**13 Senior Project Decision**

**Board of Trustees votes to eliminate senior project**

Alternate graduation requirements suggested

By Kirsten Read

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Yesterday, the Placer Union High School District Board of Trustees voted to kill the district-wide graduation requirement of a senior project. After extensive debate and public comment, board member Charles Wallgren motioned that the Senior Project be eliminated as a graduation requirement. Lynn McDonald, board member, proposed an amendment that required a replacement project by Fall 2013, which received no second vote. The board then voted eight in favor of eliminating the Senior Project as a graduation requirement, none opposed.

Jeff Tooker, Assistant Supervisor for Educational Services, said that he felt teachers in general had been “overwhelmed with the process and underwhelmed with the product ” regarding Senior Projects.

“The Senior Project is not coherent with what else is happening across the curriculum,” said Tooker. “The rhetorical question that I’ve been asking of the last couple of years is ‘can there be something else?’ There needs to be something that will provide students with the chance to say ‘this is what I learned in high school, and this is how I’m going to use it in the future.’”

Dave Horsey, District Superintendent, stated that most students chose to do something simple. According to Horsey, a senior project should demonstrate that students have the ability to “think through and solve a problem” and “work in multiple disciplines.” Ron Oates, board member, seemed to be in agreement that senior project need not be eliminated, simply replaced.

“We understand [the project’s] creativity and its importance,” said Oates. “But there needs to be more mentorship involvement.” Oates feels that some utilize the opportunity senior project provides, while others don’t, but recognizes the “tremendous amount of talent in this district.”

In regard to creating an alternate graduation requirement, Oates said, “We can’t keep doing PLC (Professional Learning Communities), continuing the current senior project, and constructing a new one in the current environment.”

Steve Trombetta, longtime Colfax High School math teacher, suggested that PLC time, which involves collaboration among teachers across the district, be used to reinvent the Senior Project. He was unwilling to see the Senior Project simply disappear.

“It’s part of our school culture and it keeps the students active and engaged until the very end,” said Trombetta.

One thing the board seemed to be in agreement on was the idea that the senior project has various forms and expectations across different schools in the district.

Rick Brown, retired Colfax High School teacher, suggested a tightening of the requirements so that “senior projects are more similar to reflect what Placer Union High School District wants of its graduates.” He pointed out the need for a “common thread.”

“It’s ironic that in an age of standardization we are talking about very different forms of senior project at each school,” said Brown. “Senior project does not reflect the integration and collaboration of schools as it should.”

“There has never been a district input component to it,” added board member Maureen Ward. “It needs to be something we can measure.”

While the Senior Project is being eliminated as a district-wide senior project, it does not mean similar projects cannot exist at high schools within that district.

“I wish they would have said in the motion that this is being eliminated specifically as a district requirement,” said Pam Robie Hart, Placer County Office of Education board member and Auburn native.

“Schools have the flexibility to continue using various aspects of the senior project,” Oates reinforced.

Hart feels that “to get rid of [the Senior Project] as a graduation requirement right now would not be giving [the students] the right message.”

Doug Summers, Auburn resident who has had two children graduate from Placer High School with another to enter senior year in the fall, expressed similar wishes to keep senior project.

“From a parent standpoint, I think it’s a fantastic program,” said Summers. “To throw the whole Senior Project away is short-sighted. I understand that it’s a staffing and money issue, but I hate to see it go away, because I don’t think it will come back.”