

January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008 Follow Up Letter to Marty Griffin of KDKA Radio Show

Dear Marty,

Thank you for the opportunity to be on your KDKA radio show this morning to discuss the PSSA/Graduation Competency Assessment proposal set forth by the State Board of Education. I appreciate the open and candid dialogue and the opportunity to shed light on the issues at hand.

There is so much more to this proposal than meets the eye and I mentioned that briefly at the onset preceding the interview other than the philosophical debate which is just one of many distractions being promoted by officials in Harrisburg promoting this agenda, but, also by the media sources reporting on the process itself.

The reality is, not all students will be 100% proficient in demonstrating the academic standards. The theory that 100 % of Pennsylvania students will master the state standards in 12 academic areas AND demonstration of proficiency on state reading and math tests by 2014 is unrealistic as per No Child Left Behind. Furthermore, this theory is still unproven. Statistically, there are simply too many variables affecting learning to suppose that tweaking expenditures and appropriations can bring about huge changes in achievement. Nor can all the necessary and needed supports within the local classrooms and simultaneously at home guarantee a uniformed result of proficiency of all students. There will always be a sub grouping of students not meeting proficiency.

As demonstrated on the radio show this morning, the philosophical discussion and debate on this issue is inevitably ongoing. There were wonderful points made by not only you, but, also your listeners! We all have experienced different life experiences in which we can contribute many points of view in regards to the issue of high school exit exams and whether or not they are good, bad, necessary, or unnecessary. But, this philosophical debate is exactly what Harrisburg wants you and others to focus on....there's a much bigger picture here on what this proposal is about.

The reality is, not all students are cut out for college and universities, our nation recognizes this fact, as well as parents, schools, and students themselves. To add to that equation, we have concerns expressed by various entities about the lack of skills exhibited by incumbent workers and job applicants as well as the out migration of skilled workers and college graduates to other states. Our Commonwealth does not have enough young people pursuing the trades and technical jobs throughout our state economy for various reasons. Here are just a couple of the reasons:

1. Each generation wants their offspring to have access to more and better opportunities in lieu of their own generation. This means promoting a college

education and receiving a college degree to be a necessity of life and long term success.

2. There is and has been a societal stigma associated with students pursuing technical and vocational education through vocational schools of education. For example, the flawed premise that “only all the troublemakers or unsuccessful students attend career/tech education schools or vocational schools”. A totally unproven and subjective opinion of many throughout our society.
  
3. School districts, in general, promote this attitude by their pressure to produce high school graduates pursuing secondary education institutions such as college, in lieu of the pursuing vocational or technical education institutions. For example, doesn't it sound better in a school or media publication to see or read “80% of our high school graduates go onto pursue secondary higher education” in contrast to “80% of our students go onto pursue vocational/technical education”? A sad commentary, but, unfortunately true. I am a public education official and am honest enough to admit this fact and try and educate parents all the time that our vocational schools are our state's best kept secret!! In my opinion, we have to get over this flawed mindset and begin elevating all students who are willing and able to pursue secondary education in any venue committed to effectively educating our younger and older generations of people pursuing opportunities to improve themselves and their quality of life.

Because of these and other factors involved, states are under intense scrutiny to come up with unique and statewide initiatives to address not only these inequities facing their respective commonwealths as well as prepare their students for the workforce. According to Dr. Mary Ann Nobers, Pennsylvania DOE Secretary in 1998, when noting a change in the state's education plan while at a visit in Edgeworth, PA, “the State will determine the 20% earmarked to go to college and the 80% of students which will enter into Pennsylvania's workforce someday.” As to how, the State was not saying, but clues are available throughout Pennsylvania's School To Work Contract which was signed by Governor Ridge to enable Pennsylvania to sign on to the federal reform of the 1994 School To Work Opportunities Act of 1994, which mandated each state government to “reinvent itself”. Section 3 (b) 2. It's important to note that School to Work is not voluntary and has invaded all fifty states. The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 was passed by Congress which works with School to Work and all of Goals 2000. School to Work is currently being marketed to school districts as the program that helps to design curriculum that fits commerce. This new tier of bureaucracy creating appointed workforce development boards may someday improve Pennsylvania's workforce through the sacrifice of our educational system and more importantly, our children's true potential. The focus of education will change

from what you know, as in facts and dates (knowledge based & academics), to “what you can do” as related to skills.

In 1999, the State Board of Education, (who is an unelected bureaucratic body empowered to make rules and regulations statewide, is appointed by the Governor and is unaccountable to the general public) empowered themselves to revise the Chapter 4 education regulations by proposing (Section 4.24, (b) & (c) beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, students who attain a PSSA score at the advanced level of proficiency on any State assessment administered in grade 10,11, or 12 shall be granted a Pennsylvania Certificate of Distinction (Silver Seal attached onto the high school diploma) for that discipline and students who score at the proficient level will receive a Pennsylvania Certificate of Proficiency (Gold Seal attached onto the high school diploma) for that discipline accordingly.

The State Board of Education then actively engaged in a huge public relations effort and spent millions of dollars promoting colleges and universities would look at these colored stickers/seals and determine college entrance of students. However, the colleges and universities were telling others that they look into a broad range of criteria and pay close attention to the SAT’s and ACT’s in lieu of the PSSA since the state assessment at that time had a history of serious flaws pertaining to scoring results. Bureaucrats were convinced that these seals would be utilized as a steering mechanism to determine who went onto college and who entered the workforce. The state assessment clearly became the mechanism to facilitate the process of achieving the goals of managing the state economy’s needs and inequities. Similar to this point now, the State Board of Education adopted their proposal upon which it then entered into the Independent Regulatory Review Process and is forwarded to the House and Senate Education Committees for their further review and for public comment. A vast grassroots movement which originated in Butler County’s seven school districts opposing the State Board of Education’s plan spread across Pennsylvania with much work by parents and school boards and into Harrisburg’s regulatory battle. The plan for colored seals and stickers met so much opposition statewide with 150 school boards passing resolutions with a majority of votes that the plan was eventually scrapped and revised to just individual certificates which were instructed not to be utilized as a steering mechanism to this present time.

In 2001, the House of Representatives on February 13, 2001 by a vote of 197-0 adopted House Resolution 16 which eventually established a 27 member commission to establish “The Keystone Commission on Education for Employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” to again address the concern about the lack of skills exhibited by incumbent works, job workers, and the out migration of not only the “Pennsylvania Brain Drain” but out migration of skilled workers leaving the economy. Manufacturing plants at that time were leaving Pennsylvania or closing down, and skilled workers originally educated in Pennsylvania were leaving the state. School to Work initiatives were further explored in which the Commission proposed numerous recommendations to statewide policy changing

the dynamics of schools, colleges, and universities all in an effort to enhance the state's economy throughout Pennsylvania. Some of these recommendations were acted upon and others are "in the works" so to speak and fit into this recent planned proposal.

Which all leads us to the point in which we as Pennsylvanians find ourselves now....a proposal similar to that of one in 1999, in which there is a mechanism utilized and administered by the State to help manage the statewide economy based on meeting the State's specific needs. Listings of occupations based on statewide needs is also a key component of the overall plan in which the State can dictate specific fields of study for those in colleges and universities as well as those learning a skilled trade by publishing and steering young people into areas in which the economy lacks. Top down control.

By now one must be sensing the similarities of this plan to those of the European model and are correct in their assumptions, as the school-to-work philosophy is the focal point of the new restructuring of American society. It is a top down reform movement known as Goals 2000/School To Work Investment Act which is designed as a "mandate for ALL publicly educated youth" and the concept was supported by three federal bills of legislation in 1994 which work together like interlocking puzzle pieces to reveal a picture of a restructured American society, focused, not surprisingly, on the best interests of the state, rather than the best interests of the child and the schools were to be the vehicle to achieving this goal.

The antiquated ways in which discussions between family members around the kitchen table to determine a youth's pending future as to college or work opportunities cease to exist under this plan.

Free choice to pursue college or enter into the workforce ceases to exist, the State will decide for you.

The ability for a local school board elected by their community to represent their respective community, to determine curriculum choices taught, provided, and to determine graduation requirements as well as the power to confer degrees, honorary, or otherwise, cease to exist under this plan, as it is designed to. Furthermore, moving to a uniformed statewide curriculum and assessment process all controlled by the State.

Regulation statewide of the plan will eventually force all those school choice providers such as homeschoolers, private and parochial schools to be compliant with those of public educated school students so that the same criteria will apply to all students, after all, this is what's in the best interest of state according to the plan.

In conclusion, there is so much more history I could elaborate on regarding this plan but I do not want to get into a dissertation. My point being, the philosophical

debate and discussion, while good to have and share, is a nothing more than a political distraction to the real core elements of the State Board of Education's proposal before us. Harrisburg laughs that the public is so engrossed with the back and forth debate of high school exit exams. But, there is a much bigger perspective to all of this that needs to be communicated and shared. The research based and supporting documents, along with my own personal accounts of following both the federal and state history of Pennsylvania's process with this agenda since 1993 have enabled me to connect the dots to these and many reforms. The real issue and bottom line to this proposal that the public is ignorant to, is simply this: The schools are being utilized as the vehicle in helping the State to be provided a mechanism through the assessment process which allow the State to manage its respective economy and to help it meet its needs to be competitive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This situation is not unique to Pennsylvania, it is not voluntary, all fifty states are a part of this plan as all fifty states accepted Goals 2000 funding from the Federal Government years ago and surrendered their state's local control as well as state academic standards to the Federal Government.

More information on this and similar policy briefs can be found on my free website at: [www.marsrrservices.com](http://www.marsrrservices.com) Click on the link "The PSSA Page".

Thank you again Marty for your efforts in getting the truth out to matters affecting all Pennsylvanians. Keep up the Great Work!! If there's anything I can do to help you or others in your efforts, you know where to contact me. Thank you!!

Sincerely,  
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P.S. I'll put this letter on my website so others can get educated. Hope this helps!!