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Woodland Hills School District
Resolution 399-08

Resolution To Oppose the Mandate of PSSA/GCA as a State Graduation Requirement

The Board of Directors for the Woodland Hills School District, uphold a passionate conviction that effective quality education is best accomplished through the process of local control which considers the unique needs of the specific community being served. It is for this reason that we take most seriously our Woodland Hills School District's mission:

"Woodland Hills School District makes students its first priority. The District provides each student with an excellent educational experience that is driven by the highest expectations and prepares students for meaningful participation in all facets of society."

WHEREAS, the Board of School Directors of the Woodland Hills School District, acknowledge the significance of accountability, the need for high academic standards, and assessment of such for providing Adequate Yearly Progress as per The No Child Left Behind Act. We wish to affirm our opposition to the proposed GCA (Graduation Competency Assessment) for the following reasons:

The proposed GCA essentially erodes local control of graduation requirements by forcing them to be "rubberstamped" by an additional paper and pencil test. In effect it is saying that local school districts and school boards are ineffective at measuring the success of their students. It is our belief that our own local standards and criteria for graduation are more rigorous and far exceed those of current state standards.

Broad based curriculum should be guided by the leaders who represent the rights of the citizens in each community, affording students unique academic opportunities, which enable them to pursue individualized dreams and life success. This will be undermined by the necessity of teaching to the test and causing difficult choices to be made by local boards when establishing curriculum and programs that offer a broader range of knowledge opportunity and experience. Although the proposal establishes a 'voluntary' model curriculum aligned with State academic standards in each GCA content area, it is inevitable that State wide uniform curriculums will become required to meet State standards due to the specifics of the test and cost of creating your own local curriculum, thus narrowing the course offerings at the local school district level.

The high stakes nature of the new requirement does not take into consideration the diversity of learning venues for students who learn and assimilate information in a variety of ways. To say that all students test the same, whether they are taking college prep, vocational courses, language students, fine arts, or the sciences is simply inaccurate.

The PSSA is already given as a means by which to measure the effectiveness of curriculum and teaching methods that serve to meet required State standards. The PSSA is just one tool that should be used to guide the proficiency needs of an individual student throughout his or her educational career. From the earliest time given in third grade, an individual plan for successful learning should take place at the classroom level on a continuum.

We currently have rigorous pre-testing and student achievement mapping procedures in place with continued priority of development as a main focus to creating individualizing intervention for academic success. Furthermore, in high school, the PSSA and GCA tests do not account for other important skills of proficiency being learned, such as conducting laboratory experiments, public speaking, research papers, dissecting robotic engines, drawing CAD, specific art ability and other hands-on learning skills. An additional test at graduation is too late to correct a missed opportunity at guiding proficiency in core curriculum.


Although the proposal provides an option for a local assessment to be given – it is done so in a manner of conditional constraint. The local assessment, according to new guidelines, would require local assessments to be "independently and objectively validated by a vendor" selected from a list of approved vendors published every five years by the Secretary after obtaining approval from the State Board. In addition there are validation and method requirements, all at complete cost to the local school district. After all of that cost and effort, the test options are subject to change as per the Secretary of Education. This will most definitely create a need for additional staff, professional development, curriculum adoption and difficult budget decisions. In effect, it appears to be a built-in disincentive to select the local assessment option.

The economic impact and true cost to tax payers at both the state and local level has not yet been determined. More money will be spent with no proof of necessity. How will we measure the success of this endeavor, by another test and research studies to prove or refute the effectiveness? What is success? Is it to say that every student has passed the test or should we be looking at how many students are successfully employed 5 years after graduation? The fact is that more money will be spent by local tax payers to implement measures to comply with offering the test 3 times a year, offering courses to guarantee success specific to the content of the test, to purchase testing materials that are approved by the Secretary of Education, to evaluate the effectiveness of our process and test materials: additional staff and staff development, additional policies and the cost related to internal and external measures of validity, and so on...This money will ultimately come from difficult budget decisions and tax dollars on both a local and state level.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Woodland Hills School District directs the Superintendent to send copies of this resolution to the State Board of Education, the Office of the Honorable Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Secretary of Education of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, to the chairs of both the Pennsylvania House and Senate Education committees, and to our local representatives in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Senate.

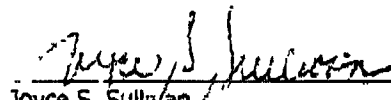
FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the Woodland Hills School District hereby directs the Superintendent and our Board President to communicate this resolution to other school districts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and to the members of our community, encouraging other school boards and individuals to take similar action in support of this issue.

RESOLVED, this 9th day of April, 2008.



Marilyn W. Messina, President
Woodland Hills Board of School Directors

ATTEST:



Joyce S. Sullivan
Board Secretary

(SEAL)