

Prepared for a Lifetime of Success

Senior Year Demonstration – Class of 2006

Purpose

The *Senior Year Demonstration* will provide a rigorous alternative to the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) so that all high school seniors in the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) will have at least two opportunities to demonstrate their preparation for success beyond high school.

Eligibility

High school seniors who have successfully completed, or are on target to complete, all of their classroom requirements but have not yet passed both sections of the CAHSEE will be eligible to participate in the Senior Year Demonstration.

Goals

The WCCUSD Senior Year Demonstration is designed to:

- Provide an empowering experience for students as they document and demonstrate the skills and knowledge that have prepared them for success after high school.
- Offer a dynamic process that highlights complex skills needed for success in both college and work: collaboration, teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving.
- Create space for students to identify and synthesize their own culture, language, history, perspective and creativity to reveal authentic voice and leadership.
- Enable community, business and academic leaders to actively engage WCCUSD high school seniors by serving as panelists and participants in an interactive closing event.
- Allow WCCUSD to convey its core values for teaching and learning by implementing a more fair and accurate means of assessing academic achievement.

Core Values

The following core values have been incorporated into the development of the WCCUSD Senior Year Demonstration:

- Education is a basic human right, not a privilege.
- Academic development must be supported and culturally relevant.
- Youth and family leadership are fundamental to strong schools.
- Transparency and collaborative decision-making are essential.

Focus Areas

- *Career Path:* To ensure economic self-sufficiency, graduating seniors – regardless of their academic and career paths – must be equipped to effectively match their skills and interests to available opportunities within an increasingly complex marketplace.
- *Civic Participation:* To promote a flourishing, effective and participatory democracy, graduating seniors must have knowledge of and exposure to civic engagement, public policy, political processes and legal rights.

- *Community Health:* To enhance the physical and emotional health of individuals, families and neighborhoods, graduating seniors must be cognizant of the critical ingredients for a healthy and vibrant community.

Meeting State Standards

The Senior Year Demonstration will employ a number of adult “coaches” who will help program participants identify specific state standards for which they can demonstrate mastery through a variety of research-based measures.

For example, specific state standards for language arts could be applied in either an oral presentation or written narrative (fiction or non-fiction) to demonstrate how a summer internship prepared a particular student for his career and how that experience has placed him on a road towards a lifelong dream of becoming a writer.

The underlying principle of the Senior Year Demonstration is that state standards will be applied as a tool for students to demonstrate that they are ready for life after high school.

Program Design

Students will work in teams that serve as support networks for troubleshooting, providing feedback, building morale and evaluating work. Teams also will critically examine their experiences – in and out of high school – and make recommendations to WCCUSD.

Utilizing their individual strengths and interests, students can demonstrate readiness for success after high school through a number of research-based methods:

- *Portfolios:* Students may compile samples of their best work, ask teachers or employers for qualitative evaluations or create new work to include in the portfolios.
- *Selected Subject Area:* Students may focus on one subject to show their readiness for graduation. For example, a student might amplify her grasp of science through an experiment and draw connections between the project and her chosen career path.
- *Action Research:* Individuals and teams of students may select a community issue from which to explore, analyze, develop recommendations and present findings.

A combination of methods will be used in the demonstration of student knowledge: written, oral, visual, theatrical and others. Students in WCCUSD have a wide array of talents and skills, and they should be given ample room to display them.

Next Steps

Pending approval by the WCCUSD Board of Education, a team of students, teachers, staff and community leaders, would marshal the requisite resources and support to further refine and implement the Senior Year Demonstration before the June 2006 graduation.

In addition, the WCCUSD General Counsel would create a waiver to be signed by all participants and, where appropriate, their parents or legal guardians which acknowledges that the State of California could initiate legal action that might jeopardize the diplomas.

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A Statement of Beliefs and Actions In Support of Our Students

WHEREAS the West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) Board of Education believes that any student who has passed the requisite high school courses and has demonstrated readiness for success beyond high school will have satisfied all of the state and local requirements for a fully-accredited diploma; and

WHEREAS the WCCUSD Board of Education believes that academic achievement is far too complex to be accurately measured by any one instrument and that the California high school exit exam is merely one of many educationally-sound and rigorous methods to assess a student's ability to be successful after high school; and

WHEREAS many students in WCCUSD may not have been provided with an equal opportunity to learn, due in part to inadequate funding provided to WCCUSD and to the lack of available teachers who are credentialed to teach the material on the exit exam; and

WHEREAS students who do not receive a high school diploma will suffer significant adverse educational, economic and social consequences, such as not qualifying for certain jobs, university admissions or financial aid; and

WHEREAS WCCUSD may be depriving these students of the benefits of their fundamental right to a public education and of their constitutional rights by depriving them of a diploma after they have passed all requisite courses for high school graduation, including multiple courses in math and English.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the WCCUSD Board of Education confer diplomas to all students who pass the requisite high school courses and successfully complete the high school exit exam or WCCUSD Senior Year Demonstration; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WCCUSD Board of Education provide a Senior Year Demonstration that utilizes rigorous, research-based measures of academic achievement, such as portfolios, exhibits, presentations and action research; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WCCUSD Board of Education call upon the Superintendent to work with students, teachers, staff and parents to infuse the values and approaches of the Senior Year Demonstration within the high school curriculum; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the WCCUSD Board of Education call upon the state and federal government to provide the necessary funding to ensure all students have access to the full range of educational programs and support services to create broader opportunities for academic achievement and preparation for success after high school.