

**Testimony of Diane Castelbuono**  
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**Department of Education**  
**Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee**  
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Good afternoon, Chairman Baker, Chairman Farnese, and members of the Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee.

I am Diane Castelbuono, Deputy Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education at the Department of Education. I would like to provide some information today on the school's educational programming and expenses, as well as its academic performance in order to give you a more insight on the difficult decision to close this school. I also want to update you on the Department's ongoing efforts to transition the school's approximately 270 students to other schools for the fall of 2009.

Scotland School has annual operating costs of \$13.5 million – more than \$45,000 per student for a nine-month academic year. Some of those costs, of course, are associated with the residential nature of the school. But even if those residential costs are removed, Scotland School spends more than \$28,000 per student for academics – making it by far the highest spending public school in the commonwealth.

By comparison, one of the highest spending school districts in Pennsylvania, the Lower Merion School District in Montgomery County, spends about \$25,000 per pupil – a full \$3,000 less per student – and, as I'll discuss in a moment, Lower Merion has a deeper, more rigorous curriculum and stronger academic performance for less money. Even some high-spending school districts that are similar to Scotland in size and rural setting offer a broader array of courses for their students and achieve better academic results.

Last year, the department placed Scotland School in "warning" status after it failed to meet proficiency targets on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment. The PSSA results showed only 38.4 percent of Scotland students were at grade level in mathematics, well below the commonwealth's target of 56 percent. Similarly, only 54.6 percent of its students were at grade level in reading, far short of the target of 63 percent.

Scotland's academic performance does not compare favorably to the five other districts in Franklin County or to the home districts of many of Scotland's students.

Within Franklin County, only Scotland School failed to meet the PSSA target for the percentage of students at grade level in math. And only Scotland School and one other school district failed to meet the PSSA target in reading.

When Scotland's PSSA results are compared to those of 55 charter schools in the Philadelphia region, where the vast majority of Scotland students come from, Scotland ranks below 39 of those charter schools in math and below 22 of them in reading. When compared to Philadelphia School District, Philadelphia overall has a higher percentage of students scoring proficient in math, but a slightly lower percentage of students scoring proficient in reading.

Scotland School does not provide the academic opportunities many of its students could receive in their home school districts. The curriculum lacks high-level courses that would provide challenges to

more advanced students – such as honors courses or Advanced Placement courses – and it offers only one world language course (Spanish).

I mention these facts to highlight that the commonwealth has the duty to provide a quality education to all students and the responsibility of ensuring that taxpayer dollars are invested wisely and economically. Especially in this time of financial crisis, we owe it to Pennsylvania's children, parents and taxpayers to make the most prudent educational investments possible – investments that will impact the largest number of students. It is neither fiscally responsible nor educationally beneficial to continue the operation of a school that costs nearly four times the state average per student yet posts only middling academic results.

Understandably, this is an emotional issue for many here today. Scotland students are rightfully proud, and it boasts a rich tradition that stretches back more than a century. That said, taxpayers also deserve the assurance that their tax dollars are providing the highest quality at the lowest cost.

Our obligation at the Department of Education is to ensure that all students have access to appropriate, high quality educational services that are provided in the most cost-effective manner possible. The reality is that the Scotland School reaches too few students at too great a cost when alternative educational opportunities are readily available.

I am also here to address the Department of Education's support to the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (DMVA), the families, and the resident school districts of these students in their transition. The Department's role is to ensure that students and parents have all the resources and guidance they need in order to easily integrate into a new school environment, whether that means re-enrolling in their home school district or finding placement through alternative educational opportunities such as charter schools or special admissions schools.

The Department of Education has contacted each of the 33 school districts that are the home districts of the Scotland School students. Each school district has notified us that they have been in contact with the students' families and have provided information to each parent regarding the resident school district's programs and enrollment procedures.

The vast majority of Scotland's students – about 200 in all - live in Philadelphia. For these students and families, it appeared best to provide some opportunities very quickly for parents to obtain information about options within the district, and request some special consideration for these students. Department of Education staff have worked closely with Philadelphia School District administrators to provide the following activities and services:

- On Saturday, February 7th, a meeting for parents was held in Philadelphia. Parents of 119 Scotland students attended this meeting at the school district headquarters. DMVA provided information regarding the school closure, and the School District of Philadelphia provided information to parents on options, including charter schools, special admissions schools, and JROTC.
- On Saturday, February 21, the Commonwealth held another meeting for families; there were 43 families in attendance, representing 48 students.
- The Philadelphia School District has extended its application deadline for Scotland School parents to apply to magnet and other special admissions school programs. Charter schools in

Philadelphia also extended their application deadlines specifically to accommodate Scotland students.

- The Department has requested the Philadelphia School District and the city's charter schools again extend their application deadlines by another two weeks to provide all Scotland School parents further opportunity to apply. This request would extend the deadline to March 20th for parents to make application.
- PDE staff has worked with DMVA to have Philadelphia students' records provided to their parents, so that they would have the necessary information in time for the aforementioned February 21 meeting, to include with their applications.
- A single point of contact within Philadelphia School District has been designated to receive the application material for Scotland School students.

For the other school districts, PDE assigned two staff members to notify each of the districts of the planned closure of the school and provide them each with the students' and parents' names and addresses. We stressed the need for the district staff to make individual contact with each family to provide information on options within the school district and any deadlines that apply. Each district designated a contact person who reported to us that they made contact with the family.

These efforts have been working. I am pleased to report that at this time:

- 47 Scotland School students have applied to magnet and special admissions schools.
- Six Scotland School students are enrolled in a charter school of their choice for 2009-10.
- An additional 18 students have applied to charter schools (their admission to their chosen charter school will be determined by the lottery which is required under state law).
- Three students have applied to other residential schools.

While the proposed closure of Scotland School does mark the end of an era, it also presents new opportunities for the students. We will continue to serve as a resource for the families and districts as they make this transition, and we will be in contact with each district until all students are enrolled in a public school or their choice of another educational program for 2009-10.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.