

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Bellingham, Washington

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Board of Directors  
**FROM:** Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent  
**DATE:** February 13, 2019  
**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 2018-19 school year began with the previously submitted Part 1 report at the December 5, 2018 meeting. This report is the second installment of the Ends 2.1 sequence for the 2018-19 school year. 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**

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 districts. We have once again relied on comparisons with a small group of high-bar peer districts whose population 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 have typically used as a proxy for a poverty index in our data comparisons.

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 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 be 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 2 report, we focus on number 3 above. The remaining item is the subject of the final Ends 2.1 report this year.

### **Graduation Rates in 42 Comparable Districts 2010-2017**

We begin by comparing Bellingham student graduation rates (using the metric of five-year adjusted cohort data) with the 42 demographically comparable districts that we regularly use as our largest comparison group. Page 1 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 42 comparable districts. Bellingham students' overall five-year graduation rate increased from 78.8% in 2010 to 88.6% in 2017. High-bar peer districts (Olympia, Shoreline and Bellevue) continue to reach higher graduation levels than Bellingham, but over the eight-year span from 2010 to 2017, the gap between our district's graduation rate and the rates in those high-bar peer districts has closed significantly. Furthermore, our district graduation rate has also moved from very near the state average in 2010 to six percentage points above the state average in 2017.

### **Four-Year and Extended Graduation Rates Compared with Peer Districts**

We also focus on both the four-year (on time) and extended year graduate rates (students who earn their high school diploma during a fifth, sixth or seventh year of high school). 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 2 compare the 2018 four-year, and prior three cohorts' graduation rates for Bellingham students with those of Washington state overall, as well as with the group of fifteen +/- 5% peer districts and with our three high-bar peer comparison districts. Bellingham students' four-year, five-year, six-year and seven-year graduation

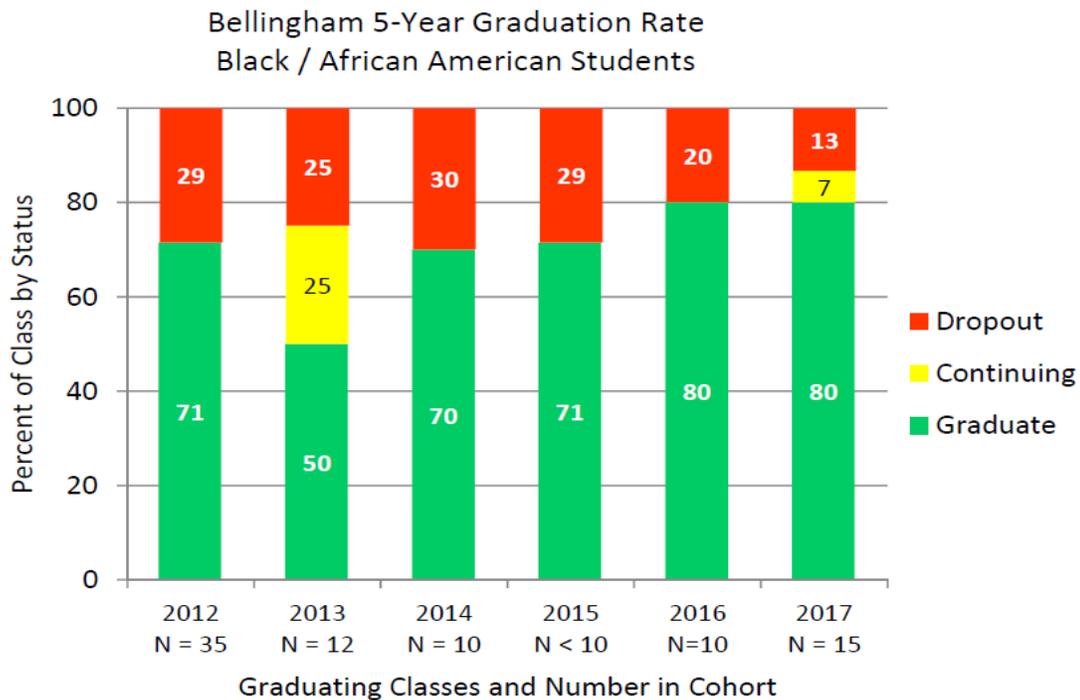
percentages have increased once again this year, continuing the trend we've seen over recent years. As the data on page 2 reveal, Bellingham students' graduation rates have exceeded the State in terms of overall graduation percentage for both four-year, five-year, six-year and seven-year cohorts. Furthermore, Bellingham's four-year graduation numbers increased each year, with another nearly 2% increase in this most recent year (85% to 87%) while comparison districts were up 2% (Bellevue), flat (Olympia and Shoreline) and up 3% (fifteen +/-5% group district comparison group). Pages 3 and 4 show three trends in a different view as line graphs compared with the high-bar peer district group and the state over the past four student cohorts. On page 5, 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 continued to show progress and are below the state average by 4% (four-year) and 6% (five-year). Overall, dropout rates in Bellingham have decreased by 4% (four-year) and 9% (five-year) since 2012.

### **Five-Year Graduation Rates by Student Subgroups**

We again analyzed Bellingham's internal graduation data for the four largest student subgroups that we've used to focus on the equity of our district's graduation rates across subgroups of students. Page 6 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. After a significant increase last year, graduation rates for English language learners and Hispanic students in 2017 decreased slightly in year-over-year comparisons. That said, the trends over time for these two groups of students are still heading in a positive direction. Graduation rates for students with IEPs and for students eligible for free/reduced priced meals both showed improvements once again this year, continuing the trend of graduation rate increases for these two subgroups since 2012. Five-year graduation rates for students eligible for free/reduced priced meals have increased from 69% in 2012 to 80% in 2017, while drop-out rates have fallen from 25% to 15% over this same time period. For students with IEPs the five-year graduation rate has improved from a low of 48% in 2012 to 64% in 2017. During this same time period, the drop-out rate has fallen from 28% to 14% with many students who have an IEP continuing to work toward graduation beyond a fifth year.

Pages 7-10 of the data set compare the five-year graduation rates of the four subgroups we track with the rates from our high-bar peer group of districts and the overall graduation rates in Washington state. The trends for Bellingham students in all four categories are heading in a positive direction over the last six years. As mentioned earlier, the data for ELL (page 7) and Hispanic students (page 8) dipped somewhat in the most recent year of comparison, while students eligible for free/reduced price meals (page 9) and students with IEPs (page 10) continued to show steady year-over year improvement. We are also introducing a new look at data for these four subgroups of students with this report. Page 11 shows Bellingham data for these four subgroups tracked into the seventh year of high school. The focus on our students served by special education shows the power of the extended school programs for those students, as their seventh year completion data (lower left graph on page 11 reveal that an additional 10 percent of students with IEPs graduated in year seven of their high school experience). Data for all four subgroups show the importance of tracking graduation rates into the fifth, sixth and seventh year as we continue to see students successfully completing high school in those years within each of the subgroups.

Another addition for this year’s report is a focus on our Black/African American student population. This is a smaller cohort of students in our district, compared to other subgroups we routinely track, yet we felt it important to delve into what can be learned about how this group progresses through our school system. As the graphic below reveals, graduation rates are ascending for Black/African American students over the past six years, while dropout rates are declining. It is important to note that the *n* size of this group is quite small in any given class, so we would expect some greater variation in year-over-year comparisons. Given that, it is good news to see positive trends in this data (see graph included below).



### The Effects of Poverty on Graduation Rates

A final piece of our analysis of graduation rates introduced with last year’s report focused in on the specific influence of income on high school completion. For purposes of comparison, we have included this analysis again this year. The graphs on page 12 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 2017 who are non-low-income again graduated at a rate nearly 20% higher than white students who are low-income. The graph at the bottom of the page reveals that for the 2017 cohort, 100% of ELL students who are non-low-income graduated within five years, a rate higher than the non-ELL, non-low-income subgroup. The disparities created by income levels are similar for those students with IEPs (middle graph). For the class of 2017, students

who have an IEP and are non-low-income graduated at a rate of 78%, while only 46% of their low-income peers with IEPs graduated after five years in high school. Consistent with the achievement data analysis reported earlier this year, the effects of poverty pose a significant overarching impediment to high school graduation, and we continue to believe it is important to raise up and examine the intersectionalities of race, language, disability and poverty on students' successful completion of high school.

### **Summary Discussion**

Overall graduation rates for Bellingham students continue to improve. As one of the clearest ultimate measures of the success of any school system, we continue to be proud that trajectories continue to improve overall, and for most student groups we track. That said, our analysis reveals that we still have areas of significant need for continued work to ensure that all students, regardless of their race, language, socio-economic status or differing abilities are able to accomplish the successful completion of high school in the Bellingham Public Schools.

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.