

STATEWIDE INDICATORS OF EDUCATIONAL HEALTH 2016 REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Board of Education herein submits its third report on the Indicators of Educational System Health. Established in 2013 by the Washington State Legislature, the indicators were designed to create a common framework upon which to evaluate the success of the educational system.

The Board is honored to have been given this responsibility by the Legislature, and believes that the project has, to a great degree, had its intended effect. The establishment of key indicators in statute has helped us achieve some consistency in our year-to-year assessment of system progress, and helped ensure that all partners in the educational governance landscape are sharing common strategies, and working toward common goals.

While this report contains technical data, we should be clear that the focus is squarely on students and their needs. The Board merely views the data as a means to focus on the hope that each student has for realizing their potential in life through the opportunities afforded them in our public education system. In this respect, career and college readiness should not be viewed as a technical term, but something that is integral to the challenges and circumstances of each student in our system. Fundamentally, this project helps us ask, “How do we need to support *all* students in our system to prepare them for fulfilling, living-wage career pathways?” There is much about the answer that is deeply personalized and individualized, but there are also common, system-wide commitments that we can make to enable those personalized career pathways to be successfully realized.

By law, the Board has two important responsibilities in this report. First, to report on the state’s progress in meeting the goals established for each indicator, and second, to recommend appropriate investments and reforms in the event that we are not on track as a state to achieving our goals. In each case, we have sought to undertake this work collaboratively with our peer agencies and partners in education. In this report, you will see separate chapters dedicated specifically to these two major responsibilities.

The major conclusion of this report is a good news, bad news message. While Washington is improving on most key performance indicators, the rate of improvement is not enough to achieve the goals established. It is also worth noting that gaps in performance remain a persistent problem. As you will see, gaps are present early in our kindergarten readiness data, and persist all the way through to our post-secondary degree attainment data. In some cases, our gaps are getting wider over time, and in some cases, the gaps are noticeably wider than what we observe in other states. While it is appropriate to acknowledge the incremental successes we have experienced, it is also important to retain our sense of urgency about the size and scope of our achievement and opportunity gaps, which present as early as age five, and persist in the data to age 25 and beyond. We can and must do better.

Indicators of Educational System Health

This figure depicts the statutorily required indicators

Indicator	Trend	2016 Actual	2016 Target
Kindergarten Readiness	Improving	44.2%	51.8%
4 th Grade Reading	Improving	57.0%	59.0% ⁺
8 th Grade Math	Improving	47.8%	50.7% ⁺
High School Graduation	Improving	78.1%	81.9%
Readiness for College Coursework	Improving	73.6%*	75.2%
Post-Secondary Attainment and Workforce	One Year of Data	42%*	44%

*Note: represents the most recent year of data.

⁺Note: represents the 2016-17 target that was reset because of the transition to the Smarter Balanced Assessments.

The Board has recommended a series of investments and reforms to address the areas where we have fallen short in our goals. In doing so, the Board sought to work from a shared unifying framework, rather than making single recommendations for separate policy areas. The Board's thinking was shaped in part by the work of a number of authors, most notably Sawhill & Karpilow (2014) in their article *How much could we improve children's life chances by intervening early and often?* The researchers theorize that evidence-based reforms or interventions have a cumulative effect, and show how higher levels of academic achievement can be attained and sustained over time. Essentially, they contend that success at each critical stage of schooling and life greatly enhances the opportunity for success at the next stage. Accordingly, a child who is kindergarten-ready is far more likely to meet or exceed the third grade reading standards, and those who meet third grade reading standards are more likely to complete middle school with the academic skills required for high school, and to graduate on time. In short, they make a case for *intervening early and intervening often* to achieve long-term goals. This led the Board to an important insight: The most important investment or reform to improve K-12 outcomes may not in fact be in the K-12 system, but in our system of early learning.

Based on this approach and dialogue with stakeholders, the Board recommends the following four major reforms and investments in the report. A detailed explanation of the rationale for each can be found in the body of the report:

- Recommendation 1: Expand access to high-quality early childhood education.
- Recommendation 2: Expand and fully fund high-quality professional learning.
- Recommendation 3: Increase access to high-quality expanded learning opportunities.
- Recommendation 4: Expand supports and services that prepare students for postsecondary opportunities.

In conclusion, the Board understands the difficult decisions that the Legislature needs to make regarding funding for the public school system. We do not take these recommendations lightly. Ultimately, however, the Board had to come to an informed opinion about the relationship between the goals we establish for our educational system and the resources provided by the state to support those goals. In nearly every major endeavor, either public or private, one can reasonably assume a relationship exists between the goals that one sets and the amount of resources one devotes to a task. This is not to imply that funding is the *only* thing that matters. But in the view of the Board, it certainly does matter. Adequate funding is seen as necessary but not sufficient to achieving a high standard of career and college readiness for all students.

This report is timely. Washington is taking on the essential question of how to make ample provision for its public school system. We hope this report is given due consideration in that process. In our review of the literature, we are encouraged by the experiences of states like Massachusetts and New Jersey, two states that took seriously the paradigm of “intervening early, and intervening often.” As a result, they have seen significant improvements, and rank ahead of us on several key outcome measures. Like us, they struggle with achievement and opportunity gaps. Nonetheless, their experience may suggest that an aggressive and sustained campaign of resources and intentional reforms can create positive changes for students in Washington.