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To: Members of the New York State Assembly

Thank you for the invitation to attend the upcoming forum on March 3, 2016. Unfortunately, a member of our administrative team will not be able to attend, however Hewlett-Woodmere Public Schools shares the concerns expressed in many forums held throughout the State regarding the lack of diploma options for New York students. At your request, we submit the following as our written testimony for your consideration.

1. The consequences of the elimination of the Local High School Diploma are vast and varied. Graduation rates will plummet, and in best case scenarios, students will require five years to meet the new requirements and graduate, rather than the typical four years. The most unfortunate by-product of this decision is that it negatively affects the neediest of populations, the struggling learner. The recent adoption of the amendment to the appeals process simply waters down requirements in the hopes that more students will be able to pass.

Perhaps the most devastating of consequences is the fact that both the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential and the Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential (stand-alone) provide students with limited options for future success. These “less-than” credentials are not recognized by institutions of higher education, employers, or the military as high school diplomas, significantly reducing opportunities for advanced study or employment. These credentials identify recipients as students with disabilities because they are only awarded to students with IEPs, which could compromise confidentiality.

This decision has resulted in anxiety-ridden parents and apathetic students who see nothing but limitations to future success, hardly a motivator for achievement. The Local High School Diploma provided an avenue that now no longer exists for the students who needed it most.

A Regents Diploma should be an option, not a requirement.

2. The use of performance based assessments and multiple pathways to graduation would be most welcome and helpful to all student populations because they would provide students with different learning styles the ability to demonstrate understanding of course subject matter. Meaningful performance based assessments provide options to showcase critical thinking and abstract skills through performance tasks, rather than through the use of standardized methods that typically require little more than recall.
3. It is extremely challenging for students to complete a BOCES, career, or technical education program in four years because of the amount of time they are out of the high school building. The expansive coursework they now have to complete, on top of their ancillary educational studies, is prohibitive. The new requirement provides students who are seeking a post high school career path with virtually no options.
4. We believe that the Regents Competency Tests should be reinstated to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate a core level of knowledge and understanding on a standardized exam. The RCTs would provide a pathway for struggling learners to achieve a legitimate high school diploma, one that would be recognized by colleges and universities, employers, and the United States Military.

Once again, thank you for reaching out to us to seek commentary on this most important topic. Revisions to the current pathways toward achieving a high school diploma would benefit large numbers of the neediest students throughout New York State. While we are certainly not opposed to rigorous standards, we do believe that one size most certainly does not fit all.

It is our fervent hope that the forum on March 3 is successful in underscoring the importance of significant change to the pathways to graduation for New York students. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide further information.

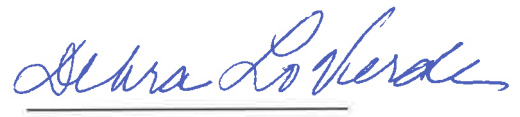
Sincerely,



Ralph Marino, Jr., Ed.D.
Superintendent



Mark Secaur
Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum & Instruction



Debra Lo Verde, Ed.D.
Executive Director of
Special Education Services

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cc: HW Board of Education
HW District Leadership Team
HW Central Council PTA Co-Presidents
HW SEPTA Co-Presidents