will tell you that the best performing
11 community college, as measured by remediation, 24
12 percent of their entry, and this is just our 18 to
13 21-year-old entering students, 24 percent had to take at
14 least one remedial course. The other end of that
15 spectrum, 87 percent had to take at least one remedial
16 course. At Westmoreland, for our entering 18 to
17 21-year-olds, about 55 percent. When we test everyone,
18 those adults coming back, the number jumps up to 75
19 percent. The cost to educate in those sections this
20 academic year, was three-quarters of a million dollars.
21 That's the instruction cost. It also costs \$1.75 to
22 give the test battery to these students. So is reading
23 important? You bet your life.

24 And one thing that I do like about the
25 Board's recommendations is the ability for these tests

1 to provide diagnostic assistance early on, because
2 that's when you need to really work with these problems.
3 What I worry about, and in my experience, working with
4 students who do not like spinach, it gets down to that
5 sometimes. I don't like school, you know. It takes a
6 lot of attention from educators, parents, counselors,
7 peer tutors, mentors. I will give you a personal
8 example. I am from Virginia. My brother and his wife
9 have a son who was one of the first groups to be exposed
10 to the testing system in Virginia. He hates spinach; he
11 hated school. He would have never graduated, in my
12 mind, without these tests. And I say that because the
13 parents were aware in the 9th grade that he was having
14 problems in Algebra I, and they had to work with private
15 tutors, they had to work with him personally, they had
16 to spend hours with this boy to help him learn what he
17 needed to learn to pass these courses, so, in fact, he
18 would be productive at 18 years old. I worry about all
19 those students who do not have that supportive
20 environment, quite frankly, who's going to help them get
21 through the rigors of these tests? Yes, they are high
22 stakes, but I think we live in a high-stakes economy
23 right now, quite frankly. And I don't think we can
24 afford not to look at something that may be different
25 from what we know now.

1 REPRESENTATIVE RAPP: And I appreciate your
2 comments. I just had one other question for Mr. Girton.
3 Education is supposed to be free, appropriate public
4 education. However, I hear almost, sometimes weekly,
5 from parents who are paying -- and I know in this
6 document it provides for remediation, it provides for
7 tutoring; but we still have parents who are hitting a
8 brick wall when being asked, saying, Well, your child
9 doesn't qualify; they don't meet the criteria. So
10 parents are still paying outside the system. That's why
11 we have all these Sylvan Learning Centers all across the
12 State in Pennsylvania. Parents are still paying for
13 private tutors; and, yes, it's included in the document.
14 But here we are, parents are paying huge amounts, those
15 who own their homes and pay property tax; we are paying
16 a ton of money for education.

17 And, by the way, Forest County School
18 District, they've met their yearly progress every year
19 since they've done the PSSA's; poor school district.
20 But how much more money can we throw at education and
21 not get the results we need? Because I am convinced
22 that if we don't start teaching children to read and
23 look at the reading issues seriously -- I read Peter
24 Hoekstra's -- Congressman Peter Hoekstra's Report way
25 back in the 90's when he talked about the cost of

1 remediation in secondary education. This isn't
2 something new. I've heard members here that have been
3 here longer than me, and they're still talking about the
4 same issues. This is only my second term. But, in my
5 opinion, until we really start looking at that reading,
6 start really teaching instruction in reading and with
7 proven research methods, we're going to have a huge
8 problem with these graduation requirements and these
9 parents who have to go to Sylvan Learning Centers so
10 their children can learn how to read.

11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. If I might, I
13 just want to ask a Chairman's question in between. But
14 I hear over and over again this statement about students
15 who need to be remediated to go to community college. I
16 sit on the board of a community college in Philadelphia.
17 I Chair their Academic Affairs Committee. So one of the
18 things we do is that every five years, courses go
19 through evaluation, a presentation is made as to how
20 they're doing, how the students are doing, are they
21 recruiting students, so forth and so on, is the
22 profession being trained for still viable?
23 All of those questions. And, invariably, one of the
24 things that's observed in those audits is that a large
25 number of students need remediated. I always then ask

1 the question, Do you know who these students are? Yes.
2 Do you know where they came from, what high schools they
3 graduated from? Yes. Do you then go back to that high
4 school and tell them that their kids aren't well
5 prepared? No. There's something wrong here.

6 If you're producing defective wages,
7 wouldn't you say, There's something wrong here, we need
8 to improve it? Why is there no -- maybe Westmoreland is
9 different than Philadelphia. Where is the partnership
10 with public schools so that you say to them, You need to
11 do a better job, and we will help you? Is that in place
12 here?

13 MR. ENDER: You're absolutely correct. And
14 it's certainly not in place the way you described it.
15 We work with four counties in the Commonwealth,
16 Westmoreland, Fayette, Indiana and Greene; so we're
17 testing students from high schools from all of those
18 counties. As far as our work and our strategic plan,
19 the data that I'm sharing with you today, I have it by
20 high school, within counties, within districts. The
21 next step in that discussion is to meet with the
22 superintendents in yearly review, Here's what we're
23 finding out through our Acu placement test. Which by
24 the way, the PSSA correlates very highly with the Acu
25 placement, just like with the SAT. It would be our

1 hope, quite frankly, that we can begin to use -- if the
2 PSSA becomes the one defining test going forward because
3 of what we know and the placement predictability of the
4 PSSA, I can stop giving the Acu placer, but, ideally,
5 what we would like to do, just like we're doing with the
6 four years in this State, is to look at our requirements
7 for college Algebra, for writing, for reading and
8 comprehension and work with the high schools to align
9 their curriculum with our curriculum that we're
10 presently aligning with the four-year baccalaureates
11 through your good work with the transfer program.
12 That's the system we have to develop. There's no doubt
13 about that. And you're absolutely correct, if we don't
14 have partnerships with our high school colleagues, it's
15 not going to happen. It's not going to be a good news
16 story when I go into have these conversations; but,
17 clearly, we have to begin to talk with one another.

18 MR. ROOSEVELT: But this is the missing
19 piece, Mr. Chairman. I mean, this is the missing piece,
20 the Graduation Exam. It will be a more systemic way of
21 approaching what you're talking about.

22 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: True.

23 MR. ROOSEVELT: And just very quickly, to
24 Representative Rapp's question, when Massachusetts did
25 this, everybody predicted, Oh, my Lord, you're going to

1 be leaving so many kids behind. And that was the rap.

2 Sorry, play on words. That was the knot on the plan.

3 By the time it counted, and the MCAT's test
4 is a higher staked test than the PSSA's, it is pegged to
5 a higher standard than the PSSA's, 96 percent of our
6 kids passed. What happens is school systems like mine,
7 I can now make -- they could -- superintendents were so
8 great, where you can now make summer school mandatory
9 where you couldn't before, because kids aren't on a
10 place to -- it's tough stuff, folks. It's not stuff
11 that everybody wants mandatory after school or mandatory
12 summer school, but what's missing here is honesty,
13 honesty about what it is that's keeping our kids from
14 being educated to the standards that they need; and
15 we're not even honest enough with our kids about it.

16 But in truth, on a vocational question, also
17 a profound one, the needs for the jobs that are being
18 created in the "vocational world" are very similar to
19 college standards now. They really are. So it isn't as
20 if there's a group of kids now, who we can, as we could
21 in the industrial years afford to undereducate them and
22 they could still get decent work. So this is the key
23 piece.

24 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. Let me go to
25 Representative Rohrer right beside me.

1 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: All righty. All
2 right. Good to have you all here.

3 MS. BENSO: Good to be here.

4 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: We had a good raft
5 of questions come across here this morning, and mine, I
6 think, will build on a couple of them and then perhaps
7 go a little bit of a, perhaps, a different direction
8 perhaps.

9 I've been on the Committee for 16 years.
10 And when I came in in 93, it was Outcomes Based
11 Education, just coming out of the Casey Administration.
12 That had just come off of the TELLS testing,
13 controversial all. And then we moved from there to
14 after the 1990 America, 2000 goals, 2000 No Child Left
15 Behind.

16 Representative Metcalfe was talking about he
17 was part of a committee some years ago that studied the
18 assessment. I chaired that committee. That was a
19 select investigative committee to look at where we were
20 going with our assessment system, exactly what it was
21 our assessment was intended to measure; and there was a
22 great deal of controversy and lack of agreement, in
23 fact, that the PSSA wasn't ever able to measure what it
24 was intended to measure, meaning the effectiveness or
25 success of a school and the success of a child.

1 We talked, at that point, a lot about the
2 whole grander global concept of what is underway and has
3 been underway for about 20 years in this state and
4 across the country, and that really is the attempt to
5 lay down on education, the tenants of total quality
6 management. And my background is business, and I've
7 been through that; and I have discussed this issue in
8 other places around the country. And that's exactly
9 what's happening now.

10 So the intent now to try to move forward
11 with a modified high-stakes exit exam was all part of
12 the system globally, nationally from the beginning. And
13 then the comment that we're getting to it late is true;
14 we are getting to it later than other people have. But
15 I would say rather than the Governor trying to do
16 something really innovative and new, he's just
17 continuing to implement what was laid out as a broader
18 blueprint, years ago.

19 That being said, I can also say that when we
20 did have the hearings, some years ago on the assessment,
21 that it was very, very clearly stated by the Department,
22 at that point, that there was going to be no exit exam;
23 and that was never in the cards. I doubted it then; and
24 I, obviously, know that it's the case. Because that's
25 really what we're talking about. Sometimes we get

1 caught up here legislatively where we're here for two
2 years, then gone or back, and members change off the
3 Committee back and forth. We end up coming into these
4 initiatives by the Board or the Department and think as
5 if it's a new issue; but, in fact, it's a continuance of
6 something that's been implemented. I think that's what
7 we're talking about today.

8 Now, being a guy who is from a data-driven
9 perspective, and who frankly, I will say up front, do
10 not believe, that the tenants of total quality
11 management, in fact, can be successfully laid down on
12 top of education because all we get then is test and
13 remediate, test and remediate. And one of the problems
14 here with a high-stakes exit exam is that you're
15 testing the car at the end of the production run.
16 Whereas, and it has been a discussion, and members have
17 said for a long time, if we're finding that the cars are
18 getting to the end of the assembly line and they can't
19 perform, and I agree they are, and I think you are
20 correct in the community colleges being an indication of
21 the number of kids needing to be remediated. And
22 everything that you were saying is correct, that that's
23 too late in the process. That's far too late in the
24 process. And it is real, and it is those fundamental
25 building blocks back in the early elementary years.

1 And none of this bigger system that we're talking about
2 here really has ever emphasized that. It's talked
3 about, but nothing has really been done to make the
4 fundamental building blocks put in place; and when
5 they're not in place, they're not going to have the
6 performance in the out years. Now, that leads me to one
7 question here because, I think, I just want to hear from
8 your perspective what it is that we're doing.
9 What is, from your perspective, the implementation of
10 the exit exam and this change we're talking about here,
11 what is it really designed to accomplish? What's the
12 goal?

13 MS. BENSO: Representative Rohrer, I want to
14 make a couple of comments. First of all, what it's
15 designed to do, is to not just assure that when kids
16 graduate from high school in Pennsylvania that employers
17 and technical schools and community colleges and
18 four-year institutions can be sure that they are ready
19 for the next phase of their life. But the way this full
20 proposal is designed, that assessment money that people
21 are so happy to go after in a budget debate, includes
22 6th grade diagnostics.

23 This is part of a broader strategy to be
24 sure that we don't wait till the end of the production
25 line. Mr. Girton talked about how we do assessment in

1 3rd through 8th and then stop. What the Commission
2 determined was that that didn't make any sense, because
3 we know till that point and then we don't anymore. And
4 I would argue that, at least from our organizational
5 perspective, one of the most important set of building
6 blocks to assure that kids' reading readiness and
7 reading performance is successful, is also a strategy
8 that has been aggressively advanced in recent years, but
9 we have yet to come to a full-financing phase. And
10 candidates said it's going to vote on a bill today that
11 takes out \$12.5 million in pre-K.

12 I'm glad we serve 11,000 children, now, of
13 300 eligible; and glad 55 percent of our kindergartners
14 now go to full-day kindergarten versus 35 years ago, but
15 the national average is 68 percent. So I couldn't agree
16 with Representative Rapp and you more, (indicating) the
17 fact that we need to start at the beginning; but we
18 can't stop when kids get to high school.

19 And our system today stops when kids get to
20 high school. Kids don't have to be remediated in high
21 school; actually, they're only guaranteed remediation in
22 elementary school. And that's what's all embedded in
23 this, rather than just the rhetoric we hear about taking
24 away local control in a high-stakes test.

25 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: I appreciate that.

1 I think, and I'll go back to the question that I was
2 asking there about the purpose, the real purpose, for
3 the test. And I put it maybe into context of these
4 four. Are we -- is the main attempt to demonstrate
5 proficiency of the PSSA? Is it to measure the knowledge
6 of skills and skills needed for college? Is it to
7 measure readiness for the workplace? Is it preparing
8 students for life after high school?

9 Now, those are four categories I gave
10 because those are categories that the 23 other states
11 who have implemented exit exams have determined what it
12 is they're doing. And I'm asking -- just kind of want
13 to know from our perspective, because I think the goal
14 of any measurement for anything that we're doing has got
15 to be very clear, otherwise, we don't ever know if we've
16 ever gotten it. So my question here is, What is the
17 primary purpose for the implementation of the exit exam
18 we are talking about?

19 MR. ENDER: I hope, and I hope it will be
20 confirmed, that the last descriptor you had, life after
21 high school, is what we're preparing -- these tests are
22 preparing young people to enter.

23 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Okay.

24 MR. ENDER: Because what I know about life
25 after high school is the world of work. Work in this

1 country today, about 40 percent of all jobs,
2 occupations, require a baccalaureate degree or more. Of
3 the remaining work, 80 percent of those jobs require
4 some type of postsecondary training. I would hope that
5 these tests are designed to help, or wherever that young
6 person goes after high school, to be prepared to enter
7 today's world of work, which is a skill-based economy.
8 That's what we have now, which is going to ask people to
9 retrain, retrain, and retrain.

10 You've got to come into this environment
11 with some core skills or you're not going to be
12 successful, in my mind.

13 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Okay.

14 MR. GIRTON: I just wanted to reach for the
15 microphone and affirm that that was very, very well
16 stated. That is the Board's intent behind this. I
17 would have stated it a little bit different, that we
18 wanted to prepare students for life after high school;
19 but we wanted to do it in a uniform and equitable way
20 for students. And I think it's important for everybody
21 to remember that this is -- the Board does not envision
22 this as a silver bullet. This will not solve all the
23 challenges that we are confronted with in this
24 Commonwealth. There's a resource component that our
25 Board has no resource authority. We can't raise our

1 spend money. We're very sensitive to the kinds of
2 mandates we put in place that we can't fund, but we
3 readily acknowledge there's a resource component to
4 this. You empowered us to do a costing-out study on
5 your behalf; and we support the findings of that study.
6 So there's a resource component to this issue. There
7 are a lot of other pieces, but until we can define the
8 expectation, develop a uniform yardstick that
9 everybody's willing to use to decide whether, in fact,
10 we have achieved the defined expectation, I think that
11 we have the potential to delude ourselves in a lot of
12 instances, unfortunately, that are misleading our
13 students.

14 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: I appreciate the
15 response on that. I know that -- I'm reading from your
16 materials here from Chapter 4. The directive from the
17 Governor on this Commission was to investigate policies
18 and programs that "Ensure a higher number of prepared
19 students enter and remain in our colleges and
20 universities."

21 I submit that there's a significant
22 difference between that and these others. And the other
23 23 States, according to CEP, who did the evaluation back
24 in the Fall of last year, the majority of those states,
25 the purpose was to demonstrate proficiency on their

1 state standards. Less than 25 percent of them said that
2 the primary purpose was to measure the knowledge and
3 skills ready for college.

4 Only 9 of 23, or less than 38 percent of
5 them, said that the intent was to measure readiness for
6 the workplace. And I come back because I believe the
7 clarity of what our definition is will dictate whether
8 or not we're being able to find out -- determine what
9 we're measuring.

10 I have a lot of other questions, but I won't
11 go any further than that, other than I'm just trying to
12 hone in on really where we're going and tie it into this
13 bigger picture, the issue that we're dealing with;
14 because everything that is laid out here has a
15 significant number of costs attached to it, costs for
16 the tests, costs for ongoing testing, the question of
17 how many tests are we going to need, the estimated cost
18 for remediation for when a child does not measure these.

19 Those who are proficient on the PSSA, are
20 not going to have an issue, because they're already
21 there. So we're really talking about those who are not,
22 primarily. And of those who are not, many of those
23 under the construct of every child will graduate and
24 every person is a number that is, frankly, not
25 achievable, because it can't be everybody. So with

1 that, is attached a, potentially, huge cost of how do
2 you take everybody when, frankly, not everybody is going
3 to be able to make it to that level, whatever level it
4 is?

5
6 So I'm putting out that I think that there
7 are some fundamental issues that I have not had resolved
8 in this entire construct of what we're doing, and I can
9 see a gigantic open door for the money truck needing to
10 be running down the road to help with this when we're
11 really not putting the emphasis properly -- and I,
12 frankly, don't necessarily agree that it's K-4.
13 I don't think it's when you start to learn, I think it's
14 how you're taught to read; and that could be when you're
15 8 years old, it can be when you're 9 years old. It's
16 not 5 years old, is the key. It's how we're taught to
17 read. Now, that's a philosophical thing, but I think
18 it's where the debate has been for decades.

19 MS. BENSO: Sure.

20 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: So, in any regard,
21 I'll just leave my comments right there. But I think
22 that -- whereas, a lot of work has been done. I think,
23 from my perspective, some big fundamental issues that
24 are not answered sufficiently. And I think, you know, a
25 lot of the comments from the members here today tend to

1 back up some of that; so I think we have some work to do
2 yet.

3 MR. BENSO: Representative Rohrer, I'd be
4 happy to bring it to you or urge you to look at it. I
5 don't know what you're reading from. But the charge to
6 the Commission, the executive order of the Governor's
7 Commission was to improve the college and career
8 readiness of all Pennsylvania's children in a
9 skills-based economy. So it's exactly what Dr. Ender
10 said. And I hear you're reading a piece of testimony
11 that someone used at --

12 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: These are from the
13 proposed regs. And it says that, "The purpose is to
14 investigate policies and programs that ensure a higher
15 number of prepared students enter and remain in our
16 colleges and universities." That just came from your
17 material.

18 MS. BENSO: I was just asking.

19 REPRESENTATIVE ROHRER: Thank you. I
20 appreciate it.

21 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: We have two more members
22 who have not had a chance to ask a first question,
23 Representative McIlvaine Smith, Representative O'Neill.
24 We're going to do that. We've have two requests for
25 second opportunities. But before we do that, it's clear

1 that there's not enough time to cover all we wanted to
2 do today.

3 The intent then is that we will reconvene
4 the Committee next week at a time we can find. We want
5 to bring the Secretary back, as there are some other
6 questions that we would like him to address as well.
7 And I understand that this panel is made up of
8 individuals who have traveled, and we want to give you
9 full opportunity to be a part of this dialogue today,
10 not anticipating that it will be easy for you to get
11 back next week. But we do want to also allow our second
12 panel the opportunity to give their -- to give us a
13 chance to ask them questions as well. So if we could do
14 that, we would go first to Representative McIlvaine
15 Smith and then to Representative O'Neill, with the
16 intent that we will come back together on this next
17 week.

18 REPRESENTATIVE O'NEILL: I will defer to
19 next week when the Secretary's going to be here.

20 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Fine.

21 REPRESENTATIVE MCILVAINE SMITH: Thank you,
22 Mr, Chairman. I do have a question for Mr. Brock.
23 Could you please give me examples of good paying careers
24 that don't require a four-year college degree? And they
25 do probably have educational requirements, so if you

1 could also tell me what those educational requirements
2 are?

3 MR. BROCK: Well, there's a whole range of
4 jobs statewide, you know, for example, operating
5 engineers, boiler makers, brick layers. All of these
6 jobs offer and would require certification beyond high
7 school, but each of these jobs requires some different
8 level of reading, mathematics, the ability to read, the
9 ability to write, sometimes entrance exams to get into
10 these types of programs. So, I guess, when we're
11 looking at, it's kind of going back to the other
12 questions about the remediation. You know, in all of
13 these jobs, they do require proficiency. If they don't
14 have that proficiency, I do think we have had programs
15 go back and remediate just simply because of the
16 demographics, particularly in Central Pennsylvania but
17 really statewide. You know, there's a real fear of a
18 labor shortage coming in the years because of the number
19 of individuals leaving the workforce compared to the
20 numbers coming in. There is going to be that shortfall.

21 But in all of these occupations and really
22 looking at the key industry and companies throughout the
23 State, companies coming in, companies developing, there
24 is that requirement for proficiency.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MCILVAINE SMITH: Thank you

1 very much.

2 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: I would like to thank our
3 panelists for their presentations, and if there are any
4 concluding statements anyone wants to make, I will offer
5 you that opportunity. If not -- first speaker?

6 MR GIRTON: No. I just -- I wanted to first
7 of all thank the Committee members for your intense
8 interest in this very, very important issue. I said to
9 my colleagues back in 1988 when we put this package
10 through final form and we published in January of '99,
11 that I thought that the most difficult part of what had
12 to be done was still ahead of us, as hard as we worked
13 to put together the graduation requirements in Chapter 4
14 at that time, that the hard work was going to come when
15 the accountability began to really ratchet up; and we
16 needed to make sure that we were on track and that the
17 political will would see this through because it's the
18 only way that the preceding work that we did would have
19 any value or whatever.

20 So thank you for your continued interest.
21 Trust me, on behalf of our colleagues on the State
22 Board, we're keenly interested in your thoughts. We
23 will respectfully consider your comments.

24 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Representative Stairs.

25 REPRESENTATIVE STAIRS: Yes, real quick

1 comment as we close. Dr. Ender, we in Westmoreland
2 County are quite proud that we have an excellent
3 community college; and the price is right, as we're
4 lowest in the State for community colleges. So we have
5 a good base here, but I'm really impressed that Dr.
6 Ender is putting some effort in to do the remediation in
7 the schools, not in the community college. Because if
8 he's successful and, you know, and of course in doing
9 this, we can maybe cut our costs a little more in the
10 community college. But, no, I applaud your effort, Dr.
11 Ender, to try to get all this done in the high schools
12 or the elementary schools and so when they come to a
13 community college, whether it be Westmoreland or any
14 other community college, they're ready to do the work
15 that's required of the student. And I'd like to work
16 with you as you propose that and bring it into fruition.

17 CHAIRMAN ROEBUCK: Thank you. I certainly
18 also thank all the panelists. I've had a chance to
19 visit Westmoreland, and I know the job of being a
20 community college president's not easy and the
21 challenges are substantial. But through everything I've
22 ever heard, you do an excellent job, and I commend you
23 for that and I look forward to working with you.

24 I wanted to thank, also, our reporter, for
25 her diligence in keeping up with us and thank the

1 members of the Committee.

2 (The hearing concluded at 11:00 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the proceedings and evidence are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me on the within proceedings and that this is a correct transcript of the same.

Tracy L. Markle,
Court Reporter/Notary