BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Board of Directors**

THROUGH: **Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent**

FROM: **Dr. Michael Copland, Deputy Superintendent**

DATE: **December 11, 2014**

SUBJECT: **Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 1**

We are pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1 - Student Competence, Part 1) to the school district's Board of Directors. Monitoring reports are intended to provide members of the School Board, and the community we serve, with a snapshot in time of our progress toward the mission, vision, and outcomes defined within our district's strategic plan, *The Bellingham Promise*. As per School Board request, our process for reporting on Ends 2.1 during the 2014-15 school year will take place over four meetings, beginning with this Part 1 report for the December 11, 2014 meeting.

Part 1 explores student performance in reading, mathematics, writing and science, and compares our progress to comparable high-performing districts. Part 2 of Ends 2.1 will be our added focus in January, taking a deep look at students' coursework/course-taking participation in college and advanced placement experiences, relative to our comparable high-performing districts. Part 3 will be presented in February and focus on students' continuous improvement toward graduation in comparison to comparable high-performing districts. Part 4 will be a focused summative conversation in March, rolling in any additional changes/additions to the three earlier reports, in anticipation of the Board's evaluation at the conclusion of that meeting about Ends 2.1 overall. Our intention is that spreading out the reporting on Ends 2.1 and discussion over four meetings will allow the Board to explore data and evidence on district outcomes with greater depth, and create an opportunity for an ongoing dialogue about the district's progress. Ends 2.0 and 3.0 are the subject of attention in ongoing meetings throughout this year that will culminate in a final report in June 2015.

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 2.1, focusing specifically on data and evidence in reading and mathematics that includes comparison to comparable, high performing districts,
- identify areas where our interpretation does not align with our mission and outcomes,
- use data to demonstrate progress toward achievement of these Ends, and

- review our Ends to ensure they remain relevant and inspire meaningful work throughout the organization and community.

Introduction

This report represents a somewhat different approach to presenting data and evidence than previous years' Ends reports. Consistent with previous reports, we have included sources of information and analysis focused on the district's student achievement performance overall in comparison to selected comparable high performing districts. What is different this year is that we connect this big picture view to information and analysis on one Bellingham elementary school's progress in literacy achievement, and, finally, to the individual achievement stories of several students within that one school over time. We anticipate that this approach will provide the Board with greater depth of understanding, drilling down from the overall state test comparisons to achievement trends in one school in a specific content area, and clearer representation of the experience of individual students who embody the ultimate reason we do any of this work. We share an interest in providing reports that are both informative for the Board, and also useful for informing the district's ongoing work, and communicating about that work in ways that are accessible to families and community members.

In taking this approach, we have reduced and combined some of the "big picture" data included in the data set, to make room for the stories at the school and individual level. Our hope is this construction that funnels down from the big picture data comparisons all the way to individual students' achievement provides a more satisfying overall picture of the achievement story in Bellingham. By way of reminder, the Ends 2.1 policy follows:

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 data and evidence we've relied upon here have a number of limitations. State tests are an imperfect, rear-view mirror representation of student achievement, and not directly aligned with district curricula. By the time these data arrive in the school district, the window of usefulness for proactive changes in teaching and learning that might be informed by the data, and that would impact those students who were tested in that grade level that year, has mostly passed. In addition, due to the policy requirement to compare Bellingham with comparable high-performing districts, the data we are using are measures that are available from those other districts. The comparisons we are able to construct and analyze are limited by these sources that are available.

All these limitations notwithstanding, these data are helpful for the school district as a gauge of progress over time, using proficiency trends to chart the big picture of how Bellingham students' achievement stacks up against our highest performing peer districts. Part of the rationale for including a window into a school's and individual students' achievement is to provide the Board with a look at some of the sources of information and evidence that are used at those levels to drive instructional changes and developments more immediately than big picture state test results. So, for example, you will see included here some uses of the Benchmark Assessments (BAS) that are directly tied to our district's work in literacy, and the Measure of Academic Performance (MAP) tests that many teachers rely on as a way to assess student achievement in real time.

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 in the Fall of 2012, and retained those same comparison districts last Fall (2013) for purposes of year to year consistency. This year, we have expanded the group of comparison districts to a total of 50, responding to Board comments last year that encouraged us to include some of the higher wealth districts that are still reasonably close in demographic comparisons. In addition, due to the fact that one of our comparison districts, Central Valley, was a pilot site for the new Smarter Balanced Assessments, and thus did not produce comparable test data, we have included the Bellevue School District instead, along with Olympia and Shoreline. These districts serve as our demographic peers who have outperformed Bellingham School District students on measures of student achievement and graduation rates. Table A below includes the parameters that guided the choice of comparison districts. Table B below arrays Bellingham's key demographic data alongside of the three comparable high-performing districts.

Table A: Parameters to Determine Comparable District Pool

Criteria	Parameters	Low	BPS Target	High
Enrollment	0.67 above and below	3,500	11,500	19,000
% Free/Reduced Meal	no lower than 0.5 below	19	38	100
% Asian and White	no higher than 0.15 above	0	75	86
% Limited English	no lower than 0.3 below	2	6	100

Table B: Demographic Data for Bellingham and High Performing Comparison Districts

Criteria	Bellingham	Bellevue	Olympia	Shoreline
Enrollment	11136	18953	9268	8988
% Free/Reduced Meal	37	20	29	27
% Asian and White	75	77	78	70
% Limited English	6	10	2	7

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 (3,500 to 19,000 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 38%.
3. For race and ethnicity consideration, we included districts that had no higher than 15% more students in the highest-performing groups, Asian and White students.
4. For the impact by English proficiency, we used the number of students identified as Limited English Proficient to find districts that had no lower than 30% fewer students in this subgroup.
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 not excluded from the list of comparable districts.

- **Overall Achievement Index Comparison to Comparable High Performing Districts**

The first part of the analysis explored was how Bellingham's overall student achievement stacks up against the range of fifty comparable districts included in our sample set. The bar graphs on pages 1-2 of the data set show percentiles of the aggregate proficiency rates for reading and for math, 2010 and 2013. As is evident from the visual representation, Bellingham's overall achievement index (all grades, reading and math) increased over this period of time, and the district also drew nearer to the three high performing comparable districts (shown in red on the graphs). The overall achievement index shows that Bellingham's student performance compares favorably to most districts in our comparison group over this period of time.

An important caveat -- not included here in this "big picture" comparison is 2014 test score data, as it was significantly compromised due to the fact that a number of districts in our comparison group had limited MSP data because they field tested the new Smarter Balanced assessments at

different grade levels 3-8. So, this created anomalies that make the overall comparisons in 2014 suspect at least and, at worst, flawed in a number of cases. This problem will be replaced with another problem in 2015 when all school districts move to the new assessment system. While this change will produce more reliable comparisons to other systems in 2015, the new assessments will not be comparable to the previous assessments, essentially causing us to reset a baseline with the new testing system. Trends on the new assessments will start to emerge from 2016 and beyond.

- **District Trends Compared to Comparable High Performing Peers**

2.1.1 (Exceed state benchmarks). In the data set provided for the Board, we also present overall comparisons against the state benchmarks through an examination of trends within grade bands and in particular content areas in comparison to the comparable high-performing districts. Twelve (12) different indicators of achievement are tracked and presented [reading in grade bands 3-5, 6-8 and 10; mathematics in grade bands 3-5, 6-8 plus the end of course mathematics exam (EOC) in high school; writing in grades 4, 7 and 10; science in grades 5, 8 plus the EOC in biology in high school]. Pages 3-4 of the data set show trend line data for students who exceed standards (Level 4) using state test performance for Bellingham and the three comparable, high performing districts in our sample (Olympia, Shoreline, and Bellevue), as well as compare all four districts to the state averages. In these comparisons, Bellingham students outperform the state averages in virtually all cases, and, with a few exceptions like Grade 7 writing, do not perform as well as students in the three high performing comparables. Given that we chose to compare with districts that are typically higher performing, this is not a surprise, but does provide a push for us to think about how we can continue to measure up to higher performing peers on achievement tests, while we continue to work on the challenge of teaching the whole child that is embodied in *The Bellingham Promise* outcomes.

2.1.2 (Show continuous significant growth). Assessments of state standards do not provide student growth measures, so we have utilized proficiency rates following specific cohorts of students over time as a proxy measure for continuous growth. Pages 5-6 of the data set show cohort growth trends over time in reading and math for students in Bellingham, as well as in our three high performing comparable peer districts, and compare these against the state averages. Bellingham's cohort achievement trends remained relatively stable, but in some cases do show that student performance in the district is increasing compared to the state (Class of 2019 reading and math, for example) and closing in on comparable districts (Class of 2021 reading and math).

Cohort data are problematic for drawing firm conclusions for a couple of different reasons. First "cohorts" are not actually comprised of discreet traceable groups of students; a "cohort" for our purposes here includes all the students in the class in a given year, and this data is compared to all the students in the class in any other year. So, the make-up of cohorts changes year-to-year due to student transiency and other factors. As such, this data is not an "apples-to-apples" comparison. With additional effort, we could provide student-level discreet cohort data for our district; but, the same is not true for our comparison districts. And if we were to track student-specific cohort data in our district, the results would screen out many of our transient students over time who are, on par, represented more heavily in our four most challenged student subgroups. For these reasons, we've not gone the extra step to sort and screen by discreet student

level data in presenting cohort data for Bellingham. As well, the particular assessments used for these comparisons are not vertically scaled, so there is a testing effect that contributes to the year-to-year leaps and drops that are evident both for the districts' data, as well as the overall state averages.

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. Pages 7-8 of the data set show Bellingham district graphs of all students' achievement (represented by the blue bars) compared to the four subgroups. Consistent with trends we reported on last year, there are positive stories regarding our work to close achievement gaps with our Hispanic students and our low-income students. Achievement results for both of these groups, while still below the average of all students, are trending up or remaining constant, while at the same time gaps are decreasing in several cases (Grade 4 math, Grade 5 science, Grade 7 writing, Grade 8 science, Grade 10 writing, algebra EOC and biology EOC).

Special education trends are more of a mixed picture with decreases in student achievement in Grade 4, Grade 7 in all content areas, and increases in Grade 10, as well as in Grades 5 and 8 science. However, we also know that student outcomes or "leaver" data is positive for Bellingham's students exiting from Special education services. Current data indicates that a higher percentage of Bellingham students with disabilities compared to the state were involved in higher education, training or employment. This is important data because it aligns well with *The Bellingham Promise* – it shows concrete ways our students with disabilities are engaged in their community, "ready for the widest range of educational and vocational options to support a diversity of life choices."

The data on students in the Limited English category appears to have some similar decreases, but this data is always difficult to analyze due to the fact that the number of ELL students tends to be small at a given grade level, and more importantly that once an ELL student reaches proficiency he or she is immediately exited from this subgroup. So, the group data tends to refresh in a negative direction, but for a good reason – kids are learning to speak, read and write in English and so are exited from the subgroup. Just to emphasize this point, we've included additional graphs (Page 11) that show very favorable data on Grades 3, 4 and 5 students who exit from Bellingham's ELL program. These grade level snaphots are similar to the exit data in other grade levels, as well. This group, by comparison, achieves at a higher level than the average of all district students.

Pages 9-10 in the data set include comparable graphs showing Bellingham compared to other districts and state achievement gaps. These graphs reveal that Bellingham's most challenged subgroups tend to score, on average near to the other comparison populations from the high performing comparable districts. Some populations score higher by comparison, for example Hispanic and Limited English student populations in Grade 7, and other areas are slightly lower by comparison, such as students served by special education in Grades 4, 7 and 10.

- **School Level Comparisons with Comparable High Performing Peers**

In addition to the district comparisons discussed above, we were curious to drill down and develop some comparisons between our schools and those from high performing comparable districts, particularly with an eye toward determining any Bellingham schools that appeared to be outperforming expectations when compared to similar schools in our comparable high performing district comparison group. Should such a case exist, we envisioned how we could mine the specific work at that site for the benefit of the rest of the system. With this goal in mind, we screened all elementary schools from across the four districts on three key variables. These included:

--Schools with more than 40% free and reduced price meals
--Schools serving more than 13% of students in special education services
--Schools with Hispanic populations greater than 16%.

In addition, we included OSPI bubble plots for our schools, as well as those from the other comparison districts to see how they arrayed on MSP growth and achievement. Pages 12-15 show OSPI's bubble chart of MSP Reading Median Growth Percentile of schools in the four comparison districts. Page 12 shows Bellingham's schools arrayed by growth and achievement (dark red circles represent our schools, arrayed against the rest of the schools in the state). Most of the district's schools fall into the upper right quadrant indicating higher growth and higher achievement.

Through this analysis, Sunnyland Elementary emerged as a school in our district that compared favorably to similar schools in the other three comparison districts. Three schools were selected to highlight the comparisons: Sherwood Forest Elementary, Bellevue; McLane Elementary School, Olympia; and, Echo Lake Elementary, Shoreline. These schools all had similar MSP reading growth and proficiency data to Sunnyland, but had student populations with significantly lower percentages of low-income students. Page 16 shows all the elementary schools in the sample arrayed by low-income and Hispanic subgroups. The analysis reveals that while Sunnyland serves a student population that is nearly 58% low-income (more than 14 percentage points higher than the next closest school in the comparison group—Sherwood Forest in Bellevue at 44% low-income), Sunnyland students' achievement in reading was on par or higher than students from the comparison group of schools. Page 17 shows the reading trend data in the four school comparison group for the past five years.

So, what has been happening at Sunnyland over the past five years that might account for this higher student achievement trajectory in reading? Sunnyland's staff has dedicated itself to continuing to deepen their work in intervention in literacy, working through teachers funded by Title 1 and Washington State Learning Assistance Program (LAP) funds in collaboration with the classroom teaching staff. The school has embraced the new literacy curriculum, including the use of Benchmark Assessments. Extra support for reading interventions has been provided through Title 1 and LAP funds, and the intervention team at Sunnyland has been a consistent support for student growth and development over this period of time. In addition, the school dedicated the use of some of its 'flex' staffing allocation (additional staff provided to elementary

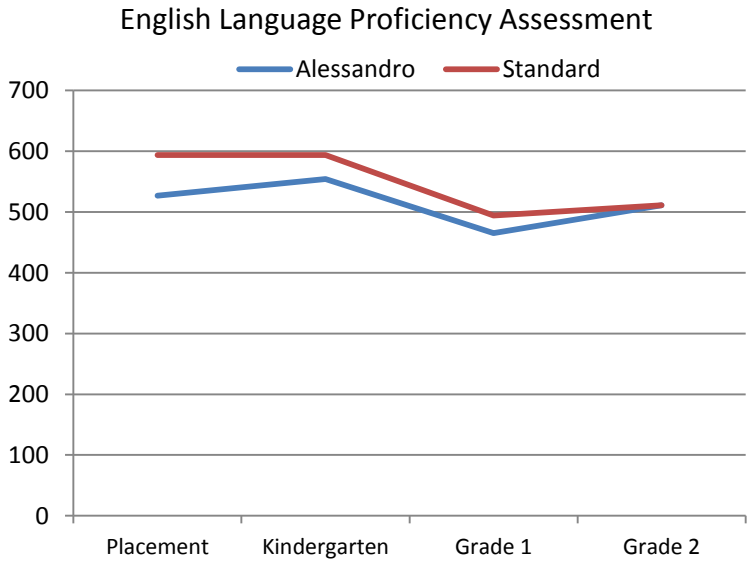
schools to use for discretionary purposes) to support the work in literacy. Some schools use this allocation for additional counseling support, or to provide World Language instruction. Sunnyland focused this "extra" support on literacy interventions. This combination resulted in adherence to a particular model of literacy intervention over time.

Student Literacy Learning Stories at Sunnyland

Given the positive comparison story we uncovered at Sunnyland, we were curious to explore some individual cases of student achievement, and tell their stories here to offer the Board a few glimpses of what happens for Bellingham students who persevere and benefit from working with our outstanding teachers. The data and evidence here is presented in the context of telling the stories of each student's learning trajectory in literacy, and we think pretty much speaks for itself.

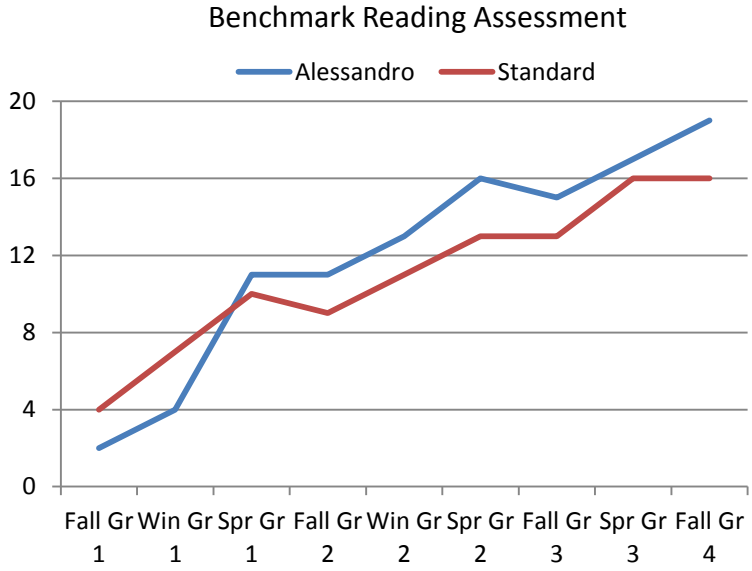
Alessandro
4th grader at Sunnyland Elementary School
Home language: Spanish

Alessandro entered Sunnyland as a kindergartener and has been there for his whole elementary career.



Alessandro met the standard at the end of second grade, and exited from the ELL program.

Typically a student meets the standard after four to five years of English. His initial WLPT suggests some language proficiency before kindergarten.



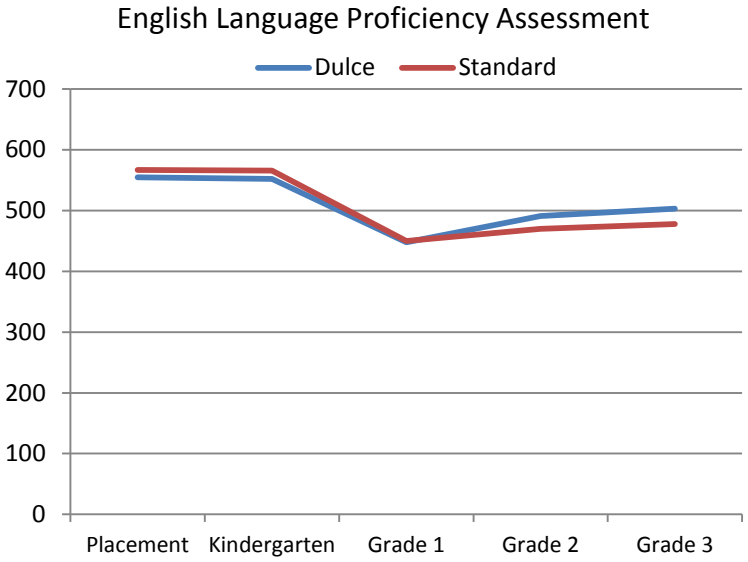
Alessandro met the standard on the BAS at the end of first grade. He was not at standard in English yet, according to the WELPA.

His score on the fourth grade fall BAS is the expected score for the end of fourth grade.

Alessandro exceeded the standard on the Grade 3 MSP with a score of 426. 400 is the standard.

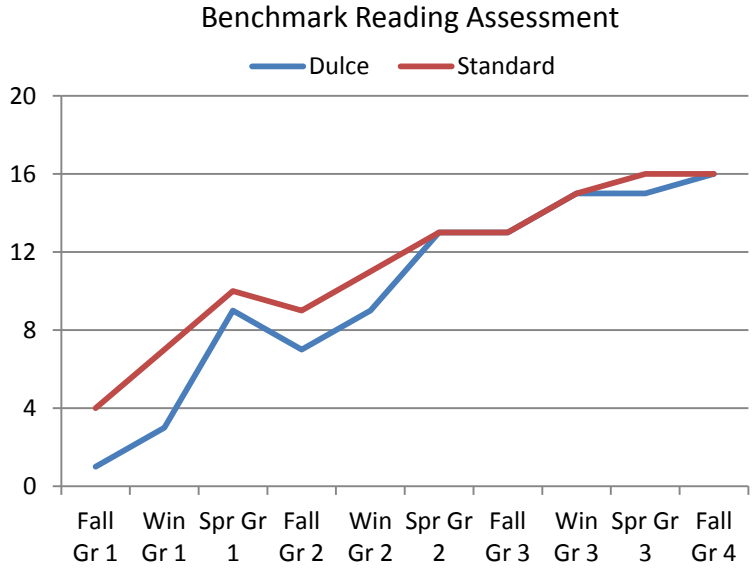
Dulce
4th grader at Sunnyland Elementary School
Home language: Spanish

Dulce began kindergarten six weeks into the school year at Roosevelt Elementary. After two weeks, her family moved and she transferred to Birchwood Elementary where she completed her kindergarten year. She began her first grade year at Sunnyland two weeks after the school year began, and has been there ever since.



Dulce showed steady progress in learning English despite her early inconsistent schooling. (Note: the assessment changed from WLPT to WELPA in her first grade year, which may explain the dip in scores.)

Despite her achievement, she is still considered Limited English Proficient, although she will likely exit the program this year if her trend continues.



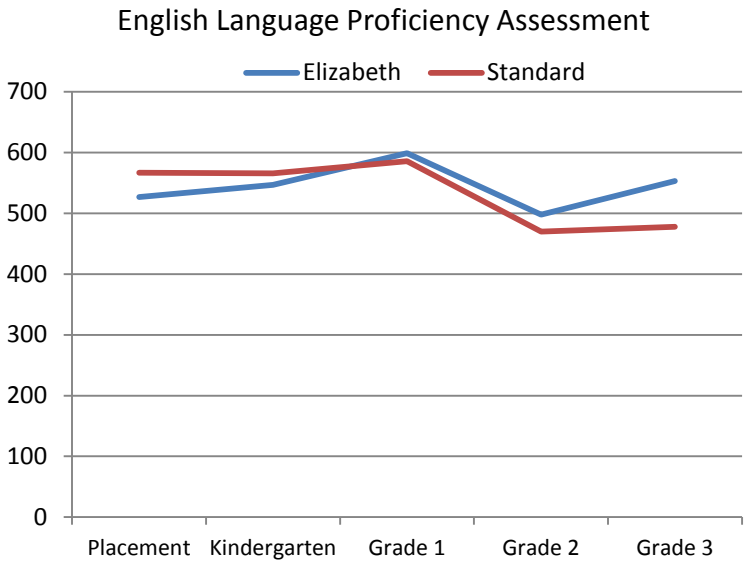
Dulce began first grade at a level A, the lowest level on the BAS. She made terrific growth, and ended the year almost at standard.

After a summer reading loss which put her significantly below grade level, she made accelerated growth and ended the year at standard. She dipped slightly below grade level at the end of Grade 3, but was back at grade level by the beginning of Grade 4.

Dulce passed the Grade 3 MSP with a score of 400. 400 is the standard.

Elizabeth
5th grader at Sunnyland Elementary School
Home Language: Vietnamese

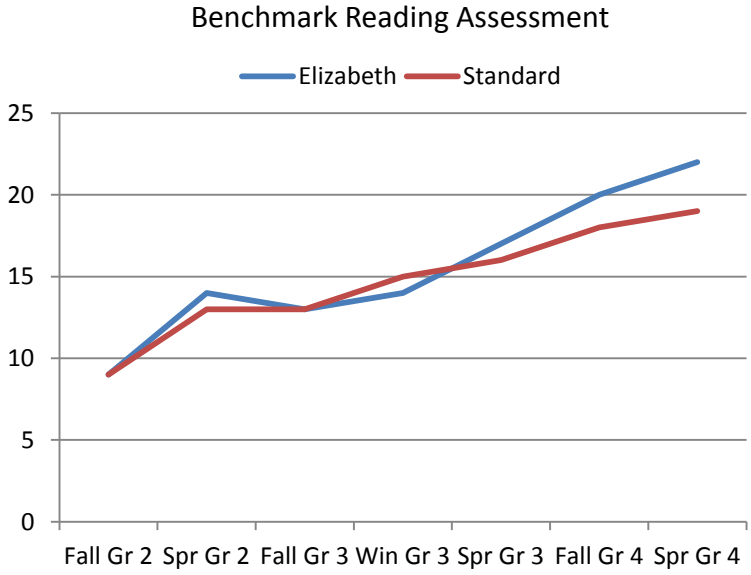
Elizabeth attended Alderwood Elementary for kindergarten through Grade 3. In fourth grade her family moved and she began attending Sunnyland. So her story is a reflection of work across the school system.



Elizabeth began kindergarten with some skills reading and writing English, but she was quiet and shy, and did not speak much.

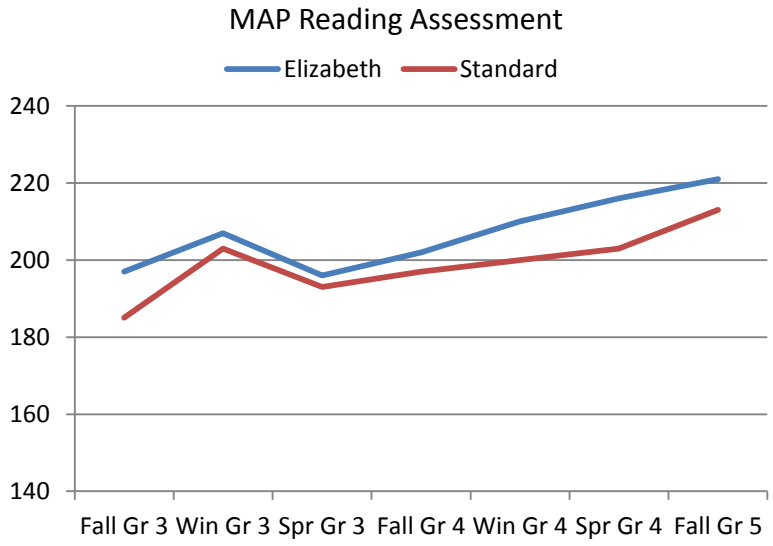
Even as she made the standard for English proficiency in first grade, her speaking continued to lag behind.

In third grade she began to gain confidence and began speaking more, which helped her overall proficiency and enabled her to exit ELL services at the end of third grade.



That third grade year, as Elizabeth's confidence grew, her reading achievement also began to accelerate.

She ended the year above grade level, and has continued to achieve at an accelerated rate.
She ended her fourth grade year reading at a mid-fifth grade level on the BAS.



Grade 3 is the first grade level to take the MAP reading test. Elizabeth has been above the standard on the MAP every year.

Concluding Statement

We believe that this Ends 2.1 (Part 1) monitoring report, in combination with the remaining parts of the report that will follow, serves as evidence of a reasonable interpretation of Ends 2.1 that aligns with our vision, mission and outcomes, and is supported by data that demonstrates progress toward achievement of these Ends. Further, we hope this report serves as a useful 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.