



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
**STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

December 9, 2005

Dr. Robert P. Strauss  
Professor of Economics and Public Policy  
H. John Heinz III School of  
Public Policy and Management  
Carnegie Mellon University  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890

Dear Dr. Strauss:

I write to formally express and document the support of the State Board of Education to the research study that you proposed to the State Board earlier this year. The State Board approved a resolution at a regular Board meeting that formally requested that you update your previous research. The State Board committed a modest financial contribution from its limited resources to support this project.

You presented your previous research findings to the State Board in 1998 in a report titled *Teacher Preparation and Selection in Pennsylvania: Ensuring High Performance Classroom Teachers for the 21st Century*. The report's findings informed the State Board and senior Department of Education officials when they made dramatic changes to state teacher preparation and certification policies in 1999 and 2000. The State Board and Department of Education adopted these policies through formal promulgation of state regulations.

In this age of strong accountability and high stakes testing it is more critical than ever that teachers have both strong content knowledge of the subjects they teach and the pedagogical skills necessary to provide effective instruction to an increasingly diverse student population that includes students with disabilities and limited English proficiency. The State Board asked Dr. Strauss to update and expand his research using newly available data, such as PSSA data and professional education records, that were not available when he first conducted his research in the mid-1990's. This new research will inform state policymakers as to whether the reforms adopted in 1999 and 2000 had their intended impact on the quality of Pennsylvania's teaching force and resulting impact on student achievement.

The timing of this research is critical as the State Board and Department of Education are currently exploring a number of policy options that address early childhood, elementary and special education teacher preparation and certification that most likely will be initiated into the lengthy state regulatory approval process by mid-2006. In addition, the Department and State

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December 9, 2005

Page 2

Board to explore issues of compliance with the highly qualified teacher provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Preliminary discussions have also begun regarding potential future restructuring of teacher preparation and certification requirements for the middle and high school levels. These issues each have significant implications for future student achievement, teacher preparation institutions, school administrators and those aspiring to teach in the Commonwealth. Your research will play an important role in informing these policies. Considerable time will be required to develop consensus among state policymakers and to obtain approval through the state's regulatory approval process.

In addition, Governor Rendell has established the Training America's Teacher's Commission that is currently examining national teacher training models and best practices. It is charged to look at possible solutions where improvements are needed and to recommend ways to address challenges associated with teaching in low-income communities; state-of-the-art high schools; schools with high immigrant, non-English speaking populations; and practices in early education. The Commission is to produce an interim report in December 2005 and a final report in Spring 2006.

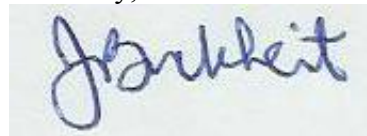
The State Board will consider the preliminary findings from your research along with the recommendations of the Training America's Teacher's Commission in its short term considerations while your final report will inform the ongoing work of the Board to continually review and address how Pennsylvania prepares its teachers for the classroom and provides ongoing support and professional education experiences throughout their careers.

The State Board requested that you update your 1998 report and to answer the following questions:

- Did the teacher preparation/certification reforms enacted in 1999 and 2000 result in changes to those who enter and complete teacher preparation programs?
- Did these reforms produce teachers of higher quality than were produced under the previous policy?
- Did the reforms produce teachers that had a positive impact on student achievement?
- Did the reforms impact employment procedures and practices of school districts?

Policies that impact these issues fall under the authority of the State Board of Education and Department of Education through the state regulations outlined in Chapter 49 (relating to certification of professional personnel) and Chapter 354 (relating to preparation of professional educators) and in Department of Education policies contained in its Teacher Preparation Program Approval Guidelines and Certification and Staffing Policy Guidelines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Buckheit". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a light blue rectangular box.

Jim Buckheit  
Executive Director