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| 2 Senior Project Next Steps  Local high schools considering modified ‘senior project’  Senior Project eliminated as a district-wide requirement, alternative  graduation requirements considered  By Kirsten Read  Journal Correspondent  While Senior Project was cancelled as a district-wide graduation requirement at a board of trustees meeting July 12, local high schools are still considering requiring alternative or modified versions of the project.  Jeff Tooker, assistant superintendent for educational services for the district, said it is too early to tell what high schools will do, but plans to discuss options are in place.  “This is an action that took place over the summer, so we’re going to have a thoughtful process of deciding what will happen next,” Tooker said. “Right now our principals are extremely busy getting ready for the first day of school, but later we’ll have inclusive conversations with principals and educational leaders of each of the schools, as well as curriculum and instruction specialists. We will include the community via the school site councils.”  A board of trustees workshop will also be held to discuss what each of the local high schools wishes to accomplish regarding an adaptation of senior project.  “I think each schools going to handle it differently over this next year,” Tooker said. “We’re not using the word ‘senior project,’ but are discussing what’s going to happen next. Regarding what that looks like in the end of the year, people don’t know, but we’re discussing it. We’re thinking about it as a ‘senior culminating assessment,’ and deciding what that might be. It’s just premature, and I think that’s what the community needs to know.”  Superintendent Dave Horsey agreed.  “We’re putting together a task force to identify what sort of senior culminating activity we want and what that would look like,” Horsey said. “Our initial plans are to include teachers and at some point community members and business leaders. It’s going to take a good year process to go through that and have those discussions.”  Horsey feels that it is important to the district that students continue to showcase their skills at the end of their high school career, and are looking for a new way in which that can be accomplished.  “We still value that component, it’s just that we wanted to encompass across all disciplines instead of a few areas,” he said.  For the coming academic year, Superintendent Dave Horsey said Placer High School will be continuing senior project, while other schools in the district are not completing the project in its past form.  “The senior project has been part of the English curriculum for over 20 years,” Peter Efstathiu, principal of Placer High School, said. “We have not changed, and we are going to be continuing that way in the coming year. It’s been a long time here at the school. The community really loves it and enjoys it and is very supportive of the teachers.”  Financial support is one issue.  “In the past, the district always supported us financially for the senior project, and that won’t be there anymore [after this upcoming year],” Efstathiu said. “They are not going to remove everything that they’ve been supporting in the past for the time being, but obviously things could change. [Their support] helps pay for the organization of the senior boards, substitute days for English teachers who grade the senior project papers, as well as materials for students. While we don’t know how not having that support will change the project, we do know that we’re going to continue as is for the 2011-2012 school year.”  Efstathiu agrees it is too early to tell what the long-term affect will be across the district.  “It’s in wet cement, I like to say,” Efstathiu said. “You see things happening differently in different places. I just think it’s one of many things that are changing in education. I don’t really know if I have much of a reaction; I don’t know if it has sunken in yet.”  Sue Lunsford, principal of Foresthill High School, is looking forward to seeing alternatives emerge in the near future.  “We are not going to be having senior project this year, Lunsford said. “We may do something through our government and economics class in the spring, but it wouldn’t be a graduation requirement like senior project was.”  Lunsford is optimistic that a similar but improved and updated project will emerge.  “We’re very excited about the possibility about replacing [senior project] with something that is maybe a little more relevant for 21st century skills,” Lunsford said. “We’ve been talking about senior project and making changes to it as a district over the past couple of years, and now we’re going to spend some time looking at what would be more relevant. It’s important that students get the opportunity to perform in an academic setting. Looking at my staff and feedback from the community, I think that’s part of the experience that is incredibly worthwhile.”  Lunsford said she understood the decision to eliminate senior project as a district-wide graduation requirement because there seemed to be a common mentality of reaching a new arrangement.  “I wasn’t at all surprised by the board’s decision,” Lunsford said. “That decision was not made in a vacuum; there was a lot of input. The district is interested in requiring something different, but there needs to be some time in there. It’s difficult to look at creating something new while continuing the past project. There will be a different kind of project in the future, but what that is remains to be seen. It will be interesting to find out.” |