

Legislative Report – Mrs. Bishop (written report)

May 2013

Gov. Tom Corbett announced that Ronald J. Tomalis will leave his post as secretary of education on May 31 to become Special Adviser to the Governor on Higher Education. Tomalis, who has been with the administration since January 2011, will be responsible for overseeing, implementing and reviewing the recommendations made by the Governor's Postsecondary Advisory Commission. Corbett has nominated Dr. William E. Harner, superintendent of the Cumberland Valley School District in Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, as the new secretary of education. A former Army officer, Harner has previously worked as a school administrator in Georgia, South Carolina, New Orleans, and Philadelphia, where he grew up. He was a Broad Foundation fellow in 2005. Harner will begin as acting secretary on June 1. His nomination must be confirmed by the Senate.

Responding to mounting criticism of the Common Core academic standards, Governor Corbett has postponed seeking final legislative and regulatory approval of the standards, and recommended some changes to the regulations governing both the standards and end-of-course Keystone Exams that will become a graduation requirement. The standards were scheduled to be approved this week by the House and Senate education committees and the Independent Regulatory Review Commission so that they could be adopted by local school boards and be in place for the start of the 2013-14 school year. This week the Senate and House Education Committees held separate hearings to discuss the standards, which the State Board of Education adopted in 2010 and which were to be finalized under the proposed Chapter 4 regulations approved by the State Board this past March. During the hearings, legislators apparently heard hours of testimony, mostly critical, regarding the proposed standards. Corbett reportedly is not seeking to alter the substance of the proposed standards, nor to change the plan to have the standards take effect before the next school year begin, nor to alter the part of the regulations that ties the standards to the three proposed Keystone exams in biology, algebra, and English literature that are to take effect in 2016-17. The change Corbett is seeking reportedly would underscore that the proposed standards are not uniform national standards.

In a unanimous vote, the PA House adopted House Resolution 139, which tasks the nonpartisan Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a comprehensive study of the process for identifying children as gifted; the process for developing and implementing gifted programs; the cost of providing such programs and services; and a demographic breakdown of the children who benefit from providing such programs and services.