

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

DATE: February 15, 2022

SUBJECT: Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 1

Introduction

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report (End 2.1 - Student Competence, Part 1) to the school district's board of directors. This annual report typically focuses on student testing performance in English language arts, math and science, and compares our students' Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) test performance to comparable and higher-performing districts. Because of the revisions in our state testing process this year, we have chosen to include different, available data sources used to assess progress in student achievement. So, similar to our approach a year ago, the report that follows is our effort to present what we know from the sources available.

As board members will remember, the state suspended the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) test last spring (2021) and instead asked school districts to administer a modified version of the test in the fall of 2021. This fall test was a truncated version of the usual exam; shorter, less time intensive, and designed to save schools some time in administration, while still giving results that allowed for some assessment of proficiency. Because the altered SBA test used in the fall of 2021 is a different test, trend comparisons of students' scores with prior years is not possible. As well, we are not able to do some of the comparisons with other districts we've typically presented in this report because of the timeline for state reporting of the fall 2021 data. As a result, we have taken a different tack with this report. Data presented includes an analysis of the Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) test data, which is a norm-referenced measure of student growth over time in core subject areas of reading and math. We also will present a high-level analysis of Bellingham's results from the fall 2021 administration of the SBA, but without the ability to show comparisons with other districts. The combined analysis from these sources provides a relevant and revealing internal district picture of recent progress in student achievement and growth.

The remaining Ends reports for this school year will be presented on the following schedule:

- We will present Ends 2.1, Part 2 at the March 16, 2022, board meeting focused on graduation rates, and students' participation in post-secondary education and career

preparation in comparison with peer districts. We will once again combine indicators 3 and 4 from the policy in this report, consistent with our approach last school year.

- The combined reports on Ends 1, 2 and 3 focused on evaluating the vision, mission and all seventeen outcomes in the Bellingham Promise will be present at the May 18, 2022 board meeting.

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 language 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 students' 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 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 one and two above. As noted earlier, in our Ends 2.1 Part 2 report presented next month, we focus on indicators 3 and 4.

Fall 2021 Smarter Balanced Assessment

The SBA exam was not given in Washington State in either the spring of 2020 or 2021. The United States Department of Education waived state testing requirements for spring of 2020 and offered our state the flexibility to administer assessments in fall of 2021 instead of spring 2021. Washington State took advantage of that flexibility and school districts were directed to give an abbreviated version of the SBA exam this past fall of 2021. The abbreviated exam was shortened significantly and included no performance tasks usually included as part of the standard SBA test. Because the fall of 2021 test was a different test on a different timeline, the state is not reporting it as a part of student test score trends over time, nor will they publish other district results in time for us to include comparisons in this report. What we can present are the overall

scores for Bellingham students on the abbreviated fall 2021 SBA test, alongside of the overall state results.

Page 1 of the data set shows the proficiency of Bellingham students compared with state averages by grade level. Bellingham students outperformed the state at every grade level except for grade 11 math on the fall 2021 SBA. The percent of Bellingham students scoring at or above standard in English-language arts (ELA) ranged from 50 percent at grade 4 to 67 percent at grade 11. In math, the percent of students scoring at, or above standard was lower, ranging from a high of 45 percent in grade 4 to a low of 28 percent at grade 11 (see note below about the particular circumstances for high school students). The proficiency rates on the Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Science (WCAS) ranged higher than the state and higher overall compared to math and ELA at all three grade levels where that assessment was given (grades 6, 9 and 12).

The board should take note that student participation in grade 11 and 12 was significantly lower than other grade levels on the fall 2021 assessments. This is likely due to a combination of factors. First, in science, the WCAS is not a graduation requirement, so many students opt to not take the exam; the higher scores accomplished by the smaller group of grade 12 students may be in part due to science teachers promoting the test among students who were enrolled in grade 12 science classes at the time the exam was given. In the areas of ELA and Math, students in grade 11 who have not fulfilled another graduation pathway (e.g., participation in AP coursework, or some other of the specified state-approved pathways) can fulfill their graduation requirement by taking the SBA. But many grade 11 students had already accomplished their graduation pathway requirement by the time this test was given, and so opted to not participate in the SBA exam. As a result, we know the population of those in grade 11 who took the fall 2021 test is not representative of the whole population of grade 11 students; exactly how this impacted the results is not known.

MAP Test Comparisons -- National

The fall 2021 SBA results reported above do not allow for comparisons beyond how Bellingham students measured up to the state averages, nor do they allow us to address achievement trends over time, given the test was a very different version than the one our students typically take. Given those limitations, for a second year we have included an analysis of MAP test results in this report. As noted earlier, the MAP test is a norm-referenced measure of student growth over time in core subject areas of reading and math. It is an exam used in many states across our country, and one that our district relies on as well. In response to the pandemic, the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) created a new state level dashboard that gives us access to the MAP data by state. The MAP is not a federal accountability mechanism like the SBA but is nationally normed and so useful in this time of limited SBA data.

The first data presented here reveal how Bellingham students scored overall in comparison to Washington State percentile averages, and averages in other states that gave the MAP test in 2020 and 2021. A score at the 50th percentile would mean that students scored exactly on the mean of all scores nationally. Page 2 of the data set displays two tables, one in reading (top chart) and one in math that show the rank ordering of Bellingham students' median achievement

on the MAP in the prior two years. 2021 MAP reading percentiles show Bellingham students performed equal to or higher on average than any state that gave the MAP. Connecticut students scored at a higher level than Bellingham students in 2020 reading, and at the same percentile rank in 2021. Median reading scores on the MAP declined slightly for Bellingham students, and in most other locations, over the period between the 2020 and 2021 administrations of the test. We hypothesize this slight drop in year-over-year median achievement scores may be attributable, at least in part, to the impact of the pandemic both locally and nationally.

Analysis of MAP math achievement revealed a similar pattern. Bellingham students scored above all states except Connecticut, and most states (and our district) showed a slight decrease in students' overall median MAP Math achievement over the 2020-2021 period. Again, we don't know the precise cause of the slight decrease in scores at the local and national levels but suggest a pandemic effect may be part of the explanation. Just as an additional comparison metric, we also included a measure of the per pupil spending in each state that administers the MAP. We found it interesting that the state of Connecticut (which bested us in MAP Math during this period) also spends nearly \$7,000 more per pupil annually than we do here in Washington State.

Projected Proficiency on State Assessments Using MAP

As noted in a prior report to the board, fall MAP test scores can also be used to project how students will do on the Smarter Balanced Assessment state test in the spring. Given that we will be administering the SBA again this spring of 2022, we were curious to see the projections of student performance predicted by the fall MAP data. The charts on Page 3 of the data set show the projected proficiency levels in the spring in reading and math over the past four years. The different colored parts of the bar charts indicate the breakdown of projected proficiency levels for the upcoming SBA, predicted by the fall MAP data. Reading projections for this year are slightly higher (more students projected to be at level 3-at standard or level 4-above standard) when compared with the three prior years. Percentage of students projected to be farthest below standard (level 1) is smaller than in any of the previous three years.

Math projections also suggest students will perform slightly better on the spring SBA than in the prior year. 21 percent of students are projected to be at level 4 (above standard) in math on the spring SBA, and 25 percent at level 3 (at standard). This also translates into lower percentages of students below or far below. These data on projected proficiency seem to be predicting student achievement on the upcoming spring SBA will rise in both math and reading, which we took to be a hopeful piece of our analysis looking ahead.

MAP Growth Assessment

As noted above we found a slight overall decrease in the median achievement percentiles of our students' MAP reading and math scores between 2020 and 2021. We were curious to explore slightly longer trend data, and to break that down into grade level analysis and by the four major student subgroups that we have typically focused on in this report. Page 4 of the data set provides the grade level trends in MAP reading and math percentile averages over four years (2018-2021). Note that the middle level data in math only extends back to 2019, as the test was not given in math to all students in 2018. Results show that students' scores vary within a relatively tight range over this period. In some grade levels, students' scores increased slightly in year-over-year

comparisons between 2020 and 2021 (Grades 3, 5 and 6 Reading, Grade 6 Math) but most grade levels remained flat or decreased slightly. Grade 7 reading and math showed the largest decreases in year-over-year comparisons (six percentile point drop in both reading and math between 2020 and 2021) while grade 6 reading and math scores both showed increases during the same time frame.

Efforts to Close Achievement Gaps: MAP Evidence

Pages 5-6 array comparisons on achievement percentile gaps for our tracked subgroups. The interest here is to determine whether achievement gaps are closing or growing. Page 5-6 display the MAP achievement gaps for four 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, students who receive services as multilingual learner (MLL) (previously identified as students who are English-language learners) and Hispanic/Latinx students versus white students. These are presented as overall averages for each group, compared with students who are not identified with these characteristics (low income vs. not low income; IEP vs. not on IEP, etc.). The graph show trend lines over the past three years 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, any graph where the blue line and the red line get closer together over time indicates a reduction in the gap separating the two subgroups being compared. 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, spoken language or learning disability.

The non-low income to low-income gaps (top of Page 5) remained fairly constant over the period of the last three years. While MAP performance dipped slightly overall during this period, the gap between students who come from low-income households and those from non-low-income households remained relatively flat. Comparing gaps in MAP percentile levels between white and Hispanic/Latinx students (bottom Page 5) we observed a similar pattern. Scores overall dropped slightly, and the gap appears to have remained relatively similar.

With regard to proficiency gaps between students with and without an IEP (top of Page 6), we observed a slight narrowing of the gap in reading (left top graph, Page 6) over the period of 2019-2021. The gap between groups was 30 percent in 2019, and this narrowed to 23 percent in 2021. The gap in math also appears to have decreased somewhat over this period between groups. The gap between students receiving MLL services and those who do not (bottom graphs, Page 6) remained relatively consistent, and larger than in the case of some of the other comparisons.

With regard to closing achievement gaps, there is a little bright spot in the data on students who have IEPs. However, we continue to have a long way to go toward our goal of ensuring that ALL students are supported to achieving at higher levels. It is difficult to see the limited progress in this year's report, but we also recognize that we have been living through a very challenging time for students and families. We can't fully know what the impact of the pandemic has had.

We nonetheless remain committed to continuing to grow the work we have focused on equity, diversity and inclusion and our work to ensure all students reach standards.

Gaining, Maintaining, Sliding

Through the MAP analysis, we were able to obtain data on growth for students in our system and explore the question that many are wondering about in this period – have our students lost learning, and to what extent? Pages 7-9 reveal a window into the data that gives us one glimpse through examination of “gainers, maintainers and sliders.” Gainers are those students who moved up at least one achievement level. Maintainers are students who scored within the same achievement level range. Sliders are those students who achievement dropped by one or more levels, as measured by the MAP.

Page 7 graph show the percent overall of students who were gainers, maintainers or sliders in year-over-year MAP comparisons. Data is displayed for grades 4-8 where the MAP test was given during this period. In reading, the data reveal that about three-fourths of students at each grade level either maintained or gained in their reading MAP performance between 2020 and 2021. Similar results were revealed in math, with grade 7 and 8 slightly higher in the maintainers and gainers categories, with grade 5 and 6 slightly lower.

Page 8 displays the grade level trends over the past three years of the percentages of students in the two highest categories of maintainer and gainer combined. Between 70-80 percent of all students were included in the maintainers or gainers category in each year. In terms of trends, most grade levels show a slight dip in the trend in the most recent year’s test, with others remaining relatively flat or slightly improving. Page 9 displays a different look at this same information, presenting the trends for the identified subgroups. Over this same period in both reading and math. Again, while 70-80 percent of students in each group were included as maintainers or gainers in each of the past three years, we observed a drop with each group in both reading and math in the data from the 2021 test administration.

Concluding Statement

The achievement picture presented above suggests there has been an impact on student learning in the past couple of years. The actual cause, size and nature of this is difficult to discern. Teachers are seeing and hearing more students who appear to be behind where teachers would typically expect them to be in their growth in learning. We remain committed as a system to staying the course and expect that these trends will improve over time as the pandemic threats decrease. 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.