

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: April 12, 2017
SUBJECT: Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 3

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1, Part 3 - Student Advancement Toward On-Time or Extended Graduation) to the school district's board of directors. Monitoring reports provide members of the school board and the community we serve with an update on our progress toward the mission, vision and outcomes defined within our district's strategic plan, *The Bellingham Promise*. As in previous recent years, our process for reporting on Ends 2.1 during the 2016-17 school year has occurred over a series of meetings, beginning with the previously submitted Part 1 report at the December 15, 2016 meeting, and the Part 2 report at the March 9, 2017 meeting. This report is the final installment of the Ends 2.1 sequence for this academic year. Yet to come is a summative report on Ends 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0, which will be presented in May 2017.

Ends 2.1, Part 3 examines how Bellingham students are faring in terms of on-time and extended graduation, and draws our attention to trends in student drop-out rates overall and within identified subgroups. Where possible, we've also examined comparisons of Bellingham Public Schools' student graduation trends to those in comparable high-performing districts. By way of reminder, 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

Our approach to this Part 3 report is consistent with the approach we've followed for Ends 2.1, Parts 1 and 2. This report, Part 3, focuses specifically on the *fifth point* listed below – examination of on-time and extended graduation rates.

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.**

Graduation Rates in Fifty Comparable Districts 2010-2015

How is Bellingham faring overall in terms of efforts to increase graduation rates relative to comparable districts? Page 1 of the data set shows the graduation percentages of Bellingham, Olympia, Shoreline and Bellevue school districts set in the context of the larger sample of the top fifty comparable districts. Bellingham students' overall five-year graduation rate is up 10% over the past six years, increasing from 79% in 2010 to 89% in 2015. Relative to the three high-performing comparable districts we gauge our progress against (Olympia, Shoreline and Bellevue) Bellingham's graduation rates have closed the gap with rates in those systems significantly over this time period. In 2010, our nearest high-performing comparable district from this group was graduating students at a rate 10% above ours. Fast forward to 2015 and our five-year rate is now approaching that of Shoreline (2% difference) and within 5% of Olympia. Bellevue continues to set the high bar, at over 95% five-year graduation rate. In terms of the big picture, the data suggests that our graduation rates have increased substantially over the past six years, and now position us well above the median of the fifty comparable districts in the larger comparison group, and much nearer our three high-performing comparable peer districts.

Four and Five Year Graduation Rates for High Performing Comparable Districts

For reporting purposes, we focus on both the four-year (on time) and five-year graduate rates (students who earn their high school diploma during a fifth year). A number of students in each cohort do extend into a fifth year or beyond in order to accrue the necessary credits needed to graduate. We believe reporting on both numbers gives a better sense of how many students are

successfully achieving high school graduation within a reasonable time horizon. As the data on page 2 reveal, Bellingham students’ four and five year rates improved slightly in year-to-year comparisons, with our four-year rate increasing from 82% in 2015 to 83% in 2016, and our five-year rate increasing from 82% to 87% in year-over-year comparisons between 2014 and 2015. These position us above the state averages on both measures, and below our three high-performing comparable districts. However, the improvement trajectory of Bellingham’s rates has been fairly consistent over this five-year period, narrowing the gaps with our three high-performing comparable peer districts during the same time frame. We’ve also included another comparison in this report graphic, which tracks the graduation rates for the group of twelve districts that are more demographically similar in terms of percentage of students eligible for free or reduced priced meals. These twelve districts (see Table 1 below) are within +/- 5% of

| Table 1. “Close Comparables*” to Bellingham - - 12 Districts | |
|---|--------------------|
| <i>District</i> | <i>% F/R Meals</i> |
| Arlington | 32% |
| North Kitsap | 32% |
| Sumner | 32% |
| Central Kitsap | 34% |
| Richland | 34% |
| Bellingham | 37% |
| University Place | 37% |
| Oak Harbor | 38% |
| Omak | 40% |
| Ferndale | 42% |
| Fife | 42% |
| West Valley | 42% |
| *Student Enrollment 3,700 to 18,900; Free/Reduced Meals 32% to 42% | |

Bellingham in terms of free/reduced lunch rates. This comparison also shows Bellingham rising within this group of “close comparable districts” in terms of our graduation rates. With regard to 2016 data, Bellingham’s graduation rates are on par with the average across this group for both four-year and five-year graduation, rising from 5% below the average back in 2012. Finally, the graphs on page 3 compare the 2014 four-year and 2015 five-year graduation rates for Bellingham students with those of Washington State overall. Bellingham students once again exceeded the State in terms of overall graduation percentage for both four-year and five-year cohorts, and positively increased the gap between our rates and the state average.

Disparities in Five-Year Graduation Rates by Student Subgroups in BPS

What about the question of equity in our graduation rates? We again analyzed Bellingham’s internal graduation data by the four student subgroups that we’ve used to help understand how equitable our district’s graduation rates are. Last year’s report noted a slight drop in the

graduation rates of all four of our examined subgroups (ELL, Hispanic, low income and students with IEPs). We raised a question in that prior report about whether this drop was an anomaly or the tipping point of a prolonged negative trend. Page 4 of the data set displays the five-year graduation rate cohort comparisons for Bellingham students. We are happy to report that the numbers have jumped back up with all four subgroups in this year's analysis. The rates for English language learners and students with IEPs improved four percentage points over last year, with low income and Hispanic students improving six percent. Of particular note, 2015 five-year graduation rates for Bellingham's Hispanic students, low income students and students with IEPs were higher overall than at any time in the last five years. These improvements give us confidence that the drops we saw last year were not the beginning of a negative trend, but rather a function of the particular student cohort. That said, we still note that there are large percentages of students in each of these representative groups who drop out of high school prior to graduation. With our emphasis on the "94" project this year, we have redoubled our efforts to identify and support all Bellingham students' successful journey to the high school graduation stage. We hope and expect to see these improvements in the graduation rates of our largest examined subgroups continue into the future.

Gaps in Five-Year Graduation Rates by Student Subgroups for Comparable Districts

In addition to our internal analysis of Bellingham student graduation data by subgroup, we also ran an analysis comparing our progress in this area with our comparison group of three high performing comparable districts. Pages 5-8 of the data set offer year-to-year cohort trends for Bellingham, Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline comparing five-year graduation rates for the four major examined student subgroups (ELL, Hispanic, low income and students with IEPs) as well as the gaps between these identified groups and non-identified peers (ELL vs. non-ELL, etc.). Bellingham student data is displayed on the top graphic on each of these four pages with the trends for Bellevue, Olympia, Shoreline and the state overall displayed below. Because these groups are, in some cases, small in number, these gap trends can be somewhat unstable, and therefore may fluctuate more dramatically year to year.

That said, with regard to ELL students (page 5 of the data set), Bellingham's class of 2015 student graduation rates increased for that subgroup, while numbers dipped in each of our high-performing comparable districts. Despite our increase, the gap between ELL and non-ELL actually widened slightly in our district, while narrowing slightly across the state overall. It is important to remember that by virtue of their identification as ELL, this subgroup is still receiving special services to help them learn English. We do not display data that compares the graduation trends for those students who were initially identified for ELL services and then exited from the program when they achieved English proficiency. So, by definition, ELL students are still learning English and have not transitioned out of that status.

Page 6 shows the subgroup data for Hispanic students, and again Bellingham's rates are increasing for that group while some of our high-performing comparable districts dipped (Bellevue and Shoreline). We were pleased to see the gap between Hispanic and White student graduation rates narrowing in Bellingham, even as our overall percentages are increasing for both groups of students. This trend of overall improvement in graduation rates while gaps are narrowing was true for Hispanic students across Washington state as well.

Trends were positive for our low income student population as well (page 7 of the data set), with graduation attainment higher at the same time that the gap between rates for low income and non-low income shrunk slightly for Bellingham students. That said, the graduation rate gap between Bellingham’s low income and non-low income populations is still significantly larger than either the state average, or that of any of our three high performing comparable districts.

Finally, we looked at the graduation rates and gap trends over time comparing students on IEPs with their non-IEP counterparts (page 8 of the data set). While our graduation rates for students receiving special education services are up almost 10% over the past five years, the gap continues to be fairly consistent between that group and their non-special education peers. Interestingly, trends in our three high-performing comparable districts this year showed a wider gap in a couple of cases (Bellevue and Shoreline), and narrower in one instance (Olympia), while the gap across the state remained relatively constant in year-over-year comparisons.

BPS College-Going and College Persistence Trends

As we did last year with this report, we’ve included some data on post-secondary outcomes for our Bellingham students. We begin with a big picture look at college-going trends for Bellingham students as represented in the National Student Clearinghouse data set that we’ve recently added to our available data sources via a new subscription. This data set trails a year or two behind the current year, so when you see references to 2013-2015 data, those are the most recently available reliable data in this resource bank. Table 2 shows data trends on Bellingham students’ two- and four-year college enrollment trends from 2013-2015. We are not able to provide comparison information from our high-performing comparable group of districts on these measures. These data include information about student cohorts enrolled in college at any time during their first two years after high school. We include information on students from the two year window because of recent trends in the number of students choosing to do a “gap year” after high school graduation before enrolling in college, so as to capture the most inclusive information about college going rates.

| Table 2. Count of Bellingham Students Enrolled in College at Any Time During the First Two Years After High School | | | |
|---|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | <i>Class of 2013</i> | <i>Class of 2014</i> | <i>Class of 2015</i> |
| Total in the Class | 696 | 708 | 774 |
| Total Enrolled | 557 | 558 | 572 |
| Total in Public | 445 | 458 | 474 |
| Total in Private | 112 | 100 | 98 |
| Total in 4-year | 352 | 340 | 358 |
| Total in 2-year | 205 | 218 | 214 |
| Total In State | 428 | 421 | 454 |
| Total Out of State | 129 | 137 | 118 |

As the data reveal, the raw numbers of Bellingham students enrolling in two- or four-year colleges are increasing slightly in each of the last three years, with the high majority of those students enrolling in a two- or four-year public institution within Washington state. Of the 572 students who enrolled in 2015, 358 of those enrolled in a four-year institution, while 214 enrolled in a two-year school. As the graph on the top of page 9 of the data set reveals, the percentage of students enrolling in either two- or four-year schools at any time within their first two years after high school decreased slightly in each of the past two years. One explanation for the drop in percentages may be that as we increase our graduation rates overall, which as noted above is our ongoing trend in Bellingham, this may have the effect of decreasing the overall represented percentage of graduates who go on to college. In other words, students who previously were not graduating from our schools, but who now are graduating, may not be college bound at the same rate as those who have been graduating all along. Raw numbers (Table 2 above) suggest that more graduates are attending college each year, but that this accounts for a slightly smaller percentage of students in year-over-year comparisons.

We also took a high level look at college persistence information. The graph on the bottom of page 9 shows the percent of students who enrolled in college the first year out of high school, and then persisted in a second year of college (freshman to sophomore persistence). The overall persistence rate for Bellingham graduates in 2013 was 88% and 87% in 2014. This rate is well above the 2014 national average of 69.6% students who persist into a second year of college.¹ A greater percentage of Bellingham students enrolling in four-year colleges persist (95%) than those who enroll in a two-year school.

BPS IEP Student Post-Secondary Outcomes Data

Our analysis also includes an additional perspective on our students with IEPs and what occurs for them after they leave our system. As noted above, this subgroup tends to be our most challenged in terms of being at risk to not graduate on time or within the five-year window. In the data set on page 10, we are once again pleased to note that our district graduates with IEPs continue to realize better outcomes than similar students in Washington state overall, including more graduates going on to higher education and fewer graduates not engaged in either school or employment of some kind. This is also true for district non-graduates with IEPs.

That said, we also looked across a four-year trend on these measures, and this revealed a mixed picture in terms of year-to-year analysis. The graph on the bottom of page 10 of the data set shows these trends for Bellingham's graduates and non-graduates with IEPs. Important to note that the up and down nature of these trends are most likely due to the fact that the percentages represent relatively small numbers of students in any given class.

Page 11 of the data set compares our post-school outcomes for our Bellingham students on IEPs with those from our three high-performing comparable districts, as well as with state averages. As the graphic on the top of page 11 reveals, Bellingham students graduating with IEPs in 2015 attended higher education at a rate second only to those in Bellevue. This trend was true as well for our non-graduates on IEPs from the 2015 cohort (bottom of page 11).

Concluding Statement

In this final report on Ends 2.1 (Part 3) we reviewed the high school graduation trends in Bellingham in comparison with state and high performing comparable district trends. We've noted some areas of significant continuous improvement over the past several years as our overall graduation rates continue to trend higher. As well, we've pointed out the need for continued work to ensure that ALL students, regardless of their race, socio-economic status or different abilities are able to realize success in achieving a high school diploma. We've also included some new information in this year's report that created a baseline for tracking Bellingham graduates' college-going and college persistence rates.

We believe that this final installment of the Ends 2.1 monitoring report, in combination with the previous parts of the report, 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.

¹See the report from the National Student Clearinghouse -- <https://nscnews.org/college-student-persistence-rate-inches-back-up-69-6-still-enrolled-in-second-year/>