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AN OVERVIEW OF WALLINGFORD'S PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR GRADUATION

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PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR GRADUATION

A Summary

To graduate from the Wallingford Public Schools a student must have earned not only a minimum credits and have met the credit distribution requirement, but also the student must satisfactorily demonstrated the district's performance standards English and mathematics. Performance standards in science and social studies will be added at a later date.

I. **DEMONSTRATION OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**: A student may demonstrate the performance standard in any subject by either of the following means:

A. Achieving the state goal on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (Note: the state goal on the combined language arts score was used for English with the first generation of the CAPT. We have not decided at this time what score will be used for English with the second generation CAPT.)

or

B. Satisfactorily completing a district performance task.

II. DISTRICT PERFORMANCE TASKS

A. English: A student who has not met the C.A.P.T. goal shall, in the senior year, respond to a literature-based question in writing that is focused, organized, elaborated, and edited for standard English conventions. The questions are modeled after the C.A.P.T. response to literature question.

B. Mathematics: A student who has not met the C.A.P.T. goal shall satisfactorily complete two our of three multistep mathematical problems that require demonstration of basic math operations including fractions or decimals. The student will be provided with any required formulas and may use a calculator in completing the task. The student will explain in writing or in a pictorial, graphical, or algebraic representation either how he/she arrived at each answer or justify each answer.

III. SCORING OF THE DISTRICT PERFORMANCE TASKS

A. A committee of teachers from the subject area is currently determining satisfactory completion of the performance task, and teachers are released from classes to participate in the scoring. Each student response is reviewed independently by two teachers using a district rubric. Both scorers must accept as satisfactory the completed performance task from a student in order for the student's work to be considered as passing. If the two teachers disagree on the acceptability of the work, a third teacher will review it. The student's current teacher may not serve as one of these reviewers.

B. The district is currently piloting the use of an outside scoring service for the tasks. The scoring service is being asked to use the district-developed rubrics as the basis for the scoring.

(September 2001)

Frequently Asked Questions About

WALLINGFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS'

PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR GRADUATION

1. WHEN DID WE IMPLEMENT THIS GRADUATION REQUIREMENT?

A. English – beginning with the Class of 1999

B. Mathematics – beginning with the Class of 2000

2. WHY DID WE ESTABLISH THE PEFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR GRADUATION?

Dr. Joseph Cirasuolo, Superintendent of Schools, has long believed that public education needed some criteria for graduation that would require students to demonstrate that they could apply basic learning skills. Since the *Nation at Risk Report* (1983), a large percentage of the American public has been led to believe that large numbers of students are graduating from all schools without control of those basic skills. Dr. Cirasuolo was convinced that this was not the case in our district, but saying it was so was not enough.

So he began pursuing a performance standard in the district. Dr. Cirasuolo uses the analogy of obtaining a driver's license to exemplify in simple terms why he sought a performance requirement. To obtain a driver's license, you must pass a written test, but you cannot obtain the license until you also demonstrate that you can actually drive the car.

A committee of teachers and administrators spent almost two years discussing potential "exit criteria" for graduation. They concluded that to establish and measure performance standards in all subjects would be a monumental task and probably not worth the investment of time that would be required to development and implement exit criteria.

When Dr. LeRoy Hay was hired as Assistant Superintendent for Instruction for the district, he was asked by the superintendent to continue exploring this issue. Dr. Hay worked with the district's Curriculum Department Head, Mrs. Alice Jackson and the district's Curriculum Council to try and establish performance standards and performance tasks that would allow students to demonstrate meeting those standards in a way that intruded on instruction as minimally as possible.

The result was the creation of district performance standards in English and mathematics and the performance tasks now administered in the district.

3. IS THIS A GUARANTEE TO THE PUBLIC THAT STUDENTS WITH A DIPLOMA WILL BE ABLE TO DEMONSTRATE THE SKILLS IDENTIFIED IN THE PERFORMANCE STANDARD ONCE THEY LEAVE SCHOOL?

The performance task is not a guarantee of future performance. What it does is reassure us that students are capable of performing to a certain standard when they really must do so.

4. DIDN'T WE REALLY ESTABLISH PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AS A WAY TO IMPROVE C.A.PT. SCORES?

The original plan was to require all students to demonstrate the standards by completing the district's performance tasks. A group of teachers who were opposed to the concept of performance standards suggested that we simply use the C.A.P.T. results in some way instead of creating our own assessments.

We knew that the C.A.P.T. could not be used as a graduation requirement according to state law. However, this led us to the idea of accepting the achievement of the C.A.P.T. goal in lieu of demonstrating the performance standard(s) via the district performance task.

By doing so, we reduced significantly the number of students who had to be assessed with the district performance tasks, and, serendipitously, we added motivation for students to try and meet the state goal on the C.A.P.T. Students have learned that there is much less pressure in your senior year if you have already met the district's performance standards.

5. WHAT ARE WALLINGFORD'S PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

The district presently has performance standards in English and mathematics as follows:

- **English:** The student must respond to a literature-based question in writing that is focused, organized, elaborated, and edited for standard English conventions. The question for the essay should require students to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of a piece of literature and to relate the literature to their own lives. Students will read the piece of literature in advance but will not be given the question in advance. Students will write the response in one class period and then revise and edit the writing in the next class period.

- **Mathematics:** The student must satisfactorily complete two out of three multistep mathematical problems that require demonstration of basic math operations including fractions or decimals and conceptual understandings in mathematics. Both problems must be completed in one regular class period. The student will be provided with any required formulas and may use a calculator in completing the task. The student will explain in writing or in a pictorial, graphical, or algebraic representation either how he/she arrived at each answer or justify each answer.

The district expects to add performance standards in Science.

6. IF ALL STUDENTS, EXECEPT THOSE EXEMPTED, ARE MEETING THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS, WHY DO WE NEED THEM ALL? ARE THE STANDARDS TOO EASY?

We do have students who struggle to meet the performance standards, but we thought all along that most, if not all, of our students would be able to demonstrate the standards when the possibility of not graduating became real to them. Our goal has always been to have all students, except for those exempted for valid reasons, leave our district in control of basic skills.

7. DO THE PERFORMANCE STANDARDS APPLY TO ALL STUDENTS?

A. All students except for the severely mentally retarded attempt to meet the performance standards at least once.

B. Students with identified learning disabilities that could militate against their meeting the standard may be exempted from one or more criteria on the rubric or exempted from this graduation requirement. This is determined by the Planning and Placement Team after the student has made at least one attempt to meet the standards.

C. A student whose primary language is not English may be exempted from the district performance requirement or some aspect of that requirement in one or more subjects if the student has been in the United States for three or fewer years. The need for the exemption must be directly attributable to the language limitations of the student. Exemptions are to be granted by the building principal, and the principal's decision is final.

8. WHAT ARE THE PERFORMANCE TASKS LIKE AND WHO CREATES THEM?

Once we decided to accept achieving the state goal on the C.A.P.T. in lieu of the district performance task, we committed to using the format of the C.A.P.T. questions for our tasks. We refer to our tasks as being "C.A.P.T.-like."

A. The English task is created by each classroom teacher. Sometime during the month designated for the task, the teacher must teach a short story (or other completed work of prose) and then assign a performance task requiring the students to respond to the piece of literature.

The district has developed criteria that establish appropriate literature for the task, and the response question must mirror the "Response to Literature" question on the C.A.P.T.

B. The mathematics questions are now being developed during summer by a team of teachers led by the Mathematics Resource Teacher. Five sets of problems are developed for each administration of the performance task in the follow areas of mathematics: algebra, geometry, elements of mathematics (the basic level courses), business/consumer mathematics, and probability and statistics. The problems are based on conceptual understandings and essential questions in mathematics in each of those areas.

9. HOW ARE THE TASKS SCORED?

A. Tasks are scored by district high school teachers on released time. All English and mathematics teachers are required to participate in the scoring at some time during the year. The scoring requires 2-4 days away from classes during the first round of the administration of the task each year. No teacher may score his/her own students.

B. Scoring sessions begin with an "inter-rater reliability" process that is facilitated by the curriculum resource teacher in the area. The scoring sessions then are facilitated by the department head in the subject from one of the two high schools.

C. Each student response is scored by two teachers and both must evaluate the response as a "pass" in order for the student to meet the performance standard. If one scorer rates a response as passing and another as failing, the third scorer rates the paper.

10. ARE WE CONCERNED ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF TIME AWAY FROM CLASSES THAT THE TEACHERS SPEND ON EVALUATNG THE PERFORMANCE TASKS?

Yes, we are not pleased that teachers lose so much class time in scoring the tasks. Thus we have explored hiring an outside vendor to score the tasks. Our first attempt at this was not successful because the scores from the outside vendor and the scores on the same tasks evaluated by our teachers were not consistent enough. We plan to continue pursuing outside scoring.

11. WHAT UNEXPECTED PROBLEMS HAVE WE RUN INTO IN ADMINISTERING THE ASSESSMENTS?

A. Duplicating assessment materials (e.g., multiple copies of each student's responses for the scorers), preparing letters for students and parents with the results of the assessment, and recording the results necessitated significant clerical assistance before the assessments as well as during and after the scoring sessions.

B. Originally we were going to allow English teachers to assess their students using whatever piece of literature they were teaching at the time. We soon realized that the scorer would need to know the piece of literature, and we couldn't expect all scorers to have read and remembered all novels or full-length plays that might be taught in English classes. Thus we had to require the use of a short story or a chapter of a novel that can stand alone. The scorers now can read the piece of literature that the students are responding to before evaluating the responses.

C. Someone has to oversee the entire process. Currently the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and the language arts and mathematics resource teachers have the responsibility. This, however, has been an "add-on" to their responsibilities and is very time consuming throughout the year. The district has begun to consider the need for a test coordinator.

12. WHAT UNEXPECTED BENEFITS HAVE RESULTED FROM THE PROCESS?

Having our teachers discuss and debate the criteria for meeting our performance standards turned out to be excellent professional development! When they began to develop a rubric for scoring the performance tasks, they soon realized that they embraced a wide variety of standards and expectations relative to the standards. The English teachers, for example, spent many hours trying to come to agreement as to what criteria were most important in judging a written response to a piece of literature. The mathematics teachers did the same in deciding what students needed to demonstrate in solving problems besides getting the right answer.

The scoring sessions also increased the professional growth value of the performance assessments. Each time that a group of teachers comes together to score assessments, they first have to achieve inter-rater reliability. Scoring a set of papers as a group has proven to be an extremely beneficial activity. The teachers have to reach consensus on a professional issue that has clear and immediate importance. Such discussion has a very positive impact on instruction and thus student achievement.

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Graduation Requirements

To graduate from the Wallingford Public Schools a student must have earned a minimum of 23 credits and must have met the credit distribution requirement. In addition, the student must also have satisfactorily demonstrated the district's performance standard in English (beginning with the class of 1999) and mathematics (beginning with the class of 2000).

I. CREDIT DISTRIBUTION REQUIREMENT

A. English - 4 credits, including English 1, 2, 3, and 4

B. Mathematics - 3 credits

C. Social studies - 3 credits, including Civics and United States History

D. Science - 2 credits in laboratory courses

E. Physical education - 2 credits (unless participation in physical education is medically contraindicated as certified in writing by a physician)

F. Health education - ½ credit

G. The arts or vocational education - 1 credit

All required courses must be passed.

II. DEMONSTRATION OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

A. Acceptable Means of Demonstrating Performance Standards: A student may demonstrate the performance standard in any subject by either of the following means:

1. Achieving the state goal on the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (Note: the state goal on the combined language arts score will be used for English)

or

2. Satisfactorily completing a district performance task.

B. District Performance Tasks:

1. The district performance tasks will be described in the regulations of this policy.