BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: **Board of Directors**

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

DATE: **December 5, 2018**

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

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1 - Student Competence, Part 1) to the school district's board of directors. Ends 2.1, Part 1 explores student performance in English language arts, math and science, and compares our progress to comparable and higher-performing districts. Part 2 of Ends 2.1 will be presented at the February 13, 2019 board meeting and will focus on students' continuous improvement toward graduation in comparison to peer districts. Part 3 will be presented at the March 13, 2019 board meeting focusing on students' participation in post-secondary education and career preparation in comparison to peer districts, along with a summative conversation in anticipation of the Board's evaluation of our reporting on Ends 2.1 overall.

Introduction

The report that follows focuses on the Bellingham Public School's student achievement performance levels overall on the Smarter Balanced assessment (SBA) and compares our progress to selected peer districts. We also include additional comparison data that highlight how Bellingham students' test performance measures up to all the states who are included in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC).

By way of reminder, the board revised the Ends 2.1 policy language in June of 2018. Language included in the revision focuses us on comparing progress to districts that are demographically similar to Bellingham, as well as to districts whose students typically outperform our students on the standardized test. The newly crafted 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 show continuous significant growth, and measures will exceed the Washington state benchmarks and be high performing relative to similar students in demographically comparable districts, as measured by state assessments and other available data, as appropriate.
2. Gaps in achievement, skills and attributes between groups of students will close. For state or federally identified student populations, any gap in achievement will eliminated, and annual achievement will be greater than that of similar students in demographically comparable districts.
3. Every student will make continuous advancement toward graduation. Measures of on-time and extended graduation attainment will be high performing relative to similar students in demographically comparable districts.
4. After graduation, student participation in post-secondary education and career preparation shall increase and exceed participation than in comparable high-performing districts.

While being held accountable to our demographically comparable districts, we also continue to compare our progress to other district, state and national data that offer a more comprehensive view of student competence.

In this Part 1 report, we focus on numbers 1-2 above. The remaining items are the subject of future Ends reports this year.

Methodology for Identifying Comparable Peer Districts

Ends 2.1 relies on big picture comparisons to a total of 42 districts that were selected on the basis of being somewhat demographically similar to Bellingham. The main sections of our report focus in on a smaller group of 15 demographically similar peer districts and additional comparisons to the Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline school districts which comprise a group of strategically chosen "high bar" districts that typically outperform our system on measures of student achievement and graduation rates. Table A below includes the parameters that guided the choice of the larger group of 42 comparison districts. Table B below includes the 15 more-demographically-similar district group. And finally, Table C below arrays Bellingham's key demographic data alongside of the three comparison, high-bar peer districts.

Table A: Parameters to Determine Comparable 42 District Pool

Criteria	Parameters	Low	Bellingham	High
Enrollment	67% above and below	3,929	11,905	19,881
% Free/Reduced Meal	50% above and below	16.9	33.9	50.8
% Asian and White	25% above and below	54.7	73	91.2
% Limited English	67% above and below	2.4	7.4	12.3
% Special Education	25% above and below	11.2	15.0	18.7

Table B: Demographic Data for Bellingham and Districts Comparable by Free/Reduced Meal Participation

District	Enrollment	% Free or Reduced Meal	% Asian and White	% Limited English	% Special Education
Bellingham	11,905	33.9	73.0	7.4	15.0
Arlington	5,628	30.5	76.8	4.6	14.1
Battle Ground	13,558	31.7	84.4	6.6	14.1
Central Kitsap	11,379	38.1	64.6	2.1	16.0
Central Valley	13,870	33.6	83.9	3.7	14.5
Ellensburg	3,397	38.6	76.7	7.5	14.8
Enumclaw	4,130	28.8	78.6	5.8	17.3
Everett	20,460	36.7	67.6	13.5	14.3
Lynden	3,276	30.5	69.5	10.4	17.2
North Kitsap	6,022	32.2	68.5	3.6	14.4
Oak Harbor	6,056	35.4	66.2	4.1	17.1
Richland	13,905	35.2	75.0	5.0	11.9
South Kitsap	9,937	34.6	72.6	1.7	15.3
University Place	5,699	34.1	57.8	5.5	10.7
West Valley (Yakima)	5,439	39.7	65.0	6.6	14.1
White River	3,885	29.7	82.3	3.0	14.4

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

District	Enrollment	% Free or Reduced Meal	% Asian and White	% Limited English	% Special Education
Bellingham	11,905	33.9	73.0	7.4	15.0
Bellevue	20,717	17.2	76.0	14.6	9.3
Olympia	10,182	27.5	75.1	2.6	15.1
Shoreline	9,847	25.1	66.8	7.9	12.5

- ▪ **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Comparison**

The SBA test is given by a number of states around the United States and as such creates the possibility for us to compare how our district and state performance measures up to those other states that use the same test.

As the tables on page 1 of the attached data set reveal, Washington State is the top-performing, or near top-performing, state overall when compared with other SBAC states. Understanding where Washington falls as a state provides a better context for understanding what it means to exceed state percentages. At many grade levels, our district's students tend to outperform our state proficiency rate, and in fact outperform most of the other states that administer the Smarter Balanced exam. As a district, Bellingham students scored above the proficiency rate in Washington state on the English language arts (ELA) test in grades five, six, seven and eight, and above the state proficiency rate in math at grades six, seven and eight. Bellingham students performed below the state in third and fourth grade ELA and math, as well as just below the state in fifth grade math.

We also know that as our students progress through the grade levels, their state test scores tend to increase. Middle school students in Bellingham perform better on the SBA than their early grade elementary peers. Why does this phenomenon occur? We are not completely sure, but one contributing factor is likely our de-emphasis on test-taking strategies and skills. We have not made performance on the state test an overriding concern for our teachers and students, largely because it does not align with our emphasis in the Bellingham Promise on teaching the whole child. Earlier this year, our Department of Teaching and Learning team spent a meeting focused on the third grade test, in particular, just to get a sense of what students are being asked to accomplish. The test is challenging on a number of levels. It is heavily text-based, both in the ELA portion and the math portion. It requires students to have a fair amount of facility with computer navigation skills. This experience gave us a better understanding of what students face as third graders the first time they encounter the SBA. While we'd like to see the early grade scores hit a higher mark, we also feel that because students seem to figure out the test as they make their way through our system we are not inclined, at least at this point, to make test prep a bigger portion of our elementary school experience.

- **2018 Proficiency Percentiles -- Bellingham Compared to 42 Comparable Districts**

Pages 2-3 of the data set show the proficiency bar charts of the 42 districts in the larger comparable set, plus Washington state. The dark blue highlighted line shows where Bellingham is positioned versus the three comparison high-bar districts (highlighted in red) in terms of student achievement on the Smarter Balanced test in both ELA and math, grades three through eight in 2018. As the bar chart illustrates, student populations from Bellevue, Shoreline and Olympia, the three districts in our comparison set, achieve at a higher rate than Bellingham students overall. Bellingham students scored at the 68th percentile in ELA, which ranked us number15 out of the 42 comparable districts in 2018 on ELA (page 2). Our high bar comparison peer districts are Bellevue (ranked number 1 overall), Shoreline (number 2) and Olympia (number 4). In mathematics, Bellingham students scored at the 62nd percentile, which ranked us number 17 out of the 42 comparable districts (see page 3 of the data set), and very near the state proficiency rate. Bellevue, Shoreline and Olympia ranked number 1, number 3 and number 4 respectively in this same group.

Given the drop we observed in scores this year, we were interested to explore the trends within each grade level cohort of students. Page 4 of the data set displays the state test proficiency by class cohort beginning with fourth graders (two years of test data) arrayed through eighth graders (four years of test data). This data reveals how students within each cohort performed on each year's test that they've taken. For example, on the graph at the top of page 4 in the area of ELA, data reveal that the eighth graders in 2018 (class of 2022) scored 71% proficient on the SBA; four years earlier, as fifth graders, that group scored 68% proficient. Page 4 compares the within-cohort trends between our students and the state as a whole. As one can see from the data, cohort data moves up and down each year. For example, we observed that in year-over-year comparisons with the prior year in ELA for last year's grades 5, 7 and 8, student scores increased slightly while decreasing in the area of math in all grades.

We have also included an analysis of how Bellingham's students compare with the more demographically similar group of 15 districts that are within +/- 5% of us in terms of the percent of students eligible for free/reduced price meals. Page 5 arrays these peer districts by percent of students eligible for free/reduced price meals. By definition, Bellingham falls in the exact middle of this group of comparable districts when arrayed this way, with half of the districts within +5% and half within -5% of Bellingham's free/reduced percentage. Page 6 arrays these same districts by the overall percent of students meeting standard. As the graphic reveals, Bellingham students' performance was similar to that of students in many of these districts and slightly lower on average for 2018 than in the prior year. Our district scores overall put us in the same range as districts such as South Kitsap, North Kitsap, White River, Lynden, Richland and Arlington.

We were interested to learn more from districts like University Place, which has roughly the same percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price meals as Bellingham, but whose students scored at a much higher percent proficient. Seventy-five percent of University Place students scored proficient or higher in ELA and 73% in math, making it the outlier in this group of fifteen peer districts at the high end of the scale. By contrast, Bellingham's students on average scored at 60% proficient in ELA and 51% proficient in math. Turns out that upon deeper exploration, University Place's community-wide poverty index hovers around 11%, whereas Bellingham's index is double that at 22%. The lower poverty index indicated to us that even though the district rates of student eligibility for free and/or reduced lunch are identical in University Place and Bellingham, University Place likely has more students eligible for "reduced" meals compared with our district, where the majority of students who are eligible receive "free" meals. As we know from prior reports, poverty plays such a heavy role in determining these test score outcomes.

Similarly, we are interested to connect with West Valley of Yakima, which scored well above our district on both tests, yet has a higher rate of students eligible for free/reduced price meals (40% eligible, compared to 34% in Bellingham). The poverty index for Yakima is similar to Bellingham's so this comparison could be a highly relevant one for future exploration.

- **District Smarter Balanced Scores Compared to Comparable High Performing Peers**

In the data set provided for the board, we also present overall comparisons against the state benchmarks on the first four years of the Smarter Balanced test to the selected high bar comparable group of school districts, namely Bellevue, Shoreline and Olympia. Several different indicators of achievement are tracked and presented. These include:

  o ELA in grade bands 3-5 and 6-8; ELA grade 10
  o math in grade bands 3-5 and 6-8; math grade 10
  o science in grades 5 and 8.

Pages 7-11 of the data set compare percentages of Bellingham students who *met* standard on the state test with percentages of students from the other three comparable high-bar districts, as well as with the state overall. Bar graphs include student overall comparisons, and comparisons on the four subgroup populations we have typically tracked: Hispanic/Latino students; English language learners, students with individualized education plans (IEPs); and students participating in the

free and reduced price meals program. We have included the 2015, 2016 and 2017 data alongside the 2018 data to give at least a visual nod to how these scores are trending over this three-year period. The state introduced a new science exam in 2018, so we do not have trend data for that subject. Page 12 compares the percentages of Bellingham students who *exceeded* standard to our comparison group.

Bellingham students overall, as well as within examined subgroups, tended to outperform the state proficiency rates on the Smarter Balanced test again this year, and underperform those students from our high performing comparable district set (Bellevue, Olympia, Shoreline). Scores for students in Bellingham were generally down slightly across the board in the overall picture (page 7). Within subpopulations of students we track, Hispanic students (page 8) showed slight increases in scores this year in both ELA and math at the middle level, but dropped at the elementary level. Scores for students receiving English language learner support (page 9) also were mostly down, with the exception of ELA at the middle level, where we saw an increase. Scores for students with individualized education plans (page 10) increased in elementary ELA and middle school math, but dropped in elementary math and ELA in the middle level. Similarly, scores for students who are from low income households (page 11) were up slightly in middle level math and elementary ELA, but down slightly on middle level ELA and elementary math. Overall, this paints a mixed picture of achievement for our tracked subgroups this year. We also noted this mixed picture was true for our highest-performing high-bar district, Bellevue, as well as for many student subcategories in Shoreline, Olympia and for Washington state overall.

When we looked at the percent of students exceeding standard, comparing Bellingham with our high bar group of comparable districts, data revealed drops in some categories and flat performance in year-over-year comparisons in others. The percent of Bellingham students exceeding standard was down overall (page 12).

Pages 13-14 include some initial data on our high school (grade 10) students' performance. Because the SBA is now the primary assessment used for graduation requirements, we are more confident in the quality of this data as we have seen fewer "opt-outs." Page 13 shows how our tenth graders' performance stacked up with our high-bar comparison districts. Overall, Bellingham students ranked above the state in all categories, including students meeting and exceeding standard at grade 10. It is also important to see our tenth grade students pulling much closer to our high-bar peer group districts in this data. Again, this suggests that as students matriculate through our system, their SBA scores tend to rise. Just to highlight one comparison here, 78% of our tenth graders met standard in ELA in 2018, and 49% exceeded standard. This level of performance was within just a few percentage points of our nearest high-bar peer district, Shoreline, with 82% of students meeting and 52% exceeding standard in ELA.

Even more promising data is included on page 14. Here we compared the performance of our Hispanic students, students with IEPs and our students who are from low income households with that of our "high bar" peer districts. As the data reveal, Bellingham's Hispanic and low income populations outperformed those in Bellevue, the district we typically think of as the highest performing in our comparison group, on the ELA test, and our students with IEPs performed at a comparable level on ELA to students in all the high-bar peer districts.

Close Achievement Gaps

Pages 15-19 array comparisons between our district and our high-bar peer districts on achievement gaps for our tracked subgroups. The interest here is to determine whether achievement gaps are closing or growing. Pages 15-17 display the proficiency gaps for three of the subgroup populations we track annually—students who are low income versus those who are not, students receiving special education services versus those not receiving services and Hispanic students versus white students. These are presented again in grade bands (3rd-5th and 6th-8th) and show the difference between the subgroup population and their counterpart comparison group.

The trends we aim for in this data are reductions in year-over-year comparisons. So anywhere the 2018 bar (darkest blue bars on the graphic) is smaller than the 2017 bar (slightly lighter blue bar on the graphic) indicates a reduction in the gap separating the two subgroups being compared. We have also included the 2015-16 data to support a longer term look at trends in this data. Each graph also includes a "candy cane" column (red horizontal stripes) that shows the relative percentage of each subgroup for each of the four districts and the state. As we have reported in previous years, this is an area where we have seen significant gaps that separate subgroups, and has been a strong focus of our equity work as a system, as we try to ensure greater and greater opportunities for all students regardless of income, race or learning disability.

The non-low income to low income gaps (page 15) showed a decrease in nearly every category this year. Elementary ELA, math and science all showed smaller gaps than the prior year. Middle school math and science gaps by income also showed a decrease this year. The middle school ELA gap was slightly higher than in the prior year. By comparison, our achievement gaps between non-low income and low income students are lower than Bellevue's in every category we tracked, and in some cases substantially lower. We believe this data is worth celebrating, and provides evidence that our efforts around equity, diversity and inclusion are helping.

With regard to proficiency gaps between students with and without an IEP (page 16), we see the continuation of a positive trend overall, with gaps shrinking for grades 3-5 ELA, math and science. In math, the gap in grades 6-8 trended smaller again this year, but was up slightly in ELA and science. The gaps for Bellingham students with IEPs were also significantly smaller than our highest-performing comparable district, Bellevue, in every category. We also noted that the gaps for students with IEPs from Bellevue increased in all areas except 6-8 math, which remained flat. Again, we were pleased to see gaps decreasing for this subgroup of students in our district in most categories.

Comparing gaps in proficiency between white and Hispanic students (page 17) revealed a more mixed picture this year. Bellingham achievement gaps between white and Hispanic students increased in each category at the elementary level across all three content areas, but decreased at the middle level in all three content areas. While our gaps were slightly lower than Bellevue's in some areas, we see that the performance gaps of our Hispanic students relative to white peers overall tends to be larger than high-performing comparable districts, and higher than state proficiency rates.

On pages 18-19 of the data set, we have included some initial high school data focused on gaps in subgroup performance. Page 18 arrays Bellingham's non-low income to low income student data, and data for students with and without an IEP, alongside our high-bar peer districts and the state. We were pleased to see that the gap between non-low income and low income 10th graders in our district is well below that of Bellevue's. The gap between scores of students with and without an IEP in Bellingham is even more promising. Our gap is the smallest of all the high-bar peer districts in both ELA and math at grade 10 and below the state proficiency rate in each subject area. Page 19 shows the gap data between white and Hispanic students. Similar to the elementary and middle level data our gaps here are smaller or on par with those in Bellevue, but higher than other high bar peer districts, and higher than state proficiency rates.

The gap analysis this year suggests some improvements being realized, but also that we continue to have a long way to go toward our goal of ensuring that ALL students are enabled and supported to perform at standard. We believe the continuing work we have focused on equity, diversity and inclusion, and the fact that we have made this a more prominent focus in the Bellingham Promise, should help to continue to decrease the gaps we continue to see in this subgroup analysis over time.

Student Growth vs. Proficiency Data

As with our report at this time last year, we are still awaiting the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to release the overall student growth data for districts. We were able to obtain data on growth for students in our system and have arrayed this a couple of different ways in the data set. Pages 20-21 show different views of our student proficiency vs. growth data. Page 20 arrays our tracked subgroup data. Interestingly, the growth scores of students in subgroups are much more tightly grouped than the proficiency scores. While proficiency ranges from the low teens to well above 70% depending on the subgroup, the growth scores all fall within about a 20%-point range. We viewed this as evidence that we are growing the skills of all students at a more uniform rate, even though proficiency varies much more widely.

This same phenomenon was true for our schools as well. Page 21 arrays the elementary and middle schools on the same grid of proficiency by growth. Proficiency scores range much more widely than growth scores, and predictably tend to follow income patterns. Schools with higher income populations like Columbia, Silver Beach and Fairhaven tend to score on the upper end of the proficiency scale. But there is much more uniformity in the growth scores across our schools and some outliers of interest. We wanted to highlight in particular the growth trajectory of Alderwood and Birchwood elementary schools which showed some of the highest growth among our schools last year.

We have not previously included an overall look at school-by-school proficiency in this report. However, given the availability of data, we included some data on individual school proficiency rates. Pages 22-23 show proficiency rates for each of our elementary and middle schools over the past four years in the areas of ELA, math and science. As is evident from these bar charts, proficiency rates jump around a fair amount in year-over-year comparisons at the school level. Some schools are up this year in ELA and math (Lowell Elementary, for example) and others

showed a decrease in one or more areas. We would highlight Shuksan's progress as a positive this year (page 23) where students showed a slight increase in both ELA and math proficiency in year-over-year comparisons. Page 24, the final page of the data set, gives the first look at our individual high school data on proficiency. We will be able to build from this foundational year and show comparisons over time in subsequent reports.

Concluding Statement

We offer this Ends 2.1 Part 1 monitoring report, in combination with the remaining parts of the report that will follow, 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 board's ability to regularly review our ends to ensure they remain relevant and inspire meaningful work throughout the organization and community.