

**Committee Name:**  
**Senate Committee – Education**  
**(SC–Ed)**

**Appointments**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_Appt\_pt00

**Clearinghouse Rules**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_CRule\_99–

**Committee Hearings**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_CH\_pt00

**Committee Reports**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_CR\_pt00

**Executive Sessions**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_ES\_pt00

**Hearing Records**

99hr\_ab0000

99hr\_sb0000

**Misc.**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_\_Misc\_\_pt02a

**Record of Committee Proceedings**

99hr\_SC–Ed\_RCP\_pt00

Department of Education  
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

N E W S   R E L E A S E

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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GOV. RIDGE HERALDS STATE BOARD'S ACCEPTANCE  
OF RIGOROUS, NEW ACADEMIC STANDARDS

HARRISBURG (April 9) -- Gov. Tom Ridge heralded today's vote by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education to approve rigorous academic standards in reading, writing and mathematics that are an appendix to recently adopted Chapter 4 regulations.

"This vote is an important next step toward my goal of fundamentally changing education in Pennsylvania," Gov. Ridge said. "We are establishing rigorous academic standards to better measure the progress of our children and to better hold our schools accountable to parents and taxpayers."

"With this vote, we set the bar of achievement high for our schools and for our students," said state Education Secretary Eugene W. Hickok. "I commend the State Board for its decisive action and its commitment to Pennsylvania's children."

The board in March voted its "intention to adopt" the new proposed Chapter 4 regulations, which focus on academic standards and assessments. These regulations outline guidelines for

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Pennsylvania's school districts to develop curricula, and to assess school and student progress.

The rigorous, clearly written, measurable academic standards outline what students should know and be able to do at the conclusion of grades three, five, eight and 11. The new regulations allow local school districts to retain the authority to adopt challenging curricula, including the development of reading lists. Student and school progress will be measured with enhanced state achievement tests in reading and mathematics in grades five, eight and 11. The performance of students in grade three will be determined through local assessments. Students in grades six and nine will continue to receive state writing assessments, and grade 11 now will begin to receive these assessments.

The proposed regulations now are subject to the regulatory-review process, which consists of a review by the Governor's Office of General Counsel; the state Attorney General; the Independent Regulatory Review Commission; the Legislative Reference Bureau; and the House and Senate education committees. These mandatory reviews are tentatively scheduled to be completed by fall 1998.

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NEWS RELEASE

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**GOV. RIDGE PRAISES STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S VOTE TO ADOPT  
CHAPTER 4 REGULATIONS**

***State regulations include rigorous academic standards  
proposed by Gov. Ridge***

HARRISBURG (Oct. 21) -- Gov. Tom Ridge today praised the Pennsylvania State Board of Education for its decisive vote to approve new state regulations eliminating outcome-based education (OBE) and establishing rigorous academic standards for schools and students.

"Today's vote sends a clear message that we are fundamentally changing education in Pennsylvania," Gov. Ridge said. "We are establishing rigorous academic standards to better measure the progress of our children and to better hold our schools accountable to parents and taxpayers."

Education Secretary Eugene W. Hickok also commended the state board for its affirmative vote.

"With these new standards and assessments, Pennsylvanians will have a clear picture of how well their

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children know and understand academic subjects," said Hickok. "We'll also know how well our teachers are doing to prepare our students for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century."

The rigorous, clearly written and measurable academic standards outline what students should know and be able to do by the end of grades three, five, eight and 11. School districts and communities retain the authority to develop challenging curriculum. Student and school progress will be measured with state assessment tests aligned with the new standards.

Students in grades five, eight and 11 will be required to take state reading and mathematics assessments. Students in grades six, nine and 11 will be required to take state writing assessments. All students will be required to participate in the assessments unless their parents choose to "opt out" their children for religious reasons, or if a special-needs student's Individualized Education Program states that the student should not participate.

Students graduating in 2003 who score at proficient or advanced levels on the 11th-grade state assessments will be

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eligible to receive special seals on their diplomas: Seals of Proficiency and Seals of Distinction, respectively. The seals will signify that students have achieved high levels of excellence. Graduation requirements still will be established by local school districts.

In addition, school districts will be required to ensure that students in grades K-3 are proficient in math and reading based on locally determined measures.

Earlier this year, Gov. Ridge introduced a plan to ensure students have strong reading skills in the critical early years, since early reading success is a strong predictor of academic success in later grades.

Gov. Ridge's Read to Succeed proposal is a four-year, \$100 million initiative that would provide targeted funds to school districts where the need for intensive reading-instruction programs is greatest.

As part of the final regulatory review process, the House and Senate education committees have up to 20 days to review and act on the regulations. The Independent Regulatory Review Commission (IRRC) then will have up to 10

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days to review and act. Following the IRRC action, the Office of the Attorney General has up to 30 days to review the regulations.

A complete copy of the board's final-form regulations will be available on the Department of Education's homepage, which is accessible through the state's homepage at [www.state.pa.us](http://www.state.pa.us), by early next week. Citizens who wish to receive a copy of the regulations also may call the State Board of Education at (717) 787-3787.

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**FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE**  
***Questions and Answers About Academic Standards***

**What are academic standards?**

Standards define what each student should know and do in a core set of subjects. They provide consistent targets for students, teachers and parents to meet.

**Why do we need standards?**

Rigorous standards allow student achievement to be measured. They help parents and teachers follow the progress that students make from year to year. Rigorous standards will improve the academic performance of students *and* schools.

**Who developed the Pennsylvania standards?**

More than 400 people from throughout the Commonwealth worked on the development of the standards. They included parents, business and community leaders, teachers, professors, school administrators and staff within the Department of Education.

**Who reviewed the standards?**

In 1997-1998 parents, educators, business, and the general public were invited to 25 public hearings across the Commonwealth. The State Board of Education included their recommendations in deliberating the standards. The State Board of Education also commissioned evaluations by the Council for Basic Education and by Dr. Sara Stotsky, a national education expert.

**What were the criteria used to evaluate the standards before they were passed?**

The academic standards had to be rigorous, measurable, applicable to the world in which we live, and clearly written.

**What other standards are planned?**

The State Board of Education has reviewed and approved academic standards in Reading and Writing and Mathematics. Science and Technology standards are complete and under review. The State Board also is reviewing proposed standards in Civics and Government; Environment and Ecology; and Health, Safety, and Physical Fitness, among others.

**What are assessments? How do they relate to standards?**

Assessments measure student and school performance in core subjects. Because they are based on the standards, assessments are a good measure of a student's ability to grasp the core subjects. They also measure a school's success in teaching the standards. Parents and the public **still** will have the opportunity to review the assessments *before* students take them.

**FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE – PAGE 2**

**When will school districts start teaching and testing the standards?**

Many have already begun to incorporate them in their curricula. Reading and writing and mathematics standards will be "phased in" the state assessments beginning with the 1999-2000 school year. Teachers began training sessions in the summer of 1998, and 50,000 teachers received special kits and training sessions on the new PSSAs.

**Have standards replaced "outcome-based education?"**

Yes. The State Board of Education removed outcome-based education and replaced it with the academic standards.

**What impact do standards have on current strategic planning in school districts?**

Academic planning is critical to schools. These plans will continue to be developed by local school districts and community members. Interested parents and public should review their school's strategic plans.

**Are the standards mandatory for school districts?**

No. However, most school districts will want to model their curricula on the state standards. Local school districts will have the freedom to set curriculum standards that best suit their local needs. The state standardized assessments (PSSA) will be designed around the academic standards. This will encourage school districts to have a demanding curriculum. Districts and teachers will be rewarded for their students' excellence.

**Will standards and assessments be required in private or parochial schools?**

No. As in past regulations, private and parochial school students will not be required to participate.

**How will standards improve school accountability to parents?**

For the first time, everyone - including parents, teachers, administrators, and taxpayers - can measure how each school is teaching core subjects. More importantly, parents can find out about their child's ability to master these subjects. Schools and teachers that excel in teaching will be rewarded for their efforts.

**Why did we change from outcomes to academic standards?**

Academic standards are objectively defined, objectively measured and focused in core academic areas such as reading, writing, mathematics and science.

**Will standards teach affective subjects such as "self-worth?"**

No. Standards focus squarely on academics, which teachers and parents can understand and measure.

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**FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE – PAGE 3**

**How can parents ensure that their children receive a quality education if school districts still develop their own curricula?**

The state's new academic standards will be used to generate standardized assessments of academic performance in Pennsylvania. The results of those assessments - **by school** - will be publicly released. This information will let parents and communities judge quantitatively how their schools are performing. Parents are encouraged to review their district's strategic plans and assessments.

**Will individual PSSA scores be released?**

No. Only summary information, which includes the results of the school district, will be available to the public. That does not include student names, ID numbers or individual information. Even the State Department of Education doesn't keep statistics on *individual* students.

**How can parents find out that their young children are doing grade level work?**

An important change is helping younger students meet the new academic challenge. Early testing is a component that will identify students who are falling behind to give them the help they need to succeed academically. Children who are having difficulty in the early grades - kindergarten through Grades 3 & 5 will be identified and given special help.

**Will the state assessments be changed?**

The PSSAs gradually will be aligned to the academic standards beginning in 1999. The Commonwealth now has academic standards in reading and writing and mathematics. State assessments will be given in these subjects. School districts may assess in any additional subjects they choose, however.

**What are the new "proficiency levels" on the state assessments?**

Beginning in the school year 2002-2003, students will be asked to achieve one of four categories of academic performance on their state assessments. The categories are advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. Students who do not achieve proficiency in grade 11 will have one more opportunity to take the assessment (and get a higher score) in grade 12 to achieve proficiency in that subject.

**Is proficiency a graduation requirement?**

Yes. Beginning in school year 2003, proficiency in mathematics, reading and writing will be necessary to graduate. Schools may use the state assessments or their own to determine proficiency. If they use their own, they must be aligned to the state standards and assessments.

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**FOUNDATIONS FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE – PAGE 4**

**What are the State Seals?**

Students who achieve *proficient* on the state assessments will be awarded a **Pennsylvania Seal of Proficiency**. This seal will be noted on their diploma and transcripts. Students who achieve the *advanced* level on the state assessments will be awarded a **Pennsylvania Seal of Distinction**, and this will be noted on their diploma and transcripts.

**What about the teachers? Will they have higher standards?**

In a separate initiative, prospective teachers also will have higher standards for admission and graduation from college. Pennsylvania has become a national leader in teacher-preparation requirements.

**Can my child be excused from the PSSA's**

Yes. If parents feel the assessment conflicts with their religious beliefs, they may write to their school superintendent.