

Forward, Together

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

January 2011



The State Board of Education gratefully acknowledges the School District of Lancaster for providing the cover photo for this year's report.



333 Market Street, 1st floor, Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
ra-stateboardofed@state.pa.us | (717) 787-3787

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A MESSAGE FROM CHAIRPERSON JOSEPH M. TORSSELLA

Dear Education Stakeholder:

It is my pleasure to transmit the State Board of Education's second annual report to the Governor and General Assembly. The theme of this year's report—Forward, Together—speaks to our commitment over the past 12 months to advance measures that will improve the equity of academic expectations statewide. From our efforts to set rigorous state-level high school graduation requirements, to adoption of the Common Core State Standards, to action that expands college access and affordability, the Board's work during 2010 will help ensure a college-ready experience for every student—and the promise of postsecondary opportunity for every graduate.

While the Board's actions will have major educational impact, they do not carry significant fiscal impact. The Board is aware that the challenging economic conditions are exerting tremendous pressure on districts and schools statewide. In response, the Board has worked to ensure that its rulemaking is either revenue-neutral or actually delivers new resources to the education community. The Board's graduation requirements rulemaking—which stipulates the provision of associated instructional supports—and the three-year phase-in for the Common Core—which will allow districts to accomplish the implementation through the normal course of curriculum revision—are two notable examples of the Board's commitment to couple its rulemaking with new supports and greater flexibility for schools.

The progress outlined in this year's report would not be possible without the tremendous partnership of the Board's stakeholders and the contributions of our volunteer members. In particular, I want to acknowledge the hard work of our four retiring members—**Esther Bush, Corrinne Caldwell, Sheila Dow Ford, and Arnold Hillman**—and **Barbara Baker**, who has served ably as the Board's Administrative Officer since 2006. Through their combined nearly 15 years of service to the Board, these individuals have left an indelible mark on public education in Pennsylvania.

As we turn the page to 2011 and the important work ahead, including implementation of this year's School Code bill, Act 104, we invite you to stay involved in our work. The Board's commitment to transparency in its policymaking—including a redesigned **website**, a new committee structure, and the practice of holding every other meeting outside Harrisburg—provides important avenues to impact education reform. We hope you'll continue to partner with us to move Pennsylvania's schools forward.


Joseph M. Torsella

2010 PERFORMANCE MEASURES [BY THE NUMBERS]

98%

Score for Board-authored sections of Pennsylvania's Race to the Top application

-21%

Reduction in operational expenses (November 2009 – November 2010)

10

Regional roundtable forums for stakeholder participation in Board policymaking

1,500+

Total attendance at State Board meetings and education forums that featured remarks from Board leadership

\$65,800

Savings from staff reorganization

17

Pennsylvania was the 17th state nationally to adopt the Common Core State Standards—as of December 31, 2010, 42 states and territories nationwide have adopted the Common Core

4,426

Chester Upland School District students who will have an affordable path to college, following the Board's action to approve the district as a local sponsor of Delaware County Community College



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Pursuant to Article XXVI-B (24 P.S. § 26-2603-B) of the Pennsylvania School Code, the State Board of Education is pleased to provide a report on its work for 2010, and to look ahead to the education policy challenges that will require our attention in 2011. The electronic transmission of this report is the latest in a series of efforts the State Board is taking to reduce its operating expenditures in light of the significant economic challenges confronting state government.

The State Board has made substantial headway on each of the policy priorities identified at the beginning of 2010: **implementation of the state's new system of high school graduation requirements; consideration of the Common Core State Standards; reforms to improve teacher and school leader effectiveness, and examining the link between student wellness and academic achievement.** The backdrop to this progress was an unprecedented effort by our all-volunteer Board to engage stakeholders in our work and to increase the transparency of the Board's operations.

1) COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

On January 9, 2010, the State Board officially published revisions to state-level high school graduation requirements—the first update to the commonwealth's diploma standards in more than a decade. This action was the culmination of a nearly three-year process that sought to align exit requirements with the new economic paradigm that signals the importance of post-secondary education in securing a job with a

family-sustaining wage. For example, a study from the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University found that by 2018, nearly 60 percent of all jobs in Pennsylvania will require postsecondary education (Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl, 2010).

Under this reform, beginning with the Class of 2015, Pennsylvania's students will be required to demonstrate proficiency in core subjects (English language arts, mathematics, and science) in addition to meeting local graduation requirements; a social studies requirement will be phased in by 2017. Options for meeting the new requirements include successful course completion in which a state-developed Keystone Exam serves as the final or demonstrating readiness on locally-developed, independently-validated assessments. Importantly, the new regulation will provide districts with detailed guidance on assessment design—a critical statewide professional development need.

“By collaborating with education practitioners to implement reforms, the State Board is bridging the gap between education policy and practice.”

– DR. LINDA HIPPERT
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ALLEGHENY INTERMEDIATE UNIT

Given the magnitude of this policy change, the Board committed to staying involved in the implementation phase of the reform. During 2010, the Board worked alongside the Department of Education to constitute and staff five stakeholder committees involving more than 75 educators

from every corner of the state. These committees are playing a critical role in setting expectation levels for the Keystone end-of-course exams, examining the criteria that will guide development of local assessment systems and crafting policy recommendations to help ensure successful implementation of the regulation.

In addition to getting the policy right, the Board is working to get the communications right. The ultimate success of this reform will depend on clear understanding—by educators, parents, and students—of the new requirements and the options for meeting them. In response, the Board has partnered with the Team Pennsylvania Foundation to develop a host of resources for districts, parents, and students that explain the new requirements in clear, non-technical language. To access these resources, please visit the Department of Education’s Standards Aligned System site: www.pdesas.org.

2) NEXT GENERATION ACADEMIC STANDARDS

The year’s second major reform of Chapter 4 regulations was the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in English language arts and mathematics. These rigorous, internationally-benchmarked learning targets are aligned with expectations for success in college and high-skill careers and were developed through a nationwide partnership of more than 40 states and territories, the National Governors Association (NGA), and the Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO).

For more than two decades, Pennsylvania has been a national leader in setting ambitious learning targets to guide instruction and assessment; the State Board, through official academic standards, defines the *what* for core subjects—the expectations for what a student should learn and be able to do. Communities and teachers decide the *how*: the daily activities—including curriculum design, textbook selections, and lesson plans—that allow students to meet these targets.

In 2009, the State Board was in the process of revising Pennsylvania’s academic content standards when the Common Core emerged as a policy priority of the nation’s governors and chief state schools officers, and, ultimately, the White House. In the interest of a coordinated and coherent approach to standards revision, Pennsylvania, along with several other states, demonstrated early interest in contributing to and learning from this nationwide effort.

The Board’s adoption of Common Core was preceded by an unprecedented effort to carefully vet the standards and to invite Pennsylvania educators into the deliberation process. At the heart of the Board’s deliberations was the question of rigor—would Common Core raise expectations and build on Pennsylvania’s existing framework of ambitious learning goals? To find the answer, the Board commissioned an independent study by the University of Pittsburgh’s School of Education and led by Professor Suzanne Lane, a nationally-known expert on educational measurement and testing. Across a four-day alignment process, Dr. Lane and 20 educators from across Pennsylvania

reviewed the draft Common Core against the state's existing standards; the results of the study revealed comparable levels of rigor and a high degree of alignment between Pennsylvania and Common Core standards (for example, over 87 percent of Pennsylvania English language arts standards were considered moderately or very strongly aligned). Professor Lane presented her findings at a public meeting of the State Board on May 6, 2010, and the findings were subsequently shared at three regional roundtables during the spring.

The Board's unanimous adoption of Common Core on July 1, 2010—and the process leading to it—helped Pennsylvania earn 98 percent of the possible points in the related component of the United States Department of Education's Race to the Top competition. More importantly, the action ensured a comprehensive, rigorous update of the state's academic standards while staying true to the essential content that has guided the work of our schools and educators over the past decade. During the state's three-year transition to Common Core, the Board will remain engaged in the implementation of Common Core. The first step in this effort is the publication of a white paper, available on the Board's website, summarizing feedback gathered from educators and postsecondary leaders statewide. This document underscores the Board's belief that Pennsylvania's higher education community can play a central part in ensuring that state standards will help our students graduate from high school college-ready.

3) TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER EFFECTIVENESS

Fashioning reform in a politically and demographically diverse state hinges on making the case that public education functions best when the rules and supports are predictable—i.e., rigorous common standards and consistent and fair graduation requirements. The policy and moral challenge ahead of us is making teacher effectiveness similarly universal; to ensure a fundamental compact among schools, unions, preparing institutions, and alternative providers aimed at effective teaching—the single-most important in-school factor in determining student achievement. Meeting this challenge calls for an array of strategies—from

“Pittsburgh Public Schools is committed to ensuring that there is a highly-effective teacher in every classroom, every day through our Empowering Effective Teachers work. The District's partnership with The New Teacher Project (TNP) is a key initiative in our effort to develop a consistent pipeline of excellent teachers who are diverse and meet our subject area needs. Thanks to authorization from the State Board of Education, our new partnership with TNP will help us to achieve our vision of Excellence for All.”

– DR. LINDA S. LANE
SUPERINTENDENT, PITTSBURGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

analyzing the individual supports provided to emerging educators, to careful analysis of district operations and contractual language, to advocacy for state-level policy change.

To support this work, the Board has formed a standing committee on Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness. The leadership of this committee was critical to the Board's action earlier this year to approve an alternative teacher certification pathway that features an innovative partnership between Pittsburgh Public Schools' Teacher Academy initiative and The New Teacher Project (TNTP), a national nonprofit working to close the achievement gap by ensuring provision of highly effective educators in high-need communities. This approval—the first action to expand alternative certification programs since 2002—established important evaluation standards for alternative certification programs and emphasized national recruitment as a method to grow the quality and diversity of applicant pools.

At the heart of the Board's action was recognition that alternative providers can play a valuable role in drawing high-quality, mid-career candidates to fill hard-to-staff teaching positions. But given the Board's work to strengthen teacher certification standards at institutions of higher education, the Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness committee feels it is crucial to hold alternative providers to these same high standards.

Going forward, the Board will continue to monitor the implementation and impact of this initiative by requiring Pittsburgh and TNTP to provide a progress report to the Board within

one year. In addition to the progress report, by November 2012, the Board will review findings and recommendations from an in-depth evaluation of the program conducted by the Department of Education; this two-year review requirement represents a more rigorous evaluation standard than the six-year cycle for postsecondary preparing institutions. These evaluations will not only inform the Board's future determinations regarding this specific initiative, but also will identify important considerations for the General Assembly to reflect on in its efforts to create high-quality alternative certification pathways.

4) EXAMINING THE LINK BETWEEN ACHIEVEMENT AND WELLNESS

In response to the emerging public health crisis surrounding childhood obesity, the Board has identified student health and wellness as a priority for the next phase of its regulatory agenda. More than 587,000 Pennsylvania students—one-third of all students—are overweight or obese, with even higher rates in two-thirds of counties statewide. Importantly, this rate is three times higher than it was just 25 years ago. Health experts project that we are facing the first generation of children with a shorter life expectancy than their parents and national data show that weight-related chronic health conditions are driving increases in health care costs. Overweight children face increased risks for developing serious health issues as adolescents and adults including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and certain types of cancer, and today's children and youth are exhibiting signs of many of these diseases at earlier ages than ever before.

Of particular concern to the Board is the link between obesity and educational attainment. Obesity is associated with lower grades and test scores, discipline issues, and obvious emotional effects with consequences for academic achievement, including feelings of low self-esteem and depression. Given that childhood obesity is far more prevalent in high-poverty communities—communities that already face significant economic challenges in providing a high quality public education—obesity is an additional barrier to academic success for our most vulnerable children.

“The updated [nutrition] guidelines . . . make sense in a state where a third of all students are overweight or obese.”

– THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
NOVEMBER 13, 2010

To improve student health while simultaneously improving academic achievement, the Board has proposed revisions to the state’s Chapter 12 regulations that would establish baseline nutritional and physical activity standards for the state’s public schools. The Board adopted the proposed regulations on May 6, 2010 and the policy was approved by the Governor’s office on November 6, 2010. Following approval by the commonwealth’s Office of General Counsel, the proposed rule-making will be forwarded to the state Attorney General for review. The Board looks forward to working with the new Administration and the education committees of the General Assembly on this regulation.

The regulation is modeled on two successful statewide pilot programs and is tailored to ensure minimal fiscal impact to districts. For example, districts will have broad discretion in implementing the activity standards and the nutrition standards will in fact create a statewide demand that will encourage vendors to offer healthier options at lower prices.

The development of this rulemaking was characterized by an unprecedented commitment to stakeholder engagement. Through the support of the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Board convened five public forums with education leaders, child advocates, and medical professionals to discuss the research base for various strategies for improving student health outcomes and to invite feedback from stakeholders. As the regulatory process proceeds, the Board will continue to gather suggestions for common sense reforms at the nexus of student achievement and student health.

5) REORGANIZING FOR EFFECTIVENESS; PARTNERING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In addition to its policy efforts, the State Board has taken a number of steps throughout 2010 to restructure for greater effectiveness during a period of economic strain. The Board has reduced its operational expenses by more than 20 percent in response to the state’s fiscal challenges and has streamlined its committee structure to ensure coordinated approaches to policymaking. For example, the Board’s committees on Vocational Education and College Access now meet jointly in response to the growing similarity between expectations for

high-wage jobs and postsecondary education. For an updated list of the Board's committee system, please visit the Board's [website](#).

Alongside these efforts, the Board has redoubled its commitment to involving education stakeholders in its policymaking. Through a revamped website and a sustained commitment to meetings outside Harrisburg, the Board is working to communicate its policy priorities and to provide the public with the opportunity to shape them. 2010 took the Board to the following locations: Riverview Intermediate Unit 6, Clarion; Colonial Intermediate Unit 20, Easton; East High School, Erie; Temple University's Fort Washington campus; Washington Elementary School, Lancaster; the Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, Philadelphia; the University of Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Public Schools; and Mt. Nittany Middle School, State College. The Board wishes to extend its thanks to the faculty, staff, and students who make these visits an important part of our continuing education.

6) LOOKING AHEAD...

In addition to the Board's continuing efforts surrounding student health and wellness and ensuring thoughtful and aligned implementation of recent initiatives related to high school graduation requirements and Common Core State Standards, the Board's 2011 agenda also will include a strong focus on college affordability and school safety. Under Act 104 of 2010 and legislation championed by Senator Andrew Dinniman, the Board will play a pivotal role in crafting recommendations related to the affordability and acces-

sibility of college textbooks and course material—a burgeoning cost facing Pennsylvania students. As is critical to all of the Board's policymaking, these recommendations will be informed by stakeholder input through a new standing committee of the Board that will convene in January 2011 and include students, higher education faculty, textbook publishers, and college booksellers.

In addition to our work to reduce costs associated with higher education, Act 104 includes legislation authored by Senator Jeffrey Piccola, Chairman of the Senate Education Committee, directing the Board to develop important regulations related to school safety and to report violent incidents that occur on school grounds. Recognizing that academic achievement is an abstract notion for the student who feels threatened or endangered in school, the Board will move rapidly to engage and collaborate with stakeholders in developing and promulgating school safety regulations by early 2012.

Finally, in 2011 the Board also will undertake a thorough, quantitative study of the state of public school libraries, and will continue its practice of holding every other meeting outside Harrisburg to maximize opportunities for citizens statewide to share perspectives on the Board's work.

Following the Board's January meeting and opportunities to engage with the new administration of state government, we'll be in touch with additional details on our priorities and plans for 2011. In the meantime, please contact the Board office with any questions or to share your thoughts on our progress.



Joseph M. Torsella, *Chair*
Amy C. Morton, *Acting Secretary of Education*
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