

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Bellingham, Washington

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Board of Directors

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

**DATE:** March 16, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 2

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report to the school district's board of directors. Our process for reporting on Ends 2.1 during the 2021-22 school year began with the previously submitted Ends 2.1, Part 1 report at the February 15, 2022 meeting. This report is the second in sequence this year and focuses on evidence of student advancement toward on-time or extended graduation and reduction in drop-out rates as well as students' participation in post-secondary education and career preparation in comparison to peer districts. Our final Ends report for this year on the vision, mission and outcomes in the Bellingham Promise (Ends 1, 2 and 3) will be presented at the May 18, 2022 meeting.

**Introduction**

The first part of this report 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. We also include comparisons of Bellingham Public Schools' student graduation trends to those in comparable districts. The second part of the report examines Bellingham students' post-secondary enrollment rates, and how we are preparing students for post-secondary educational options. This work includes a focus on post-secondary enrollments for Bellingham students in higher education, both two-year and four-year options, as well as preparation pathways for students who pursue post-secondary career and technical options.

We once again include comparisons with Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline school district as the small group of high-bar peer districts whose populations of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals fall below those eligible in our district. As well, we include updated comparisons with a cluster of districts that are within  $\pm 5$  percent of Bellingham in terms of percent of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals (used as a proxy for poverty level). We also draw in data from Lynden School District, a local comparison district within  $\pm 5$  percent of Bellingham's percentage of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals, and within our comparison group for five-year graduation rates.

Language included in the revised Ends 2.1 policy 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 in than 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 numbers three and four above.

### **Section 1: Graduation Rate Comparisons**

#### **Graduation Rates in Forty-Two Comparable Districts 2010-2020**

Once again, we begin this year's report by comparing Bellingham student graduation rates (using the metric of five-year adjusted cohort data) with the forty-two 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 42 comparable districts. Bellingham students' overall five-year graduation rate increased from 78.8 percent in 2010 to 89 percent in 2020. High-bar peer districts (Bellevue, Olympia, Shoreline) continue to reach higher graduation levels than Bellingham. However, over the ten-year span from 2010 to 2020, our district's graduation rate continues to edge closer to those high bar peers, effectively closing the gap, and positioning our district above the state average graduation rate.

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

Page 2 of the data set presents the four-year (on time) and extended year graduation rates for students who earn their high school diploma during a fifth, sixth or seventh year of high school. As we have reported in prior years, a group of students in each cohort do extend into a fifth year or beyond to accrue the necessary credits needed to graduate from Bellingham schools. The

graphs on Page 2 compare the graduation rates for the last six cohorts of Bellingham students with those of Washington State overall, as well as with the group of  $12 \pm 5$  percent peer districts and our three high-bar peer comparison districts. Bellingham students' four-year rate remained constant this year (85 percent). The five-year rate dipped by one percent, while the six- and seven-year graduation percentages have increased this year. We were pleased to see the seven-year graduation rate reach the 93 percent mark in this year's analysis, which is a high-water mark for that data. As the data also reveal, Bellingham students' graduation rates have continued to exceed the state in terms of overall graduation percentage for four-year, five-year, six-year and seven-year cohorts.

On page three, we were pleased to see the dropout rate for the four-year 2021 cohort appears to have slightly decreased to 7 percent, down from 9 in the graduating class of 2020, with 8 percent of the class continuing beyond the fourth year of high school. The dropout rate for the five-year 2020 cohort increased by 1 percent to 7 percent overall in year over year comparison and sits below the state average of 11 percent.

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

We again analyzed Bellingham's internal graduation data for some of our largest student subgroups that we have used to focus on the equity of our district's graduation rates. Page four of the data set displays the five-year graduation rate cohort comparisons for Bellingham students who are multilingual learners (MLL), Hispanic/Latinx, eligible for free/reduced priced meals and receiving special education services. Page five has data on graduation trends for students who identify as Black/African American as well as students who identify as two or more races. Graduation rates for multilingual learners held at 70 percent in year-over-year comparisons. However, the percentage of students in that group continuing beyond a fourth year of high school dropped from 10 percent to 4 percent and dropout percentage increased in year-over-year comparisons. While it is disappointing to see that year-over-year increase in the dropout rate in this group, and we speculated what impact the COVID pandemic may have had in that increase, as we also observed a slight increase in the dropout rates for both Hispanic/Latinx students as well as students eligible for free/reduced price meals. Conversely, the dropout rate for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) fell again slightly (from 10 percent to 9 percent) for the class of 2020, consistent with a trend we have observed for several years. On Page five, we were pleased to note that 100 percent of our Black/African American students from the class of 2020 graduated by the end of their fifth year, and none dropped out. While our Black/African American population in this group comprised only 13 students, it was great to see that every one of those students successfully graduated. Similarly, the five-year graduation rates also bumped up for students of two or more races to over 91percent, while the dropout rate for that same group fell to 2 percent.

The graphs arrayed on Page six show the breakdown of extended graduation rates for our four largest student subgroups. We saw growth in the seven-year extended graduation percentages in most groups. Seven-year rates increased for Hispanic/Latinx students to 88 percent for the 2018 cohort. Similarly, the seven-year rate for students identified as eligible for free/reduced price meals from the class of 2018 increased to 86 percent, while the rate jumped up to 88 percent for students with IEPs. This was a particularly gratifying piece of data, and we will circle back to this story when we discuss the special education "leaver" data later in the report.

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. Graduation percentages for multilingual learners in Bellingham (Page 7) held steady in year over year comparison, as did the 20-point gap with the comparison group of non-MLL students. We noted that our MLL population five-year graduation rate dropped below the state in this report, as did the percentage for that group in Shoreline. This fact merits further attention to ensure this trend does not continue. The five-year rate for Hispanic/Latinx students (Page 8) dropped slightly in the most recent year of comparison and the five-year graduation gap between Hispanic/Latinx and White student rates increased. We observed that the gap widened for this group in year-over-year comparisons in our three high-bar peer districts as well. Graduation rates for students eligible for free/reduced price meals (Page 9) also dipped slightly, consistent with those trends observed in other districts. The five-year graduation gap between students identified as low income and those identified as non-low income remained approximately 13 percent. Five-year graduation rates for Bellingham students with IEPs (Page 10) dropped by a percent and the graduation gap between students with IEPs and those without still sits at about 30 percent. This data is somewhat tempered by the fact that we know from our earlier analysis an increasingly higher percentage of our students with IEPs graduate in their seventh year of high school. Percent of students with IEPs graduating in five-years dropped for both Bellevue and Olympia, while increasing for Shoreline.

### **The Effects of Income on Graduation Rates**

For a fourth year in this report, we include a brief examination of the intersectionality of race and income in our discussion of graduation rates. The four graphs on Page 11 of the data set split out five-year graduation rates for students from four racial designations into categories of low-income and non-low income. The graphs on that page once again reveal the stark difference for all students who are low-income vs. their non-low-income peers. Five-year graduation rates for non-low-income students who are Asian, Hispanic, two or more races, or White all sit well above the 90 percent mark, ranging as high as 98 percent and above their low-income peers from the same racial category. This difference is most pronounced in our district in the comparison of students identified as low income and non-low income who are of two or more races (79 percent to 98 percent respectively).

### **Section 2: Post-Secondary Success**

The focus for Section 2 of the report includes analysis of a set of leading indicators that shed light on our efforts to prepare students for post-secondary success. This section includes an analysis of data concerning dual credit enrollments in comparison with our peer districts, as well as within observed subgroups of our own students. The final part of Section 2 explores trends in Bellingham graduates' post-secondary opportunities and outcomes in the context of the COVID pandemic. Given the growth we have observed in our students accessing Career Technical Education (CTE) course work in recent years, we also take a deeper dive into a few stories from our graduates who have gone on to post-secondary opportunities in the CTE fields to illustrate how their preparation here has influence their post-secondary journeys. We again rely on our comparison set of districts and Washington state noted above.

## High School Dual Credit Enrollment

What we refer to as high school dual credit enrollment information tracks student participation in Running Start, College in the High School (CIHS), CTE, dual credit and Advanced Placement (AP<sup>1</sup>) Courses. The top chart on Page 12 displays trends over the past six years revealing the percentage of Bellingham students enrolled in these program/course types; the middle chart on Page 12 shows the same information for the state of Washington as a whole. As comparisons between the charts reveal, Bellingham's student enrollment in all these areas exceeds state averages, and in some cases by a significant margin. CTE dual credit and College in the High School data continue to trend upward, while Running Start and AP trends have held or decreased slightly over time. The significant increase in CTE course taking that is observable beginning in 2018 coincided with the advent of the eight-period schedule in our local high schools. This change has enabled a far expanded set of course taking opportunities for students in CTE program areas. The chart at the bottom of Page 12 contrasts the trend lines for all our high bar comparison districts (Bellevue, Olympia, Shoreline), as well as a local peer district (Lynden) and Washington state alongside Bellingham trends in students completing dual credit courses. The trendlines show that Bellingham students' completion of dual credit courses remained consistent with the prior year, with numbers below Bellevue, approximately equivalent to Shoreline, and above the state, Lynden, and Olympia.

We also continue to examine students' participation in career and technical programs in our district. The top graph on Page 13 of the data set includes two graphs that array trend data on student participation in career and technical programs/areas of study. As is evident from the trend lines, CTE program completion numbers continued to increase, reaching over 800 in 2020-21. The board will note that the industry certificate line graph on the top of Page 13 ends with the 2019 year. While data on CTE program completion is based on course taking in our schools (thus available up to the current year) the additional assessments that students complete for the industry certificate were significantly impeded by the pandemic over the past couple of years. Therefore, that data is incomplete and most recent years' data are not reported here in this year's report. Given that CTE has been an area of growth and focus over several years in our district the board will note the inclusion of a special section detailing the post-secondary experiences of some of our CTE graduates in the final portions of this report (below).

Finally, we have included a comparison of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates for our students alongside those rates for peer districts and the state. We know from research that completion of the FAFSA is a strong leading indicator for actual enrollment in post-secondary education. Students who take the step to fill out the form are more likely to enroll. As the graph on the bottom of Page 13 displays, Bellingham students' rate of FAFSA completion was substantially increasing over the period from 2015-2019, as was FAFSA completion in most of our peer districts. However, the past two years has seen a drop in FAFSA completion across the board, and we attribute this to the pandemic, and the fact that (as you will

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<sup>1</sup> One footnote about AP courses and dual credit. While we continue to track and include AP course completion in this portion of the report, it is increasingly the case that four-year colleges and universities are decreasing their acceptance of AP test scores as a basis for awarding university credit. In recent years, many universities have stopped granting credit for high school AP courses, or now only recognize the very top AP score of 5 as a proxy for credit; previously it was more common that passing scores of 3, 4 or 5 on AP tests were recognized and accorded credit. This trend away from awarding university/college credit for AP is one we've observed over some years.

learn in the section on post-secondary enrollment) a smaller percentage of our students have pursued post-secondary opportunities in the period of COVID.

### **Post-Secondary Enrollment in First Year After High School Graduation**

We next focus on recent trends in enrollment in post-secondary education for Bellingham graduates. The graph on the top of Page 14 displays post-secondary enrollment trends for Bellingham graduates immediately after high school over the past nine years and includes the 2021 data. The trend shows our enrollment rate of our graduates in four-year institutions increased about two percentage points from 40 percent in 2020 to 42 percent in 2021. We took this as a positive sign that students who have planned to go on to four-year colleges and universities are continuing with those plans for the most part, despite whatever impact of having lived through a pandemic, and those numbers appear to be increasing in the most current year. Our rate of enrollment in two-year institutions decreased slightly and this continued a trend we noted last year. The percentage of graduates enrolling in two-year institutions has gone from 23 percent in 2019 to 18 percent in 2020 to 15 percent in 2021. We attribute the drop in two-year college post-secondary attendance for 2021 graduates as likely due to the pandemic. However, when we looked again at the research on college-going rates, it appears Bellingham students' attendance remained fairly steady compared to the national picture. Specifically, the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) recently released information suggesting that higher education enrollment fell another 2.7 percent in the fall of 2021 following a 2.5 percent drop in the preceding fall. Continued enrollment losses nationwide in the pandemic represent a total two-year decline of 5.1 percent or 938,000 students since fall 2019.<sup>2</sup> So, while our two-year college enrollment dipped once again, consistent with the NSCRC findings, our four-year rate increased slightly. As the lower graph on Page 14 reveals, by comparison with our group of peer districts, Bellingham's percentages of students enrolling in post-secondary schools are below those of Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline, and above Lynden and the state of Washington overall.

### **Persistence in Two-Year or Four-Year Colleges Post-Graduation**

Data on the persistence of Bellingham graduates continuing in higher education once they enter a post-secondary institution is arrayed on Page 15 of the data set. The upper graph displays the trend data for the past seven years on graduates of our system who enrolled in college at any time during the first two years after high school. Over seven years, trends suggest that percentages of our graduates persisting in two-year institutions and in four-year institutions have dipped slightly.

The graph on the bottom of Page 15 shows trend data over the past six years on what percentage of Bellingham graduates persist after a first year in post-secondary and return for a second year. Data suggested persistence for the class of 2019 dropped in comparison to prior years in year-over-year trends. We think this is likely another result of the COVID pandemic, and we will

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<sup>2</sup> See January 13, 2022 -- <https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>

want to track this data into the future to determine if the percentages eventually track back upward.

### **Post-School Outcomes for Graduates with IEPs**

Page 16 arrays the data from 2020 on students with IEPs and their trajectories in the first year out of high school. Our graduates served with an IEP enroll in higher education at rates higher than state averages. On average, slightly fewer of our graduates with IEPs are listed as “not engaged” compared with state averages. A slightly lower percentage of our graduates from 2020 with IEPs attended higher education in their first year after graduation than in prior years.

The graph on the bottom of Page 16 reiterates the vulnerability of students served with IEPs who do not make it all the way to graduation, and how this impacts their engagement opportunities in either education or employment as they age out of high school. The data are so clear about the importance of ensuring all students, regardless of handicapping condition make it over the high graduation finish line; given what we see happening in our extended graduation data for students with IEPs noted earlier, we are pleased to connect the importance of that data with the graphic on the bottom of Page 16. The data on productive engagement for students with IEPs who are graduates from our system suggest that 76 percent of those from the class of 2020 are engaged either in employment, higher education or other educational or training programs. For those who did not graduate, that number drops to 50 percent. All the indicators line up around this key point.

### **Special Focus: CTE Graduates’ Post-secondary Opportunities**

Because of the significant growth in CTE course taking, program completion and industry certificates in our district, we were interested in delving a little deeper into the post-secondary experiences of students who have taken advantage of CTE pathways. When we expanded into a 4x8 high school schedule at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, students had opportunities to take a broader array of electives and choose elective credits in sequence that added up to being counted as a “CTE completer” - a student who has demonstrated an extended commitment to earning credit within one of the CTE course taking pathways. As we have expanded CTE offerings, we have taken a scaffolded approach to allow students to do a deeper dive into their passion area courses with addition of advanced and year two classes. We also know that students who are heavily invested in CTE work have a graduation rate that is near 90 percent.

CTE Director Jeff Tetrick gathered some feedback from graduates to learn about how their preparation in CTE courses in Bellingham schools has influenced what happened after high school. Graduates we communicated with referenced ways CTE work was influential both in terms of general skills development and in the pursuit of careers in specific fields. One graduate noted, for example, how experiences in the DECA (Distributive Education Clubs of America)<sup>3</sup> club chapter:

... have made me better prepared to face both academic and professional challenges in college. Early exposure to a business environment, both through DECA competitions and running a school-based enterprise, helped me develop

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<sup>3</sup> DECA is a national non-profit organization that currently serves 175,000 high school and college students whose aim is to prepare leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality and management.

networking skills needed to interact with professionals across many fields. The leadership positions I held in my school's DECA chapter taught me how to lead a group of driven individuals when accomplishing collaborative goals in addition to using intrinsic drive when completing long term projects. Because of my involvement in such a career-oriented association, DECA made me feel more confident entering college regardless of what field I pursued."

Another mentioned the specific influence of culinary course work in thinking about a career path:

My participation in culinary-oriented CTE classes in particular has impacted my plans after high school. Before taking these classes, the culinary industry is something I had considered, since I enjoy cooking; however, I did not know anything very concrete about the industry. In addition to food preparation, these classes also focus on the food industry. This prompted me to do my own research, and I now have a better idea of how the industry works. I am now realistically considering it as a career path.....Ultimately, my classes and teachers helped me materialize the more hypothetical thoughts I had about my plans after high school. As a result, I am more confident about what I want to do.

Other graduates described the experiences of woodworking classes and clubs and how they have been influential, including one who noted:

Mr. Doud's woodshop class was my first experience building something hands on. As a current mechanical engineering student at Washington State University, I am often asked in interviews "What experience do you have working with your hands?" I then explain how the woodshop program at Squalicum gave me my first experience planning, measuring, and executing a project which involved constructing an object. In my research lab, I constantly think back to the practices Mr. Doud taught us before making a cut, something I have applied to working with other materials as well. These foundational skills have helped propel me in my major in ways which any other typical class could not."

Another stated:

I participated in the woodworking club which was through the Career and Technical Education program at Squalicum High School. This led to me attending the International Bridge Building Competition in Dallas, Texas. Making bridges and seeing other designs in Texas has changed the way that I see bridges ever since. I plan to become a high school physics teacher and after participating in the bridge building club in high school, I plan to create similar opportunities for other high school students in CTE.

In some instances, graduates have taken their CTE experiences and pursued careers in the arts or in game design or other technology-related fields. Graduates James Probert (Sehome High School, 2011), [Dylan Furst](#) (Sehome High School, 2009) and [Michael LaMartin](#) (Sehome High School, 2013) are pursuing photography as working artists. Graduate Chris Harada (Sehome High School, 2010) helped to design the video game *Borderlands 2* that was recognized as game



of the year on the Microsoft X-Box platform in 2012. Other students have pursued credentials in technology and are using what they learned out in the real world. One graduate noted, by way of example:

I took technical literacy in my freshman year, and throughout the semester long class I earned a Word, PowerPoint, Excel and Excel Expert certification. I landed a job... and did entry level tasks like data entry, but every week or so I would get an assignment to either make a spreadsheet or fix one that someone else was stumped on. I was able to express a high level of understanding for the program that my co-workers were unable to match.

Another graduate noted the influence of work in robotics:

CTE classes and programs gave me the opportunity to explore technical subjects that I otherwise would not have had access to. Through the various courses offered, I was able to experiment and find subjects I was passionate about. Student organizations such as FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) robotics team competitions allowed for further development while encouraging us to cooperate with each other and learn from mentors in our community. Thanks to CTE, I entered college with a better idea of what I wanted to study, and with the skills to hit the ground running.

Other graduates have gone on to achievements in higher education as well. We heard from a graduate who is pursuing mechanical engineering and involved in research on hydrogen propulsion fuel. Another is a mechanical engineering graduate of the Colorado School of Mines and recently began a career with an engineering firm and described how CTE experiences in Bellingham schools were a great foundational tool for engineering school. Finally, another relayed that:

...being a part of the CTE program at Sehome High School sparked a passion for STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) in me and gave me a huge leg up when I entered college. I went into college with skills and experiences that were very rare among my peers, and this allowed me to hit the ground running. Without the CTE programs the Bellingham School District has, I would not be the graduate of Purdue's Aeronautical and Astronautical program that I am today.

The experience of our graduates reaffirms the commitment to expansion of our CTE programs and course offerings, and hopefully helps the board with a deeper understanding of how CTE experiences in our schools have helped to shape post-secondary opportunities.

### **Summary Discussion**

Overall extended graduation rates for Bellingham students in general continue to improve. Specifically, this year's report suggests our extended graduation rates for students with IEPs continued to climb into the seventh year in high school. Our efforts around CTE programming appear to be having an impact on students' educational and career trajectories. Still, we know we have areas of significant need for continued work to ensure that all students, regardless of their

race, language, socio-economic status, or differing abilities can accomplish the successful completion of high school in Bellingham Public Schools. Gaps in graduation rates for some of the groups we track remained static in this year's analysis. We remain committed to seeing improvements in this crucial measure of success – student graduation rates from our system and how graduation propels students into educational opportunities at the next level.

This second installment of the Ends 2.1 monitoring report, in combination with the earlier Part 1 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 appreciation once again 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.