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**PPC TESTIFIES BEFORE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION IN SUPPORT OF
GRADUATION COMPETENCY ASSESSMENTS THAT HELP YOUTH SUCCEED
IN EDUCATION AND THE WORKPLACE**

(HARRISBURG, PA) January 9, 2008 – Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), an independent, statewide child advocacy organization, testified today before the Pennsylvania State Board of Education in support of revisions to the state’s high school graduation requirements as proposed by the Board. Benso focused her testimony in support of Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) - as a tool to establish a consistent statewide baseline expectation of the minimum knowledge and skills that a public high school diploma signifies - and a basic system of academic supports to help students achieve the standards.

PPC believes that the Commonwealth has not done enough to ensure that every high school graduate is adequately prepared for postsecondary education or training, 21st century occupations and productive citizenship. Establishing statewide uniformity in assessment of standards and skill sets is an essential step in helping students succeed in high school and beyond.

Benso testified that in 2006, 45 percent of graduating seniors did not score proficient on the reading and math 11th grade PSSAs, the 12th grade retake, or did not take the PSSAs but graduated based on these local assessments. “The disconnect between graduation rates and proficiency on state assessments is cause for concern. Yet the disconnect is not just in districts considered as being poor performing historically; in fact, 461 school districts graduated at least 20 percent *more* students in 2006 than scored proficient or above on the PSSA,” Benso said.

PPC supports the development of GCAs as a tool to measure the state standards for a number of reasons: GCAs place assessments closer to the point of instruction and create

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a sense of relevance and progression for students; they present an opportunity to assess more in-depth knowledge and smaller bodies of knowledge at one time. Students would take the GCAs when they complete the relevant coursework and have multiple opportunities to pass them. GCAs could also be utilized as a valuable credit-recovery tool for dropouts returning to school.

Benso testified that if a student does not pass a specific GCA, say Algebra I, the student is entitled to comprehensive remediation to help him succeed. PPC urges the Commonwealth to dedicate additional resources to help districts provide core academic support to students to achieve the state standards. Tutoring, remediation and extended instructional time programs are proven strategies that help students achieve.

“We fail kids if they graduate from public high school with a diploma they think prepares them for postsecondary education or work, but then they have to go and pay for remedial education in math and English in college,” Benso said. “If they master the standards in high school, they won’t have to pay for non-credit bearing courses at two and four-year-institutions.

“All students need to achieve the Pennsylvania academic standards so they have the skills to achieve success in postsecondary education, in careers, and as citizens in an increasingly complex world,” Benso added.

The State Board could vote on its proposed draft regulations at its meeting Jan. 16 and 17.

PPC published a paper in Sept. 2006 in favor of improving Pennsylvania’s accountability system through the creation and implementation of Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs). That paper is housed online at:
http://www.papartnerships.org/ensuring_success/index.asp

Local data from the report is available at:
http://www.papartnerships.org/ensuring_success/table_math_reading_all.pdf

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