

# WAPSD

## Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities

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CARRIE BRASHER

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### WDE REPRESENTATIVES

PEG BROWN-CLARK

STEPHANIE WEAVER

MISSY WHITE

November 15, 2011

President Jim D. Neiman  
University of Wyoming Board of Trustees  
P.O. Box 218  
Hulett, WY 82720

RE: Proposed Admission Standards

Dear President Neiman and University of Wyoming Trustees,

The Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities (WAPSD) is charged with relaying information regarding the unmet needs of Wyoming's students with disabilities to The State Superintendent of Schools and other state officials involved in our state education system. Our panel consists of Wyoming educational professionals and most importantly, parents of children with disabilities that dream of their children being able to access an education that provides full opportunities for post-secondary education.

The WAPSD has many concerns regarding the possibility of increased core curriculum standards to admission to The University of Wyoming. We are concerned this would limit the number of elective classes for students with disabilities who are admitted conditionally and identified for support. Non-core subjects often offer students with disabilities important opportunities to demonstrate success and to explore new areas of interest. Students at-risk for graduation would be further marginalized through this decision. We feel strongly that many people with disabilities would thrive in a college setting, but that this decision would further limit their opportunities for attending our state university.

We are also concerned that our state legislature may react in a way that forces all Wyoming schools to follow suit with these standards, mandating more core classes and less elective offerings. These kinds of changes will narrow choices for all students, and non-core electives are essential for keeping many students interested and involved in school and academics. This is particularly true for at-risk students and students with disabilities whose talents and strengths may not lie in math, science, foreign language and English. Some of these students may not even be interested in pursuing college degrees or in going to UW, but such changes would directly impact their desire or ability to graduate from high school. Graduation rates for students with disabilities across the state are already low (66%), so our panel members are particularly concerned with this possibility. This would be detrimental to our current education system which has historically responded to the individual and unique interests, skills and diversity of Wyoming's population.

WAPSD implores you to consider how this decision may affect all Wyoming students. A few years ago, we as a panel recommended that the Hathaway scholarship become more inclusive for many of these same reasons. We urged the

[http://edu.wyoming.gov/Programs/special\\_education/wapsd.aspx](http://edu.wyoming.gov/Programs/special_education/wapsd.aspx)

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Superintendent of Public Instruction to advocate for an additional strand in the Hathaway scholarship that would support academic and non-academic employment training goals for students with disabilities. Because all four Hathaway Scholarship award categories are linked to academic performance, the Hathaway Scholarship is not able to address the ongoing educational needs of all deserving high school-aged students in the state. Many students with disabilities are unable to perform satisfactorily with even modified success curriculum coursework in high school. At the same time, these same students may have the greatest need for post-secondary education. We hoped to see broader incentives implemented to better include students with disabilities, including a needs-based program designed to encourage post-secondary learning and gleaning eligibility criteria from multiple sources, including non-academic settings.

Our panel appreciates that the University of Wyoming is looking for better ways to support students to complete their undergraduate degrees, but we worry that the overwhelming focus on core subjects and the success curriculum may negatively impact all students whose strengths lie in arts, vocational, or other areas. We are concerned with UW's own research indicating that minority students will be disproportionately represented in the conditionally admitted group, and because many of our panel members work with students with disabilities across the state, our group fears that students with disabilities will also be overrepresented in this group. If the goal is truly supporting student success, our panel would like to see more creative models of support focused on bolstering fundamental skills in students' areas of interest, models that allow much broader flexibility to meet individual student needs and talents.

WAPSD as a state advisory group is opposed to the implementation of the success curriculum for these reasons. Please consider these reasons when making this decision that will undoubtedly have unintended consequences for all of Wyoming's potential graduates.

On behalf of the Wyoming Advisory Panel for Students with Disabilities,



Carrie M. Brasher, Chair

cc: Cindy Hill, Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Matthew Mead, Governor of Wyoming  
Thomas Buchanan, President, University of Wyoming  
Myron Allen, Vice President of Academic Affairs