

The Washington State Board of Education

Governance | Accountability | Achievement | Oversight | Career & College Readiness

Old Capitol Building, Room 253
P.O. Box 47206
600 Washington St. SE
Olympia, Washington 98504

February 8, 2013

House Education and Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education Committee Members
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

As a member of the State Board of Education (SBE) and a thought-leader in both the initial development of the Achievement Index and its current refinement process, I am writing to voice my concern about the proposed A-F grading system in SB 5328.

Washington sought a waiver from No Child Left Behind in part to seek relief from its punitive nature. Using an A-F grading system oversimplifies school data and damages schools in the process, taking us right back to a punitive system. SB 5328 will detract from our goal to move forward to a state system of accountability with both recognition and differentiated assistance based on calculations using aggregated school data.

Background on Index Tier Labels

The Washington Achievement Index includes indicators rated on a seven-point scale, which gives sufficient 'spread' in the results. The overall Index is a simple average of all 20 ratings, ranging from 1.0 to 7.0. Index data is presented through a five-level tier scale ranging from Exemplary to Struggling.

Our 2009-2010 System Performance Accountability Task Force, with participation from the PTA, WEA, AWSP, WASA, a superintendent, principal, teacher, and the Partnership for Learning, developed the Achievement Index tier labels, a more palatable alternative to NCLB or any other labels that offer a connotation of failure.

As a member of the State Board of Education, I concur with the work of the Task Force and the input of our publics. It has been our intention and practice to combine the tier rating with a more in-depth analysis of the conditions in schools / districts to determine the best possible level of investment of resources. A letter grade of D or F does not do justice to the complexity of school performance and increases the risk of alienation and demoralization with no potential gain.

At the Board's November 2012 meeting, members had a robust discussion of the utility of changing the tier labels. We considered the cost/benefit of any changes in the labels that sent negative or confusing messages. We know from experience that strong relationships are a key component to successful implementation of any state accountability system. The cost of an A-F system is high and damages the very relationships improving schools need to foster. I, along with others, concluded this was not a change that was necessary to make at this time.

The Achievement Index should provide support to underperforming schools, acknowledge improvement, and reward success. The data calculations used to determine which label a school receives are done with aggregated student achievement data. This data does not tell us the nuanced story of a school or its community context. Using an A-F grade is reminiscent of the punitive nature of NCLB. Our goal is to be transparent about where schools are performing but not to cause further alienation or damage relationships.

Jeff Vincent, *Chair* • Randy Dorn, *Superintendent of Public Instruction*
Kevin Lavery • Phyllis Bunker Frank • Elias Ulmer
Bob Hughes • Dr. Kristina Mayer • Matthew Spencer • Cynthia McMullen JD
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I appreciate your service to the state of Washington and your concern for our education system and the students it serves. It is our duty to ensure that we do everything in our power to improve student learning outcomes. I hope you'll agree with me that proposing seemingly punitive language to inform local communities of school performance will not engender support or build the alliances we need to make a difference.

Please feel free to contact me at any time. I can be reached at Kris@klmayer.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristina L. Mayer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristina L. Mayer, Ed. D.

cc: House Education Committee Members