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House of Representatives

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg

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4th Legislative District

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February 18, 2022

The Honorable Noe Ortega
Secretary
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17126

RE: 2021 Pennsylvania System School Assessment Results

Dear Secretary Ortega:

We write to request that the Pennsylvania Department of Education ("Department") immediately release the results of the 2021 Pennsylvania System School Assessment ("PSSA") examinations and provide an explanation for the extensive delay of the public release of those results.

In your February 25, 2021 letter to the U.S. Department of Education, you stated that "annual achievement tests are a critical component of fulfilling the foundational civil rights goals of the Secondary Education Act ("ESEA") as reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act ("ESSA")." Accordingly, you explained that "Pennsylvania complies with federal requirements for administering these annual assessments, for publishing assessment results, and for using such results for prioritizing schools for support and intervention."

Your letter further stated that "Pennsylvania feels a moral imperative to assess students as one means of understanding and documenting learning loss..." By your own words, therefore, the annual achievement tests are a critical component of the evaluation of Pennsylvania's educational system and publication of these results is a critical aspect of that process.

While it is acknowledged that the guidance relating to the 2021 spring PSSA testing offered school districts the option to extend the testing through September of 2021, the reality is that anecdotal evidence and a review of Pennsylvania school districts suggests that few districts took advantage of this extension.

On November 8, 2021, the House Education Subcommittee on Basic Education invited the Department to testify at its hearing on the impact of student learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the Department initially accepted the invitation, on the eve of the hearing you declined to appear. Your testimony submitted for the record opened with the statement that "we anticipate the availability of new and relevant data in the coming weeks."

Over three months later, however, the results of the 2021 PSSA tests still have not been released to the General Assembly and the public, as required. Yet, it is our understanding that the individual results of the PSSA tests have been released to students and parents after being provided to local school districts as early as November 2021.

The release of PSSA test results is important to this legislative body as the results are used for a variety of public policy purposes, including the relevant budgeting and allocation of resources as well as the determination as to revisions to State Education laws. The 2022-2023 budget process has begun, but without the test data we are at great disadvantage in formulating an education plan that provides targeted support for those students and schools who may have been greatly impacted by the pandemic.

Given the above, we see little reason to justify the delay in the public release of the scores from the 2021 PSSA tests; and, therefore, request their immediate release.

Sincerely,



Bryon Cutler
Speaker
House of Representatives



Curt Sonney
Majority Chair
House Education Committee

Handwritten signature or initials, possibly "D. B. [unclear]"