



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Superintendent

FROM: Dr. Michael Copland, Deputy Superintendent

DATE: October 8, 2013

SUBJECT: Ends Monitoring Reports 2.0 and 2.1

The Department of Teaching and Learning is pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (Ends 2.0 – Academic Achievement and 2.1 - Student Competence) to the Superintendent of Bellingham Schools and the Board of Directors. Monitoring reports are submitted annually and are intended to provide the Superintendent, members of the School Board, and the community we serve with a snapshot of our progress toward the mission, vision, and outcomes defined within our district’s strategic plan, *The Bellingham Promise*.

This Ends monitoring report is intended to serve as both an analytic and evaluative tool that allows us to:

- demonstrate a reasonable interpretation of Ends 2.0 and 2.1,
- identify areas where our interpretation does not align with our mission and outcomes,
- use data to demonstrate progress toward achievement of these Ends, and
- regularly review our Ends to ensure they remain relevant and inspire meaningful work throughout the organization and community.

Introduction

This report provides a reflective lens on the school district’s progress to date in achieving key outcomes identified in *The Bellingham Promise*. *The Promise* has proven to be a living document that well defines the vision, mission, values and outcomes set forth by the School Board, and the document is serving to guide decision-making and effort for the school district. As those of us on the Department of Teaching and Learning (DTL) team engage in the day-to-day work designed to improve the students’ experience in Bellingham, we routinely hear references to the outcomes established in *The Promise* from students, teachers, parents, administrators and members of the community. *The Promise* provides the system with clear, simple language that has tremendously helped to guide key priorities for improvement. In contrast with many strategic plans elsewhere that are formulated and then relegated to a shelf

somewhere in the district office, *The Bellingham Promise*, in a relatively short time period, has become part of the lexicon of the school system and the Bellingham community.

By way of reminder, the Ends reported here include Ends 2.0 - Academic Achievement and 2.1 - Student Competence. Each is described below.

E - 2.0: The Bellingham School District is committed to developing students and graduates who are:

- Readers and Writers
- Scientists and Mathematicians
- Historians and Global Thinkers
- Artists, Performers, and Trades People
- Healthy, Active Individuals
- Multilingual Readers and Speakers
- Skilled Users of Technology and Information

E - 2.1: Consistent with the district Vision and Mission, all children of the Bellingham Public Schools Community will attain high academic achievement, develop essential skills and attributes necessary for continuous growth in learning, and graduate from high school. All students will succeed and grow regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic status, English language proficiency or disabilities.

1. Every student's achievement, skills and attributes will exceed: (a) the Washington State benchmarks and (b) similar students in comparable high performing districts, as measured by state assessments and other available data, as appropriate.
2. Every student's achievement, skills and attributes will show continuous significant growth relative to similar students in comparable high performing districts as measured by state assessments and other available data, as appropriate.
3. Every student with a gap in achievement, skills and attributes will close the gap. For state or federally identified student populations, any gap will be eliminated and annual progress will be greater than that of similar students in comparable high performing districts.
4. Student participation in post-secondary and career-ready courses shall increase and exceed participation in comparable high-performing districts. This shall include high school credits in middle school, college credits in high school, technical and career ready coursework, Advanced Placement, and other advanced learning opportunities.
5. All children of the Bellingham Public Schools community shall make continuous advancement toward on-time graduation or extended graduation, thereby reducing Bellingham Public Schools' drop-out rates.

The contents of this monitoring report include the following:

- A. Evidence and Artifacts Matrix
- B. Methodology for Identifying Comparable High Performing Districts
- C. Data Set, Analysis of Progress, and Summary Statements
- D. Furthering our Means to an End: Reporting on Progress
- E. Concluding Statement

A. *Evidence and Artifacts Matrix*

Consistent with the formatting of the initial Ends reports provided for the School Board in the fall of 2012, the Department of Teaching and Learning has included an Evidence and Artifacts matrix. This is intended to aid in the identification and analysis of student achievement and other indicators, relative to the type of student and graduate that we are committed to developing, as defined in Ends 2.0 and 2.1. The matrix is our effort to connect the high level, global outcomes from End 2.0, with the more specific, targeted achievement measures included in End 2.1.

Please refer to document, titled Evidence and Artifacts Matrix, included in Board documents.

B. *Methodology for Identifying Comparable High Performing Districts*

Our interpretation of Ends 2.1 requires us to establish a methodology to identify a sample of comparable, high performing districts. We established an initial comparison set of school districts last fall (2012), and have retained those same comparison districts once again this fall (2013) for purposes of year-to-year consistency. These districts serve as our demographic peers who have outperformed Bellingham School District students on measures of student achievement and graduation rates. By design, we have selected districts that are among our highest performing peer districts, rather than using a mean of all comparable districts, as this provides a more rigorous comparison set for Bellingham.

For purposes of review, the demographic factors utilized to identify a list of comparable districts followed this order:

1. For comparable size, we used K-12 enrollment to find districts relatively similar in enrollment (5,000 to 17,000 students).
2. For impact by poverty, we used student participation in Free/Reduced Price Meal program to include districts that were at least at half of our rate of 39.5% or more.
3. For race and ethnicity consideration, we included districts that had similar percentage of students in the highest-performing groups.
4. For the impact by English proficiency, we used the number of students identified as Limited English Proficient to find districts that had a similar population rate.
5. The percentage of students with disabilities was similar across all districts at this point and not a discriminating demographic.

To ensure we did not rule out districts that may be outperforming Bellingham School District despite greater demographic challenges, those with student populations that exhibit higher limited English proficiency rates, higher free/reduced price meal participation, and lower Asian/White enrollments were also included in the list of comparable districts.

Next, we identified the high-performing districts based on various data points from state assessment achievement and the state Annual Measureable Objectives (AMO). A final check using the *Compare My School* tool from the Washington State Report Card site supported our selection of three districts as appropriate comparison sites in lists of top districts: Central Valley, Olympia and Shoreline.

A number of limitations to this comparison methodology remain. In particular:

- Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures have been replaced by interim Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) measures until a new accountability system is created for 2014-15 that includes student growth data.
- The State Achievement Index and the Achievement Award designations are determined only at the school level with no feasible district aggregation.
- School districts do not share student course-taking data nor do they have common annual student achievement measures in all academic areas.

C. *Data Set, Analysis of Progress and Summary Statements*

The Department of Teaching and Learning compiled data associated with each cell of the Evidence and Artifacts Matrix for our collaborative analysis of progress related to Ends 2.0 and 2.1. Summary statements addressing the five specific components of Ends 2.1 are below. Please refer to the document, titled Data Set, included in Board documents, for supporting data.

2.1.1 (Exceed state benchmarks). Overall, compared to the whole set of 32 districts initially identified as comparable, Bellingham students achieve in the top quartile on state assessments. For purposes of illustration, page 1 of the data set provides one example (3rd grade reading) that locates Bellingham student achievement compared to the whole set of 32 comparable districts. While not included here, other indicators reveal a similar pattern.

On the following pages, we present two different sets of overall comparisons against the state benchmarks. Twenty (20) different indicators of achievement are tracked and presented. On pages 2-5, graphs show the trend lines for all students meeting or exceeding standard, compared to the state overall assessment averages, as well as compared to the three identified higher performing comparable districts. This measure provides a picture of how our students perform overall by comparison. The chart and graph on page 6 show the percent of students meeting standard in music, physical education and social studies. On pages 7-10, graphs show the trend lines only for groups of students who are exceeding standard on state assessments, compared to state and comparable district data. This measure helpfully demonstrates how Bellingham students are doing relative to students across state and comparable districts in exceeding state benchmarks, a mark of higher achievement. The following analysis breaks down some lessons from these two data sources.

Analysis:

All Students Meeting or Exceeding Standard

With regard to the goal of all students meeting or exceeding state standard (pages 2-5 in the data set) Bellingham students, on average, overall:

- Achieved above the state average on 20/20 indicators in the current year analysis, and this trend of meeting or exceeding the state extends back to 2010 with the exception of grade 4 writing (fell below the state for one year in 2010, but above since);
- Achieved at the same or higher level compared to 2012 on 18/20 indicators. Two areas decreased slightly this year (grade 4 and 6 math);
- Achieved above students in one or more high comparable districts on 14/20 indicators; and, above two high comparable districts on 6/20 indicators (grades 5 and 8 math; grades 4 and 10 writing; grade 10 reading; and, End of Course Biology).

All Students Exceeding Standard

Regarding those students who exceeded state standards, and comparisons to higher performing comparable districts:

- The percentage of Bellingham students exceeding standards remained the same or increased in year-over-year comparison to 2012 in 15/20 indicators.
- Bellingham students exceeded standard at a rate higher than one or more comparable district on 15/20 indicators, and higher than two or more comparable districts on 5/20 indicators.

Students Not Meeting Standard

While these indicators point out notable positive trends in student achievement in the district, it is important to note that the percentages of students not meeting standard this past year range from 9% (End of Course Biology) to 36% (4th grade math), reminding us that overall we still have work to do to move student achievement to minimum levels needed for success for many students. These overall data provide an important point of reflection for the Board regarding our work in meeting Ends 2.0 of developing readers and writers, scientists and mathematicians, as well as connecting to aspects of other Ends focused on developing thinkers, multi-lingual speakers and readers, and users of technology and information.

2.1.2 (Show continuous significant growth). Assessment of state standards do not yet provide student growth measures at the school district level , so we have utilized proficiency rates following specific cohorts of students over time as a proxy measure for continuous growth. The data arrays on pages 11-12 in the data set provide snapshots of cohort trend data in reading and mathematics for six student cohorts, including this year's 6th-11th graders (classes of 2015-2020).

Analysis:

These data reveal:

- 4/6 Bellingham cohorts trending positive in reading achievement 2013 compared to 2012 (classes of 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020)
- 4/6 Bellingham cohorts trending positive in mathematics achievement 2013 compared to 2012 (also 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020)
- This year's 7th and 9th grade cohorts fared less well with 7th grade year-over-year data remaining same in reading and dropping slightly in math, and 9th grade year-over-year percentages revealing an overall drop in both reading and math compared with 2012.
- Bellingham student cohorts out performed at least one comparable district's student cohorts in every year in reading (typically outperforming Central Valley), and in 4/6 cohort comparisons in math. Bellingham classes of 2015 and 2020 outperformed two comparable district cohorts in mathematics.

Again, these results provide the Board with an important source of reflection regarding our work in meeting Ends 2.0 of developing readers and writers, scientists and mathematicians, as well as

connecting to aspects of other outcomes focused on developing thinkers, multi-lingual speakers and readers, and users of technology and information.

2.1.3 (Close achievement gaps). For state or federally identified student populations, we highlighted the four student groups with the greatest difference in proficiency compared to all students: Hispanic, limited English, low income and special education students. Overall achievement gap trend data by Bellingham subgroups are displayed on pages 13-14; pages 15-22 break down Bellingham comparisons to state averages and higher performing comparable districts by subgroup across content areas. Overall, data on Hispanic, low income, and special education populations reveal a number of positives in the internal trend data; the picture is more mixed in comparing achievement results against the higher performing comparable districts. Results from the analysis of data on limited English students are more mixed. However, actual trend data on academic proficiency for limited English students are difficult to ascertain from state data because, once students reach proficiency in English and are able to read and understand state tests, they no longer qualify for inclusion in the limited English proficiency group. In other words, as limited English students progress in their English learning to the point where they are actually able to demonstrate what they know and understand on state tests, they are exited from limited English classification to English proficient (This may in part help to explain the widely varying data shown on the graphs on pages 17-18). To focus in on interesting results and keep this report a manageable size, our analysis hones in on two subgroups, our Hispanic students and our students receiving special education services.

Analysis:

Hispanic Students

Data tracking achievement trends for Bellingham's Hispanic students (pages 13-14) show some positive trends. Hispanic student achievement in Bellingham is ascending in both multiple grade levels and content areas, and, as well, the gaps between the Hispanic achievement and overall student achievement are closing. Data reveal, for example:

- Four year trends of ascending Hispanic student achievement and parallel shrinking achievement differences compared to overall student achievement in 4th grade reading, 5th grade science, 7th grade writing, and 10th grade reading.
- A three year similar ascending trend in 7th grade reading and in Algebra End of Course.
- Hispanic year-over-year trends comparing 2012 to 2013 are the same or positive in every measure except 4th math and writing.

All this said, in addition to the relatively positive story that results from comparing students in this sub-group to their previous achievement, the data also reveal disparities in Hispanic student achievement when compared to higher performing comparison districts' Hispanic student achievement trends (pages 15-16). For example:

- Bellingham Hispanic students achieved below all three comparable districts in 4th grade reading, writing and math, 7th grade reading, writing and math, and 8th grade science, and below the state average for 2013 in 4th math.

Students in Special Education

Analysis of Bellingham’s special education student achievement reveals some similar big-picture positive results (pages 13-14) regarding internal comparative trends over time. For example:

- Special education achievement trends are on a multi-year positive trajectory in 4th grade reading, math and writing, and the achievement gap has narrowed between special education students and the overall population in each of those areas over the past three years.
- Similar positive results and smaller gaps are revealed in Algebra End of Course and Biology End of Course, and 7th grade writing.

Again, as with our analysis of Hispanic achievement trends, the resulting comparison of special education achievement trends of Bellingham students with those in our comparable district group are more mixed. A few strengths noted, as well as some significant limitations, indicate that much work is still needed to help move achievement for our special education students. For example:

- Bellingham’s special education students achieved above all other comparables, and the state average in End of Course math and above all comparables except one in 4th grade writing and math, 7th grade writing and EOC Biology.
- By contrast, special education students were below the state average and all comparables in 4th grade reading, and above only one comparable district and below the state average in 7th and 10th grade reading and writing.

2.1.4 (Participation in post-secondary and career-ready courses). We accessed enrollment and course grade data for Advanced Placement, AVID, world language at second year and beyond, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) classes. Further evidence was collected from students taking courses through Running Start and Northwest Career and Technical Academy (NWCTA).

Analysis:

- Participation and passing rates in Advanced Placement courses have increased (page 23 in data set). Notably, this trend dates back three years with overall participation increasing to 35% of all high school students across the system earning one or more AP credits in 2013. Freshman and sophomore participation show larger increases over this time, indicating that Bellingham high school students are also accessing AP courses at a higher rate earlier in their high school experience.
- Participation in Running Start courses dropped in 2013, as did percentage of students participating in Career and Technical Education courses. Participation in NW Career and Technical Academy coursework remains similar in year-over-year comparison 2012 to 2013.
- Participation in world language courses for second year and beyond has increased while maintaining a high passing rate. Data displayed shows year-over-year 2011 to 2012 data; 2013 data are still in process of gathering and analysis.

2.1.5 (Continuous advancement toward graduation). By way of reminder for the Board, beginning with the Class of 2011, a new method for calculating graduation rates was required by the U.S. Department of Education. This new method uses the actual cohort student count starting from grade 9 rather than a grade level estimate. The 4-year graduation rates can be considered similar to the former on-time graduation rates, while the 5-year rates are similar to the extended graduation

rates. The dropout rate is now a 4-year or 5-year rate for the cohort, rather than a 1-year annual rate for grades 9-12.

Analysis:

Compared to the state, our data indicate that, while we exceeded the 5-year state graduation rate for all students last year, our 4-year graduation rate is slightly below the state average for 2012, and for certain populations, Bellingham's graduation rates remain unacceptably below the state. For example:

- Class of 2011 data show Hispanic, special education, and low income student populations in Bellingham all graduated in lower percentages than those populations on average across the state.
- One bright spot in looking at the disaggregated results from 2011 (page 24) is that our population of limited English speaking students is graduating at a somewhat higher rate than state average. Still in all, graduation rates are low by comparison, and signal an important area of work.

Our intention is that the strategies being pursued in preschool and the early grades will over time shift these trends toward the positive. In addition, our secondary schools have implemented a number of new strategies in the last two years including high school success coordinators, anchor classes, and interventions.

As the analysis above indicates, we have a number of data sources that currently inform our picture of student progress against the outcomes described in Ends 2.0 and 2.1. That said, we recognize that this picture remains incomplete in various areas. We envision significant future work needed to build the school district's expertise in gathering and assessing evidence in some areas. We are excited to share with you (in the study session tonight) the developing plans for the school district's work on metrics this year and beyond that will enable us to determine with greater efficiency, breadth, and depth how students are progressing in *Promise* outcome areas that are not as easily rendered into numbers and graphs, including some of those included in End 2.0 (developing outcomes for our students as historians, artists, performers, healthy active individuals, skilled users of technology, etc.) as well as those noted in End 3.0. Scalable outcome measures associated with the development of the "whole child" are nascent in the field of education, yet we are in the process of tapping into many productive new efforts underway in both research and practice around the U.S. that will help to inform a smart, technically rigorous, and conceptually grounded approach to assessing progress in some of these "difficult to quantify" areas of student development.

D. Furthering our Means to an End

As a part of the Ends 2.0 and 2.1 reports provided one year ago, we noted that the Bellingham SD leadership team was developing a focused set of actions designed to make progress on outcomes in *The Promise* that we titled *Priorities for Progress*. This document outlined research-based initiatives and actions for the 2012-13 school year and beyond that aligned to each of the five areas of strategic focus defined within *The Bellingham Promise*, and identified "the how"—what steps the district would undertake in key areas to ensure progress was steadily made toward the Ends. We plan to update the Board on our *Priorities for Progress* later this school year.

E. Concluding Statement

The Department of Teaching and Learning believes this Ends 2.0 and 2.1 monitoring report serves as evidence of a reasonable interpretation of Ends 2.0 and 2.1 that aligns with our vision, mission and outcomes, and is supported by data that demonstrates progress toward achievement of these Ends. Further, this report serves as a tool in support of the School Board's ability to regularly review our ends to ensure they remain relevant and inspire meaningful work throughout the organization and community.

We appreciate the direction provided by the School Board to focus on the development of exceptional students with strong character, a passion for learning and graduates who are ready for the widest range of educational and vocational options to support a diversity of life choices.