

**Testimony for Public Hearing
Pennsylvania State Senate Education Committee
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Good morning Chairman Folmer and Chairman Dinniman and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Rosemary Fiumara, and I am the President of the Garnet Valley School Board as well as a parent of two daughters, both graduates of Garnet Valley. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and to present my testimony concerning the role that Keystone Exams play in a student's academic career.

As context for this discussion, I would like to provide some background about the Garnet Valley School District as it relates to Pennsylvania Core Standards and Keystone Assessments as graduation requirements. Currently, our graduation rate is over 99%. On average, over 90% of our graduating seniors go on to attain a two or four year college or university education. Most recently, our Keystone Algebra I given to our 11th graders revealed an 86% proficiency or advanced level and 14% scored basic or below. Literature for

grade 11 was 93% proficient or advanced and 7% basic or below. Also, Biology scores were 63% proficient or advanced and 37% basic or below.

Conversely, the PA state data reveals that approximately 50-60% of students across the state scored basic or below. How can we implement a graduation requirement based on a test that seems to require remediation for one out of every two students on a statewide basis? And if we do.....who will pay for this? As I see it we'll be asking the Garnet Valley taxpayers to pay for our districts remediation program. And while this is a pressing issue, it's certainly not our only concern.

We think the Pennsylvania Core Standards have merit and are a well needed and refreshing change to curriculum and instruction. Overall, they provide a more holistic and detailed point of view, they're challenging and developmentally appropriate, and are well articulated both horizontally and vertically, outlining important concepts and skills from PreK-12th grade. Using the PA Core Standards as a framework for the development of local curriculum, while maintaining a district's ability to use the resources and assessments appropriate to its students, is a means by which quality education can be delivered in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Let me be clear that we believe assessment is a key component to the educational system, and we do see value in assuring there is an adequate level of competence, in all subjects, that all students continue to show growth as they progress through their education, both district and statewide. The Keystone exams have merit and do provide a framework for this thinking. However, the use of the Keystone exams as a graduation requirement creates unnecessary hardships for all school districts. These issues include:

- the amount of testing at the state level, as students continue to retake the Keystones, the level of anxiety this creates for school leaders, teachers, parents and students will only detract from the Core Standards curriculum that we are trying to teach.
- The need to remediate each and every student both during the school year and over the summer will place an undue hardship on every district to support these unfunded mandates.
- Specifically, these tests place a burden on several student populations,
 - Middle School students who take Algebra I must take four PSSA assessments (Math, Reading, Science, Writing) in addition to the Algebra I Keystone Exam, all within a close time frame.
 - High School students who are taking AP courses face the rigor of both sets of exams in a very close time frame

- Unlike PSSA which offered modified testing for students with IEP's, the Keystone expect all students to take the same exam. Some of our IEP population might not have even taken Algebra I but are still expected to take the Keystone Exam.
- Keystone Exams were designed to be taken as an end of course exam. However with the testing schedule the exam took place prior to the actual end of the course. Secondly, this past year students were expected to take an end of course exam when they had actually taken the course 2 or 3 years prior.
- While the state has provided for two "waves" of testing for the Keystone to account for block scheduling, the exams still took place several weeks prior to the end of the course. An example for this for the upcoming year is the spring wave 2 window (which is designed for schools on block scheduling) That date is May 12-23 which is still too early for a student to take an end of course exam.
- We oppose the use of a differentiated transcript for graduation, as this may have a detrimental effect on a student's evaluation for admission to college. Additionally, the time commitment placed on students to participate in remedial programs will dilute their whole learning

experience as less time can be devoted to elective courses of study and extra-curricular activities.

We are opposed to the unfunded burden placed on our school district to hire and compensate staff for these remediation efforts. These costs will have to come directly from our taxpayers at a time when they are rightfully concerned about the rising costs of property taxes to support other unfunded state mandates such as the pension crisis along with escalating special education costs. For these reasons we oppose any regulatory action in favor of making these assessments a graduation requirement.

Further, the speed at which we are trying to link these tests to new standards just being implemented and test scores to graduation requirements is at best too much too soon, and at worse, will have an unfavorable impact on upcoming graduates as we continue to experiment with their future over the next few years.

School districts should be allowed to ascertain the needs of their students, how to address non-proficient students in a manner that is specific to that district's population while determined by the educators in that district, and decrease the burden that these tests as a graduation requirement place on schools at the local level.

High performing school districts such as Garnet Valley understand the need to ensure that quality remediation efforts are implemented, and such efforts can and should be evaluated at the local level. The decision as to when a student has fulfilled the requirements for graduation should, therefore, be determined by the entity responsible for the education of that student.

I would like to thank the members of the Senate Education Committee for their time and consideration today and I would be happy to answer any questions you have for me.
