



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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June 19, 2009

The Honorable Jeffrey Piccola
Chairman
Senate Education Committee
173 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable James R. Roebuck, Jr.
Chairman
House Education Committee
208 Irvis Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Andrew E. Dinniman
Minority Chairman
Senate Education Committee
183 Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA 17120

The Honorable Paul I. Clymer
Minority Chairman
House Education Committee
216 Ryan Office Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Senators Piccola and Dinniman and
Representatives Roebuck and Clymer:

I appreciate the contribution that each of you is making to find common ground on the issue of high school graduation requirements. Over the past few months, we have had countless discussions and hearings on this matter, and I remain committed to a collaborative process that will result in substantial and positive impact for Pennsylvania's children.

Therefore, under the current circumstance and to allow the emerging consensus to develop, we will not spend funds for state-mandated graduation test development under the Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) contract. We intend to revisit this issue when final form regulations, or the consensus we all hope for, is in place. We have relayed this information to DRC.

While the 2008-09 budget included funding for the development of standard final exams for voluntary use by districts, I believe these funds should be focused, for now, on the two elements of the contract that enjoy broad support—the voluntary model curriculum and instructional diagnostic tools. The states and nations with the most successful education systems already have these resources in place, so it's fundamental that we press ahead with this work.

As Joe Torsella conveyed in his note to you, this has been a challenging and complex issue. Conceptually, I think we agree on the need for consistent graduation requirements that reflect the skills our young people will need to be successful in a changing and challenging economy. After nearly two years of private meetings, public hearings and some tough discussions, I'm heartened to see so much progress in just the last few days. Thanks to your continued leadership and commitment to reform, I know the end result will be one we can all be proud of.

As always, call on me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gerald L. Zahorchak". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Gerald L. Zahorchak, D.Ed.