

**Educational Excellence Support Group
of [REDACTED] School District**

Members of the [REDACTED] School Board Curriculum Committee:

[REDACTED]

Re: Raising the Bar for Academic Performance

Dear Board Member,

As a group of concerned parents and taxpayers, we have met several times over the past year to share ideas and resources about obtaining the best possible education for our children. As you reorganize the board and your committee for the coming year, we urge you to raise the bar and promote **academic excellence** and not just proficiency in the [REDACTED] Public Schools.

With the increased emphasis and focus on meeting PSSA “proficiency levels” and with other legally mandated initiatives such as “no child left behind”, we believe that many academically talented students are not receiving adequate academic challenges and support to stimulate and motivate these students to realize, develop and achieve their highest potential. The ideal of striving for excellence and not mediocrity is highlighted in the [REDACTED] mission statement that affirms the goal of “**outstanding** academic and personal achievement.” In emphasizing “academic rigor for ALL students”, [REDACTED] has referenced the Pygmalion research theory that “we will get what we expect.” Our superintendent has indicated that given the demographics of [REDACTED] we should strive higher and expect more from our schools and students. Simply put, we ask you to ensure that the education at [REDACTED] will be of the required rigor and quality to enable our middle and high performing students to excel.

We appreciate that in the high school, AP classes (mostly available in the junior and senior years) help to advance the goals set forth in the [REDACTED] mission statement and provide adequate challenge for our high potential students. However, the most serious issues involve the lack of rigor in many high school honors classes and the lack of effective differentiation in all core subjects in the middle and elementary schools. These deficiencies encourage students to become intellectually lazy and underachieve for a large part of their academic experience. Examples such as replacing the accelerated math program with more [REDACTED], several middle school required books that were read aloud to the accelerated classes appeared on the 4th grade reading Olympics list, 7th grade life science without labs and microscopes, honors courses that fail to cover all of the material on the SAT subject tests, little enrichment or acceleration offered outside the gifted program and instituting the 4sight testing program at schools with low PSSA scores are signals to us that “proficiency” is winning the day over “excellence”.

At all levels and in all core subjects, the school district curriculum needs to manifest the highest potential of our students.

Some of the high achieving students participate in the gifted program, but that program is so relatively under-funded that it cannot provide the single answer for these students and it doesn't reach other students also with great potential. The gifted programs vary greatly from school to school and are usually not designed to enrich or accelerate core curriculum subjects. We applaud the appointment of [REDACTED] to oversee the gifted program. [REDACTED] has met with us and respectfully listened to our concerns as well as interviewed all the stakeholders in gifted education. [REDACTED] has done a great job accelerating curriculum review, encouraging communication and training across all of the gifted teachers and instituting other important changes, including putting individualization back into the GIEP. Even if we achieve a "best practices" gifted program, we believe that at all levels, effective differentiation must take place in the classroom to raise the academic bar.

We specifically ask you to consider three proposals to help provide differentiation and raise the bar of academic performance for our students. First, at the high schools, validate that all honors classes are truly advanced compared to grade level alternatives, and are providing acceleration and enrichment for faster learners. Second, at the middle schools, consider offering honors classes in all core subjects. And third, in the elementary schools, provide the teachers with the training and materials to provide effective differentiation to the high performing students. In boosting the curriculum, we encourage you to provide more challenge and deeper inquiry of a subject matter and not to merely increase the quantity of work required. In an effort to improve gifted programming across the board, we suggest that each gifted teacher share their strongest unit with the other gifted teachers. This information can be very helpful in your efforts to review the gifted curriculum. We are also requesting the formation of a parent/teacher committee to interview and review how other excellent school districts in [REDACTED] Pennsylvania are educating their students with high potential. In a year when budget constraints are present, we believe these are the most cost effective ways to meet the educational needs of our children.

Ultimately, the quality of the education received by a student is a result of the ability of each teacher to ignite and inspire and not just meet proficiency. Our teachers need to receive the practical teaching tools, administrative support and appropriate incentives to promote academic excellence in our students. A wide range of academic opportunities is nice, but if the challenge and enthusiasm is not found in the classroom and endorsed by the board and administration, our students will not reach their potential. Please accept this challenge to raise the educational bar across the district and avoid measures such as teaching to the PSSA test and striving for increased proficiency at the expense of academic excellence.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns. We appreciate your work in making [REDACTED] School District a model of academic excellence.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]