

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
State Board of Education
PUBLIC HEARING
ON
HIGH SCHOOL REFORM**

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Parkland Senior High School

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Testimony to Pennsylvania State Board of Education

Good morning. I am Mary Kay Grim, senior vice president of human resources for Lehigh Valley Health Network. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide testimony today. I commend the State Board of Education for taking a closer look at high school education requirements across the Commonwealth. As you know, there is a mandate for health care reform nationally, so I am very aware of the on-going assessment, reassessment and challenges needed to keep our nation in the forefront of innovation, intellectual enterprise, good health and economic prosperity.

Under that mantle of reform, Lehigh Valley Health Network operates as a charitable, not-for-profit organization in an environment of continuous learning and improvement. We understand that in a fast-moving, competitive world, what was good enough yesterday, is not necessarily good enough today, and most certainly will not be good enough tomorrow. We're constantly raising our standards in health care. As a result, I applaud your interest in ensuring education standards are raised as well. Employers depend on our local schools to produce quality high school graduates. With predictions of physician shortages in the future, we also depend on local school systems to provide the foundation necessary to send a robust supply of high school graduates onto further education to become the highly trained health care professionals of tomorrow.

That being said, I come before you today not as an expert on education reform, ready to discuss the detailed impact of the proposed Graduation Competency Assessments, but rather as a human resources representative from the largest employer in the Lehigh Valley, responsible for hiring people with a wide variety of skill sets for an even wider variety of positions. In an effort to address your concerns about the validity and meaning of a high school diploma to employers, I hope to provide insight on the qualities and characteristics we look for in future employees who come to us as high school graduates for our entry level positions. I'll also discuss the methods we use to determine which applicants fit into our health network's caring culture, and ensure employees are performing the job that best suits their skills. It may surprise you what we value in the hiring process.

We employ 9,500 people, many of whom are clinical professionals requiring advanced degrees. However, more than 300 positions within our health network require only a high school diploma. In 2008, 34 percent of our new hires were chosen to fill one of these positions.

Because of the uncertain and uneven skills required to obtain a high school diploma, and to help determine an applicant's other abilities to be successful in an entry level position straight from high school, we administer a nationally standardized pre-employment assessment called WorkKeys as part of the application process. This assessment provides more detailed information about the applicants' ability to listen, work as part of a team, observe what's going on around them, and comprehend written information. The reading assessment focuses on materials usually found in the workplace like memos, signs, notices and regulations. The results of this assessment, which are

provided to us through a partnership with Lehigh Carbon Community College, help us determine which entry level position is best suited for each applicant.

WorkKeys quotes an American Management Association survey in 2000 as finding that 38 percent of job applicants taking these tests lacked the reading and math skills necessary for the jobs for which they applied. I can tell you that over the last ten years we have seen an increase in the number of applicants for entry level positions who are unable to obtain satisfactory scores on these simple skills. Last year, 30 percent of our applicants failed the WorkKeys test.

Another important part of our hiring process includes an attitude and behavioral assessment survey that all applicants are required to complete. This assessment is a vital tool in determining which applicants have the behavioral skills necessary to work in our health network.

Obviously, as a health care provider, we are a behavioral-based organization. We recognize that we can teach an employee the necessary technical skills to provide the best possible care if they come to us with at least the basic reading, writing and math skills. We cannot, however, teach an employee the behavioral skills that are a crucial component of the delivery of that care. These skills include work ethic, attendance, energy, teamwork, customer focus, compassion, flexibility, multitasking, valuing diversity and openness to learning—skills that need to be developed and reinforced during the early education and formative years.

Although you may think this is unique to health care, my human resources colleagues in other industries also embrace this notion that the successful employee of the future will need to demonstrate these behaviors while the organization provides

opportunities for continuous learning and retraining as the need for new technical skills emerge.

Long after an applicant is hired, we continue to focus on behavioral, in addition to technical skills. Forty percent of each employee's annual evaluation score is based on their ability to exhibit our health network's PRIDE behaviors. PRIDE – an acronym that stands for Privacy, Respect, Involvement, Dignity and Empathy – encompass the behavioral skills Lehigh Valley Health Network believes every patient and family member deserves while receiving care.

This attention to behavior has paid off with great health care outcomes. According to the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Lehigh Valley Health Network reported the lowest heart attack mortality rate in the country, as reported by *USA TODAY* in August of 2008. We've learned our behaviors, in addition to our technical skills, produce great outcomes.

I cannot stress enough that Lehigh Valley Health Network seeks out applicants who wish to be continuous learners. As a teaching health network, the education of our workforce is part of our mission. Through our tuition reimbursement benefit, we encourage employees to return to school and further their education.

In these turbulent economic times, we've found that hiring and retaining quality people is the most important ingredient in building and maintaining a successful organization. The attention to hiring the right people has created a culture that led to Lehigh Valley Health Network being named one of *FORTUNE* magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" three years in a row. The men and women who comprise our health network go above and beyond. They provide the highest quality care for people of

our community—and so much more. They have a passion for what they do. They have genuine feelings about the people they care for and work with. They want to be a member of a team that can accomplish more than any one individual. In addition to basic academic skills these are the qualities today's high school graduates need to be career ready.

So as you look for ways to standardize the meaning and significance of a high school diploma, I urge you to consider these other essential qualities as well. I wish you great success in your efforts and thank you again for the opportunity to share my thoughts today.