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July 25, 2009

Subject: NAACP opposition to the proposed final-form regulations for new high school graduation requirements

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

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

Dear Chairmen:

Through the regulation of education, the power of the state directly impacts the life-long experience of each of its citizens. That is why, with due respect for the significant revisions agreed to by the Board of Education in its work with CERT on the proposed Keystone Exams, **the Education Committee of the State Conference of NAACP Branches opposes the final-form regulations for new high school graduation requirements.**

We believe that the final-form regulations are unfriendly and potentially harmful to a great many of the youth of Pennsylvania; most especially and specifically those who are poor, who are Black, or who are Brown. **We believe that the final-form regulations provide the power to discriminate against citizens.** We hold this to be evident in ways which include, but may not be limited to:

The punitive use of the test scores - failure to acknowledge the disparities in schooling faced by students in underfunded, underserved districts across Pennsylvania while assessing them on a scale set for students of advantage;

The forced disclosure of test scores – given society’s requirement for and use of the high school diploma, listing test scores on diplomas eliminates student choice as to whether or not the scores are made public; thus forcing disclosure of this private aspect of their lives and without clarity as to how scores will be used by those who access them;

The use of labeled certificates - given the disproportional lack of placement in - and or lack of access to - courses/programs that foster and nurture advanced achievement precludes equal access to certain of the proposed certificates;

The disregard for the ethics of/ standards for the use of test score – one form of test will impact on the life choices of a large proportion of the State’s students although standards of professional best practice define the authentic use of tests - which is to evaluate curricula and programming needs. As well, for a select population, one form of testing becomes the basis for an ongoing, time intense, expensive additional schooling process when there are numerous, more reliable ways to demonstrate proficiency;

The lack of transparency in its special education provision – the proposal is left unclear concerning accommodations for the diagnostic categories to which Black and Brown students are disproportionately assigned;

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The failure to provide specific advocacy for Pennsylvania's minority students – the request that the Board of Education specifically designate a *minority advocate seat* on each of the proposed advisory boards was ignored; and

The appearance of intended obfuscation – among the most disturbing of which are:

- Imbedding unfriendly legislation behind the diversion of tests (Placing a test validation requirement on local entities that choose to use their own assessments – then removing the requirement if the state does not pay its 50% of the validation cost – thus demonstrating that the original demand is unnecessary and unimportant;
- Forcing the disclosure of private information by posting test scores on the diploma;
- Creating a false system of comparative excellence through labeled certificates while undermining the regular school district diploma and relegating the work of students who do not have equal access to opportunity to a nebulous state; **and most egregiously,**
- Using the tax dollars of citizens whose children do not have access to extended educational opportunities to pay for a system that institutionalizes the superiority of the privileged.

The NAACP fully supports rigorous curricula and the thorough education of all students. **However, we feel certain that the complex system of tutoring, remediation, and special projects will result in Pennsylvania - as is shown by data from other states – in an increase in the drop out rate. We know that research demonstrates how this can be prevented with a focus on funding, programs, teaching, mentoring, developing family and community engagement strategies, and a more systematic and broader assessment approach.**

As well, in addition to the content of the final-form regulations that are unfriendly and potentially harmful to the students, there are the broad demands that require increased funding and increased staffing at the local school district level. Monitoring the system of tutoring, remediation and special projects – as **an add-on to the daily work of schooling** - imposes for many districts, a great (and possibly unsustainable) burden in staffing, scheduling, and salaries. This burden can be circumvented by a more realistic plan. An adjusted, systematic process will avoid the systemic chaos inherent in the final-form regulations as constructed.

The State Board of Education's proposed final-form regulations for new high school graduation requirements, as currently submitted, are unfriendly to both the children and the education entities over which they have power.

Given these concerns, the Education Committee on behalf of the State Conference on NAACP Branches, strongly urges that all members of both the House and Senate of the Pennsylvania Assembly vote "NO" on the proposed final-form regulations for new high school graduation requirements.

Thank you for your tireless service, and thank you for addressing this issue for the citizens of Pennsylvania,

Joan Duvall-Flynn, Ed. D.

Chair: Education Committee, PA State Conference of NAACP Branches

Dr. Marilyn Barnett

Mrs. Jean Brown

Mrs. Sheila Carter

Dr. Donna Laws

Dr. George Love

Dr. Edwina Vold

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Cc: Senators

Representative

NAACP Branches state-wide

CERT

Other special interest groups