

## **The State Will and Is Deciding Who Graduates?**

The Public School Code Act of 1949 (which is the law of the Commonwealth) grants school districts the power to issue diplomas and to determine graduation requirements. Chapter 4 education regulations mandate additional graduation requirements starting in the 2002-2003 school year. 4.24 (a)

"Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, students shall demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics on either the State assessments administered in grade 11 or 12 or local assessment aligned with academic standards and State assessments under 4.52 (relating to local assessment) at the "proficient" level or better to graduate."

One new requirement includes passing the PSSA. Initially, the State refused to define what constitutes a passing PSSA score thus making an unaccountable scoring system in determining what student will graduate. In May of 2001, the SBOE released their proposed performance levels that correspond to student scores of the PSSA. The four mandated levels are: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic. The PSSA performance level descriptors and performance level scores are not contained in the Chapter 4 education regulations and can be located as published through a level of Notice by the State Board of Education at 31 Pennsylvania Bulletin 2736 (May 26, 2001).

The best advice to a parent of a student is to check with their local school district and ask if the PSSA test is a LOCAL requirement for graduation. Often times this requirement along with graduation criteria can be found in the individual student handbooks distributed at the beginning of the school year. In addition, Mars students and parents receive graduation requirements in the course selection manual when high school students are scheduling each year. Graduation criteria and requirements can also be found in the local school district's strategic plan, which should be available to the public at its request and review as located in the district's administrative office. While there are some school districts across the commonwealth which have decided to also locally mandate the PSSA test as a graduation requirement within their district, at this point in time, the Mars Area School District has chosen not to do so.

According to Chapter 4 education regulations (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 for that discipline (reading, math, or writing with science soon to be added) and students who score at the proficient level will receive a Pennsylvania Certificate of Proficiency for that discipline accordingly.

Is it possible these certificates could possibly act as a steering mechanism as to who goes to college some day and who goes into 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 is 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. 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