

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: January 29, 2018
SUBJECT: Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 2

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1, Part 2 - Student Advancement Toward On-Time or Extended Graduation and Reduction in Drop-Out Rates) to the school district's board of directors. Our process for reporting on Ends 2.1 during the 2017-18 school year occurs over a series of meetings, beginning with the previously submitted Part 1 report at the January 10, 2018 meeting. This report is the second installment of the Ends 2.1 sequence for this academic year. Yet to come is a third installment of the Ends 2.1 sequence of reports (March 14, 2018), as well as a summative report on Ends 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0, which will be presented on May 9, 2018.

Ends 2.1 Part 2 examines how Bellingham students are faring in terms of on-time and extended graduation rates, and draws our attention to trends in student drop-out rates overall and within identified student subgroups. Where possible, we've also examined comparisons of Bellingham Public Schools' student graduation trends to those in comparable high-performing districts. We have once again relied on comparisons with a small group of high-performing comparable districts whose populations of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals fall below those eligible in our district. We have also relied on comparisons with a cluster of districts that are within +/-5% of Bellingham in terms of percent of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals. This free/reduced priced meals percentage comparison is what we typically use as a proxy for a poverty index in our data comparisons.

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 Ends 2.1, Part 2 report is consistent with the approach we've followed previously. This report focuses specifically on the *fourth 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. 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.
5. After graduation, student participation in post-secondary education and career preparation shall increase and exceed participation than in comparable high-performing districts.

Graduation Rates in Forty-Three Comparable Districts 2010-2016

We begin by comparing Bellingham student graduation rates (using the metric of five-year adjusted cohort data) with the forty-three closest demographically comparable districts that we regularly use as our largest comparison group. Page one of the data set highlights the graduation percentages of Bellingham, Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline school districts set in the context of the larger sample of the top forty-three comparable districts. Bellingham students' overall five-year graduation rate increased from 79% in 2010 to 87% in 2016. High-performing comparable districts (Olympia, Shoreline and Bellevue) also realized gains in graduation rates over this period. While Bellingham's overall five-year graduation rate remains below these three high-performing comparable districts, the gap between our district's rates and those of the high-performing comparable group has closed significantly over the past six years. In the six years observed, Bellingham's five-year graduation rate has increased by 8%, with Shoreline improving by 1%, Bellevue by 2% and Olympia by 6%. Our district graduation rate has also moved from near the state average in 2010, to 5% above the state in 2016.

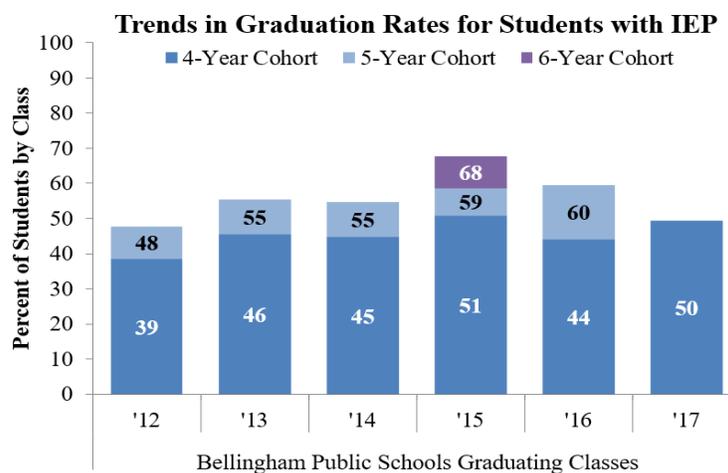
Four- and Five-Year Graduation Rates Compared with High-Performing Comparable Districts

We also 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. The

graphs on page two compare the 2017 four-year and 2016 five-year graduation rates for Bellingham students with those of Washington State overall, and with our three high-performing comparable comparison districts. The page two graph also includes trends for the average of the twelve districts whose free/reduced priced meal percentages fall within +/- 5% of Bellingham.¹ Bellingham students' four- and five-year graduation percentages have increased once again this year, continuing the trend we've seen over recent years. As the data on page two reveal, Bellingham students' graduation rates have exceeded the State in terms of overall graduation percentage for both four-year and five-year cohorts. Furthermore, Bellingham's four-year graduation numbers increased each year, with a 2% increase in this most recent year (83% to 85%) while comparison districts were up 1% (Bellevue), down 1% (Olympia), up 2% (Shoreline) and up 1% (12 district comparison group). On page three, we were also pleased to see that dropout rates (shown in orange) for both the four-year cohort and the five-year cohort of Bellingham students included in this report decreased again, and are below the state average by 4% (four-year) and 5% (five-year). Overall, dropout rates in Bellingham have decreased by 5% (four-year) and 7% (five-year) since 2012.

Five-Year Graduation Rates by Student Subgroups

We again analyzed Bellingham's internal graduation data for the four student subgroups that we've used to focus on the question of how equitable are our district's graduation rates. Page four of the data set displays the five-year graduation rate cohort comparisons for Bellingham students who are English language learners, Hispanic, eligible for free/reduced priced meals and receiving special education services. In all four subgroups, graduation rates for 2016 increased in year-over-year comparisons. Furthermore, we've seen dramatic increases for all four subgroups since 2011. Since that time, the dropout rate for English language learners has decreased from 27% to 10%. For Hispanics, dropout rates have fallen from 33% to 10%, and five-year graduation rates are up a full 20% (from 63% in 2011 to 83% in 2016). Low income



¹ This is the same group of twelve districts we've referenced in the first Ends 2.1 report this year.

student dropout rates have fallen from 26% to 17% over this time period, and for students with IEPs the rate has fallen from 27% to 21%, with many students who are on an IEP continuing beyond a fifth year.

The focus on our students served by special education caused us to look a little deeper into the continuation rates. The graph included above shows the sixth year data for one cohort of students with IEPs. As the data reveal, the additional year for the cohort from 2015 added another 9% of that group as successful high school graduates.

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. Page five of the data set offers year-to-year cohort trends for Bellingham, Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline comparing English language learners (ELL) and non-ELL student five-year graduation rates. Gaps are closing for Bellingham students, while the state gap has remained relatively constant, and are widening in some of our high-performing comparables (Bellevue and Shoreline). The Olympia data fluctuates rather dramatically due to relatively small numbers of ELL students.

Similarly, the data on page six show the gap between Bellingham's white and Hispanic student population graduation rates getting narrower, as is the gap in Washington state overall. Page seven shows the overall trends for low income students versus non-low income, suggesting that while all students' graduation rates have ascended over six years, the gap has also closed slightly in that time period. On page eight, data are presented comparing students with and without IEPs over the same time frame. While this gap continues to be large in Bellingham, we also know that many students served in special education continue into a sixth or seventh year, and many do complete high school successfully in that extended timeframe.

The Effects of Poverty on Graduation Rates

A final piece of our analysis of graduation rates this year focuses in on the specific influence of income on high school completion. The graphs on page nine of the data set split out three of our identified student subgroups into categories of low-income and non-low-income. The graph on the top of that page shows the stark difference for Hispanic and white students who are low-income vs. their non-low income peers. Interestingly, Hispanic students in the five-year cohort from the class of 2016 who are non-low-income graduated at a higher rate than white students who are non-low-income. The graph at the bottom of the page reveals that those ELL students who are non-low-income graduated at a higher rate than low-income non-ELL students. The disparities created by income levels are similar for those students with IEPs (middle graph). For students who have an IEP and also low-income, on average they graduate at a rate that is a full ten percentile points behind their non-low-income peers with IEPs. Consistent with the achievement data analysis in the first report this year, the effects of poverty pose a significant overarching impediment to high school graduation.

Summary Discussion

We believe the increasing graduation rates for Bellingham students that we're seeing in this analysis start with efforts to support our youngest learners with high quality teaching, and continues throughout the students' entire educational experience through middle and high school. This report suggests that these efforts are paying off with trends in increased graduation over a period of several years. While the gap analysis reveals that we still have areas of significant 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 are also hopeful that the efforts we've made in recent years to identify, locate and support students who either have dropped out or are at high risk for dropping out stay in school and finish with their diplomas are paying off in these data trends. We continue as a system to refuse to quit on those kids who otherwise might leave and not complete high school. The "94" project that the leadership team engaged in beginning with the 2015 cohort of dropouts put a spotlight on the individual stories of students and ways they are caused to disengage with school. By continuing to hold up these stories, and keep focused on providing new and innovative supports, we hope to continue to make progress in getting kids to the finish line and beyond.

Concluding Statement

This second installment of the Ends 2.1 monitoring report, in combination with the other parts of the report, is offered 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. I want to reiterate our appreciation for 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.