

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Bellingham, Washington

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent  
**DATE:** February 28, 2017  
**SUBJECT:** Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 2

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1, Part 2 - Student Participation in Post-Secondary and Career-Ready Courses) to the school district's board of directors. This report follows the previously submitted Part 1 report at the December 15, 2016 meeting. The final Ends 2.1 report (Part 3) will be submitted as part of the April 20, 2017 meeting of the school board.

Ends 2.1, Part 1, explored student performance in reading, mathematics, writing and science, and compared our progress to comparable high-performing districts. Part 2 takes an in-depth look at student participation in post-secondary and career-ready courses. This focus includes information about college credits in high school, as well as technical and career ready coursework, Advanced Placement courses, and other advanced learning opportunities. The report also presents data on student participation and comparisons in SAT testing trends relative to our comparable high-performing districts. Where possible, we've examined comparisons of Bellingham Public Schools student trends to those in comparable high-performing districts. Finally, and new for this year's report, we've included some additional analyses focused on participation in key post-secondary preparatory experiences that our students pursue. These include trends in participation rates in the district's Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, and trends in the number of Bellingham student applications for federal financial aid (FAFSA) which tends to be a predictor of post-secondary enrollment.

Ends reports serve as both an analytic and evaluative tool that allow 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

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.

This report, Part 2, focuses specifically on the *fourth point* listed above – student participation in post-secondary and career-ready courses. We've relied on the same methodology for identifying the comparable high performing districts that was used in Part 1, so for purposes of brevity we will not recount that here.

### ▪ **Bellingham Public Schools Dual Credit Opportunities and Trends**

Page 1 of the data set reveals 2012-16 trends of Bellingham student enrollment in all dual-credit courses offered within the system. Dual credit courses include any course that provides students with both a high school credit and a college or career-preparatory credit. Types of such courses are arrayed in the table on the top of page 1. These include:

- *Advanced Placement (AP) courses.* These are courses that are nationally normed by the College Board and include assessments that are common, regardless of the district or state in which the course is taken. Students who take an AP course are encouraged to take the associated AP exam, which is scored on a five-point rubric. Students scoring at a level three, four or five are often able to claim credit for the high school AP course when enrolling in a college or university post-high-school graduation<sup>1</sup>.

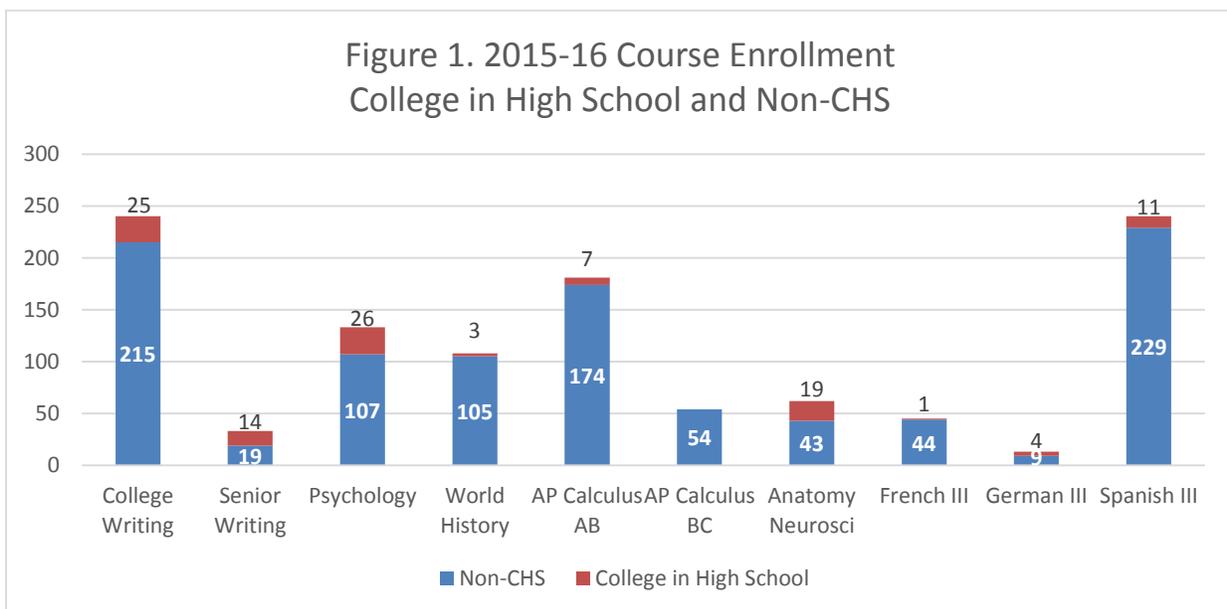
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<sup>1</sup> Students scoring at a level 3, 4 or 5 on the AP exam are eligible to earn college credit at some universities. Our analysis of Washington state institutions of higher education indicates, for example, that Western Washington

- *College in the High School (CIHS) courses.* CIHS courses offer students the ability to earn college credit by taking an equivalent course while still enrolled in high school.
- *Running Start courses.* Running Start is a state-sponsored program that offers students enrolled in high school to co-enroll in college level courses and earn dual credit. Students taking high numbers of Running Start courses can, for example, earn the equivalent of an Associate of Arts (AA) community college degree concurrent with the completion of high school.
- *Tech Prep courses.* Tech prep courses are advanced courses that can lead to certificates of study within technology-related fields.

Dual credit attempts by Bellingham students were down slightly overall compared with levels recorded the past two school years. Percentage of those students enrolled who actually earned credit in these dual credit offerings held constant at 96%. Decreases were noted in advanced placement course participation and in college in the high school (CIHS) participation, although the CIHS course-taking data merits further discussion below. Tech prep dual credit enrollments were also down compared to last year. Participation in Running Start dual credit course options was the highest participation level recorded over the past five years. Given that dual credit numbers had been trending up over the prior three years, it is not known whether the dip this year is a function of a particular student cohort, or foretelling some change in these overall trends.

To try to understand more about what is underneath some of these numbers, we looked specifically at the CIHS enrollments. Figure 1 below shows the enrollments in the CIHS eligible courses, broken down by the number of students who actually pay tuition to post-secondary



University grants credit for almost all AP exams scoring 3 or higher, while standards at the University of Washington are tending to rise, granting credit in many cases only for exams scoring at 4 or above.

Institutions to earn the credit, versus those who take the course, in many cases perform well, but do not “buy” the college credit. As the graph reveals, while only 87 students enrolled for post-secondary credit across ten CIHS-eligible courses, hundreds more students are actually accessing these courses, but not registering for credit. There are likely a few factors at play in this picture. First, to get a course on the books in the school district and a partner higher education institution, staff members are required to go through a qualification process with the institution of higher education. Some of the instructors teaching the ten courses listed across the high schools have attained this qualification; others have not. Second, the cost of tuition in these courses may be a barrier to some students. Fees range from ~\$80 for a community college course to much higher for those offered through four-year universities. A University of Washington (UW) sponsored course, like UW Spanish for example, can run upwards of \$350 for tuition. While this is still a “bargain” compared to paying actual UW tuition for these credits, it may present a barrier for middle and low income families whose students may be well prepared to take the course for credit, but lack the funding to pay the tuition. To this point, the school district has not committed funds to cover the cost of student tuition in these courses, but the topic has come up in our conversations about paying for AP testing, and accounting for other fees associated with taking courses in our high schools. So, the analytic takeaway from this examination suggests that, while 2016 trends revealed decreases in advanced dual credit course-taking overall, the data do not accurately present the numbers of students who are accessing advanced course opportunities specifically in CIHS, but without paying tuition to accrue the post-secondary credits.

We also analyzed these trends within some of our most challenged student demographic groups. The graph at the bottom of page 1 reveals that, overall, percentages of Hispanic and low-income students attempting dual credit in 2016 were down slightly overall, with reductions in Advanced Placement and Tech Prep options compared with percentages from 2015, and slight increases for both groups in accessing Running Start.

Pages 2 and 3 graphically represent some specific dual credit trend comparisons with our highest performing comparable districts, Bellevue SD, Olympia SD and Shoreline SD. These trends suggest that Hispanic and low income Bellingham student subgroups accessed dual credit opportunities at percentages that were comparable or slightly above those observed in both Shoreline and Olympia, and below those observed in Bellevue. In addition, dual credit access by Bellingham students receiving special education services lagged behind those comparable subgroups in Bellevue and Shoreline and was about on par with those in Olympia. The data on ELL students’ participation remained relatively flat in Bellingham and below Bellevue, whose ELL students trended upward slightly in their participation compared with last year’s data. Smaller numbers of students in both Shoreline and Olympia make comparisons less relevant as the ELL data from those districts tends to be more erratic year to year.

#### ▪ **Overall Advanced Placement Courses and Testing Trends Comparison to Comparable High Performing Districts**

We are once again drawing upon common course-taking experiences with College Board sponsored courses and tests to make comparisons with our comparable high-performing district peers. The table and graph on the top of page 4 of the data set offers some overall comparisons to comparable high performing districts (Bellevue, Olympia, Shoreline) regarding trends in

Advanced Placement (AP) course-taking. The number of Bellingham students taking AP courses, and the total number of AP exams taken, both decreased slightly in year-over-year comparisons. Similarly, the overall number of exams that were scored a three, four or five, as well as the percentage of exams scoring at those levels, dipped slightly this year compared to last. The percentage of Bellingham students scoring at a level three or higher also falls 8-10% below percentages in our three comparable high-performing districts.

We've also circled back to take another look at trends in the comparable group of schools we analyzed last year in this part of the report, which included Squalicum HS, Sammamish HS (Bellevue), Olympia HS and Shorecrest HS (Shoreline). Page 5 of the data set includes a demographic comparison of the four schools. Squalicum and Sammamish high schools both enroll a significantly higher percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals than the comparable schools. We include Squalicum as our representative high school in this group because its student population does have the highest rate of students eligible for free and/or reduced price meals of all the comprehensive high schools in Bellingham.

As the data on the bottom of page 4 reveals, Squalicum continued to have higher overall numbers of AP test takers, as well as more overall exams taken than any of the three comparable group schools, and also had more students scoring at levels three, four or five than any of the comparison schools. Last year, recall that Squalicum students were second to Olympia HS in terms of numbers of exams scored at three or higher. This year, SQHS came out on top in terms of exam performance in this comparison group.

The board may also be interested to know how students' grades in AP courses stack up in year-over-year comparisons. The examination of grading data adds another dimension to the exploration of AP course performance beyond the AP test score data. The figure at the bottom of page 6 of the data set provides a graphic look back at our district's performance over the past five years. While course attempts were down slightly, aggregate grade point average of students in those courses was up from 3.20 in 2015 to 3.33 in 2016. The array at the top of page 6 also shows the list of AP course exam counts for 2016 by course title. As is apparent from this data, courses in English (composition), Human Geography, Calculus, US History, Physics and Economics are among the most popular course choices for Bellingham students.

- **Overall Career and Technical Education Enrollment Trends**

Last year's report featured some vignettes of students who had completed courses of study in the area of Career and Technical Education, a program that continues to be on the rise in our school district. If you recall, the number of Bellingham students enrolling in CTE courses was up 30% in 2015 compared to the prior year. The 2016 data (see page 7 of the data set) again shows another movement upward. CTE "Concentrators" (students enrolling in two or more CTE courses) increased from 580 to 647; the number of industry certificates doubled from 25 in 2015 to 50 in 2016. On the top of page 7 we've included a graphic that arrays the courses available to students, and calls out those with the highest completion rates. The course in Engineering Design saw the biggest increase in year-over-year comparisons.

- **SAT District and School Level Comparisons with Comparable High Performing Peers**

This report once again includes comparison data on some “readiness for post-secondary” factors. The first of these compare trends in mean scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The district comparison data on the top of page 8 of the data set show Bellingham students’ 2016 SAT scores up slightly in both reading and writing compared with 2015, and down slightly in math. Our district scores keep us in the middle of the pack of our high-performing comparable districts, above Shoreline and below Olympia and Bellevue. On the bottom of page 8, we’ve displayed the data for SAT test mean scoring for all four schools included in the comparison. Trends held fairly constant, showing Squalicum students outperforming Sammamish in reading and writing, slightly below Sammamish in math, and underperforming Olympia and Shorecrest students overall.

- **Other “Readiness Factor” Trends: HS Credits in MS; AVID Participation; FAFSA**

A number of factors contribute to students’ readiness for post-secondary options. In the paragraphs that follow, we explore three data sources that may have bearing on students’ readiness as they move through our school system. These include: high school credit earning opportunities in the middle school; participation in AVID courses; and data on students’ free applications for federal student aid (FAFSA).

- **High School Credit in Middle School**

Two main options for earning high school credit are available to students in the middle school. Math credit can be earned through successful completion of Algebra 1 in 8th grade, with smaller numbers of capable students accessing Algebra 1 in 7th grade and Geometry in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. World language is comprised of high school Spanish and French, plus credits from competency based tests (credit for proficiency) in Burmese, Chinese, German, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese. Table 1 shows the trends in Bellingham middle school students earning high school credit.

**TABLE 1. Middle School Students Taking High School Credits**

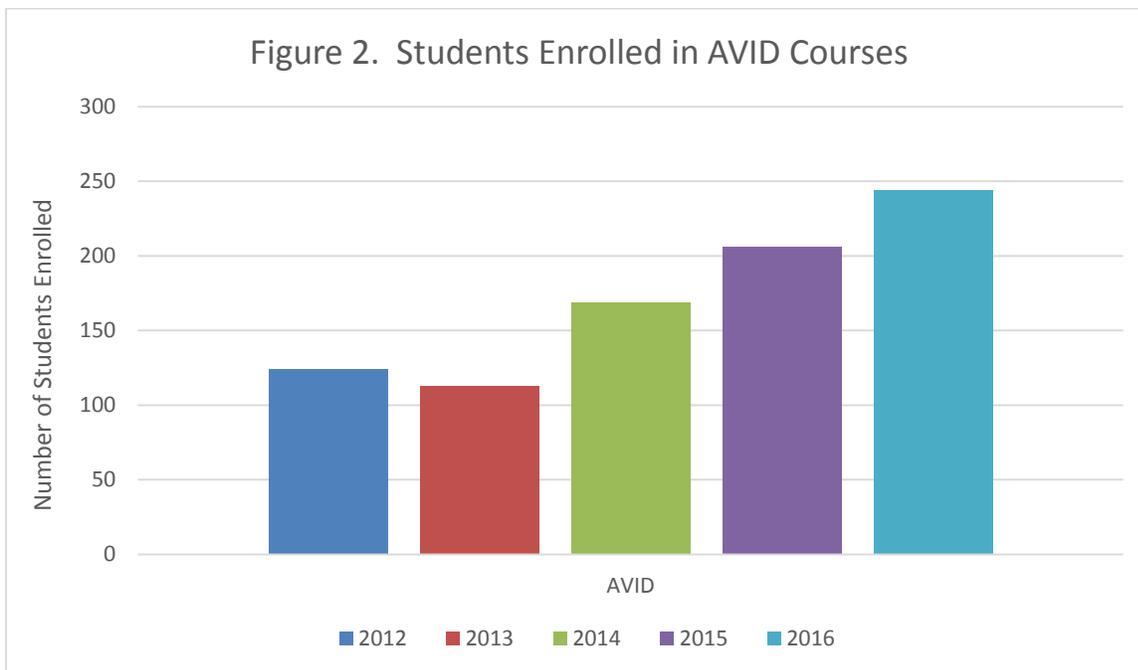
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Mathematics</b>	643	698	608	351	323
<b>World Language</b>	162	199	204	155	210
<b>Any Credits</b>	659	749	638	375	396

As the data reveals, math credits earned once again trended down slightly, while world language credits earned trended upward. Overall, the trend in middle school students earning high school credit is down over the past five years, due in large part to the shift to the common core based curriculum in math, which mandates that most students not “skip” math courses in the middle school to their later detriment. High school credit options in math will continue to be available to middle school students for whom this approach is based in data on attainment, performance

and likelihood for success. As a system, we have stopped the heavy pressure to advance students early in math that was present as recently as five years ago, in favor of an approach that focuses on students learning the material they need for success deeply and well. The district's world language program continues to be a work in progress, and more opportunities for language learning would be predicated on moving the middle schools to a new schedule, perhaps similar to the 4x8 schedule that is being implemented in high schools next year. With the current middle school schedule students are, in many cases, forced to choose between a year-long language course as eighth graders or a music or art elective. We need a schedule that can accommodate both, as well as language offerings in the earlier grades that build a robust program of language learning that over time may also make the high school credit issue in the middle school moot.

- **Student Participation in AVID Courses**

As some board members may recall, one of the Ends reports from two years ago featured stories of some first generation college-going students from Squalicum HS. The recipe for those students' successes that were highlighted included a combination of participation in AP courses supported by participation in an AVID course. AVID is a secondary elective course taken during the school day. Students are usually selected to enroll in an AVID class after an application process. For one class period a day, they learn organizational and study skills, work on critical thinking and asking probing questions, get academic help from peers and college tutors, and participate in enrichment and motivational activities that make college seem attainable. Students enrolled in AVID are typically required to enroll in at least one challenging course, such as an AP class, in addition to the AVID elective. Research on the AVID program suggests that as students progress in AVID courses, their self-images improve and they become academically more successful leaders and role models for other students. We've seen this play out first hand with students in our high schools, and as such our emphasis on building the AVID program and student participation continues. Figure 2 below reveals the trends in AVID course participation

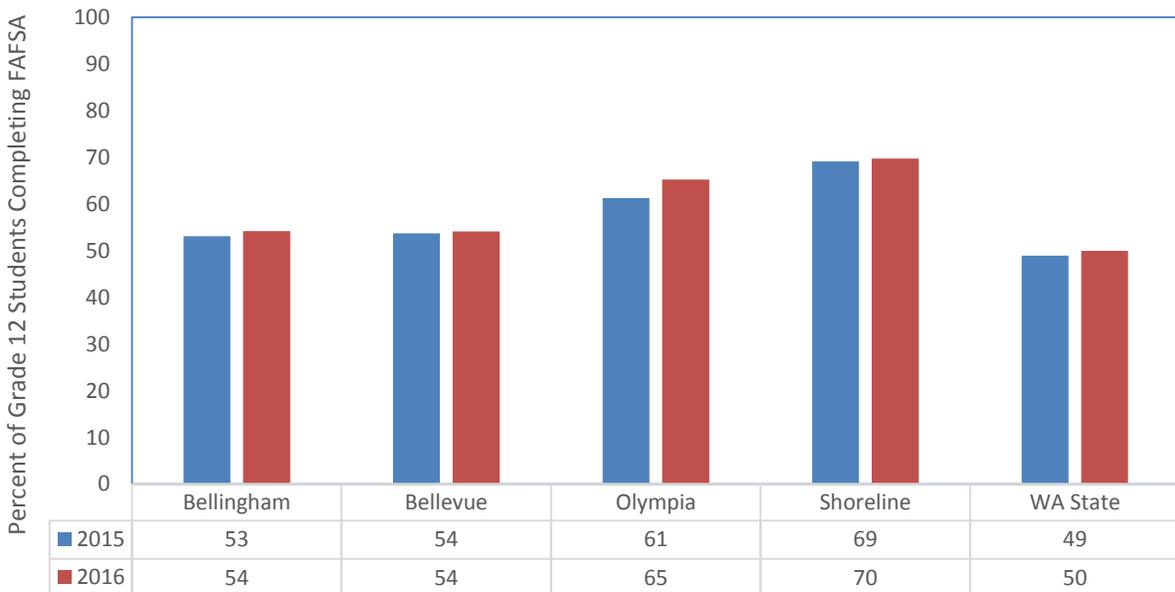


among Bellingham students over the past five years. We are once again looking at the program as we progress into this upcoming budget cycle with an eye toward continuing to expand opportunities for students.

- **FAFSA Application Participation**

The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) assesses students’ eligibility for post-secondary financial aid and is submitted around the time students are readying their post-secondary applications. While the submission of this form seems such a simple step, research suggests that over 90% of students who complete the FAFSA enroll at post-secondary institutions within twelve months of high school graduation. For many students, completing the FAFSA is the first step taken in pursuit of financial aid and postsecondary education. Figure 3 below reveals comparison data on FAFSA completion. 54% of 2016 Bellingham seniors completed the FAFSA, up slightly from the year prior. Overall, Bellingham students complete

Figure 3. FAFSA Completion Rates



the FAFSA at rates above the state average, on par with Bellevue school district students, and below students in Olympia and Shoreline.

### **Concluding Statement**

We appreciate the board’s attention and support of ongoing improvement for our district. We believe this report focuses on issues that align with our vision, mission and outcomes, and is supported by data that demonstrates progress toward achievement of these Ends. Clearly the report signals areas where we need to continue to improve students’ access to rigorous coursework experiences; it also sheds light on aspects of our program that are key readiness factors in helping students prepare for post-secondary work and school. We hope this report

serves as a useful tool in support of the school board's charge to hold us accountable for key student outcomes, and to ensure those outcomes remain relevant and inspire meaningful work throughout the organization and community.