

TO: The Honorable Members of the PA House of Representatives

**FROM: Excellent Schools PA
Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry
Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children**

DATE: Oct. 9, 2018

RE: S.B. 1095 – Graduation requirements

We write regarding S.B. 1095, which we understand the House may consider in the near future.

Our organizations support a public education system based on rigorous standards, with appropriate transparency and robust accountability measures, which will help ensure Pennsylvania students graduate high school as prepared as possible for the next phase of their lives. We were part of a broad coalition of higher education institutions, education advocates, retired military, employers and others who supported the state Board of Education's proposal for public school students to pass an exam in order to graduate. This prompted development of the Keystone Exams, which were planned to take effect for the 2016-17 school year but have been delayed.

There have been ongoing discussions on creating a system that best meets the needs of all students. While we have always viewed the Keystone Exams as the floor for demonstrating proficiency in multiple subject matters, Pennsylvania students are a diverse group and we recognize that graduation requirements can, to a certain extent, reflect that diversity. S.B. 1095 was introduced to provide alternative options for students to satisfy the graduation requirement. We understood the intent behind the bill but worried initially that it swung the pendulum too dramatically in a direction away from accountability and appropriate standards.

In the past few months, numerous stakeholders engaged in constructive discussion over various facets of the bill. We appreciate that several key recommendations our organizations proffered were incorporated including important transparency and accountability measures that will help ensure this new framework is properly implemented and that struggling schools are identified and provided necessary oversight and assistance. On the other hand, other important suggestions, such as mandatory supplemental instruction, were unfortunately left out for now.

Overall, the result of these discussions was an agreed-to amendment and improved bill, which still fulfills the intent of providing multiple options for satisfying the graduation requirement, including a Career and Technical Education path and successful passage of other rigorous, objective tests.

To be sure, the impact of added transparency and accountability measures, and the extent to which the bill in general benefits students, is entirely based on how it is carried out by schools in partnership with state officials and with vigorous oversight from the legislature. Passing this legislation is an important, but early step in the process and we urge all stakeholders to maintain a commitment to the principles now encompassed in this bill.