

Questionable Standards:

Pennsylvania's new academic standards are contained as an appendix to the Chapter 4 education regulations written by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education. The PSSA's original intention was to provide the Pennsylvania Department of Education a measure of "school" performance, building by building, within one given school district. After all, the abbreviation, PSSA, represents the Pennsylvania System of "School" Assessment. Interestingly, the PSSA has been in effect since 1991, long before the academic standards were even created and /or adopted by the state legislature and/or the State Board of Education itself.

Though the academic standards were originally approved in 1997 under the Ridge administration, Chapter 4 and its accompanying appendix of performance based standards were not approved until 1999. With the ongoing battle against OBE, parents and school officials wanting reform were questioning why the state was utilizing this same state assessment with little or no changes to now measure individual student performance in meeting the newly established and rigorous academic standards? For a state administration publicly touting they were committed to quality academic standards, why not demand a new academic assessment that measures true academic content? The State made an aggressive attempt to take an existing test which was originally designed to measure school performance and market it to school districts across the Commonwealth as being aligned to the Governor's new academic standards.

This did not sit well with some in the public. The intent of standards and assessments had the lofty goal of improving student performance. However, if the standards are poorly designed the results of the tests based on the standards result in perverse results. Especially when the same entity, the State, has developed both the standards and test. Education experts from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington D.C. rated Pennsylvania's standards at a grade level of "D+" sending up a red flag. Dr. Sandra Stosky, PH.D, who was paid by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education to evaluate the Pennsylvania standards, was very critical of the proposed standards at that time calling them "schizophrenic". These same standards were encouraged to be adopted by the SBOE's Dr. Peter Garland in 1999 who was before the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee in a packed room of statewide protestors, inclusive of myself.