



August Meeting Highlights

August 28, 2006

Welcome to the second edition of Highlights, a summary of actions by the Washington State Board of Education.

The board met last Wednesday and Thursday in Yakima for a meeting that largely focused on English language learners. Yakima Mayor David Edler welcomed the board which met at Yakima Valley Community College.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Dr. Alfonso Anaya, Migrant/Bilingual Director with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), gave an overview of English language learners nationally and in Washington State. Nearly 88,000 English language learners are enrolled in Washington State. For those students, the challenges are enormous, as reflected by an achievement gap in Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores. In the 2005 WASL, for example, fewer than 12 percent of English language learners passed the math portion compared to fewer than 48 percent of their peers.

Dr. Anaya identified characteristics of effective programs:

- Positive environment.
- A curriculum which is meaningful and academically challenging, incorporating higher order thinking, is thematically integrated, establishes a clear alignment with standards and assessment, and is consistent and sustained over time.
- A program model that is grounded in sound theory and best practices associated with an enriched, not remedial, instructional model.
- Teachers in programs who understand theories about bilingualism and second language development as well as the goals and rationale for the model in which they are teaching.
- The use of cooperative learning and high-quality exchange between teachers and students.

The board also heard from educators, superintendents and others who spoke of programs to help more children succeed, but the most moving testimony came from students who spoke about their own experiences of enrolling in school with no knowledge of English. Parents of immigrant children spoke of their own struggles trying to help their children while also trying to navigate language barriers.

In response, the board discussed several issues that had been raised, such as a shortage of bilingual teachers, the differences between conversational English and academic English used by WASL, early intervention for English learners, and inadequate funding for programs.

THE BOARD'S STRATEGIC PLAN

After considerable discussion, the board approved a draft of objectives of its strategic plan, a document that identifies its focus and work as a leader and advocate in education.

Vision

The State Board envisions a learner-focused state education system that is accountable for the individual growth of each student, so that students can thrive in a competitive global economy and in life.

The Board's Goals for the K-12 System

Raise student achievement dramatically. This is the overarching goal for the K-12 system. All other goals are mechanisms for improving student outcomes.

- Enhance the quality of education provided to our students. Invest our education resources in the curriculum, methodology, opportunities to learn, and educator development that equip students for work, life and future learning in a dynamic world economy.
- Build a system of shared accountability for results within K-12. Increase transparency and accountability in the alignment of resources.
- Use data intentionally to assess the progress of students and the effectiveness of each part of the system.
- Link the early learning, K-12, and post-secondary systems, so that students experience seamless transitions.

The Board's Mission

The State Board's role in the K-12 system is to lead the development of state policy, provide system oversight and advocate for student success.

Board Objectives and Activities

The board has one overarching goal: to improve student achievement. In support of that goal, we will focus our efforts on the following four objectives:

- Develop and recommend to the legislature a new statutory definition of Basic Education that aligns funding with the learning goals and system goals for K-12. Urge the Legislature to appropriate sufficient funding to support implementation of the new definition.
- Target resources on the strategies and practices that are most likely to ensure good student outcomes. In addition, work with OSPI, the Professional Educator Standards Board, schools, districts and other partners to identify the actions needed to improve achievement in mathematics and science at all levels. Advocate for the adoption of proven and promising practices in graduation requirements, curriculum, teacher preparation and other aspects of quality education.

- Develop an accountability system to support and improve the performance of the K-12 system. An effective accountability system must include: Indicators and measures that can be used to identify schools and districts which are effective, as well as those in which improvement is needed; and designation of authority for an agreed on process by which we can ensure schools and districts take the necessary steps to improve.
- Build the board's capacity to serve as a credible, independent, catalyst for a positive impact on student learning.

Please forward this note to others who might be interested in the State Board of Education's work.

Please visit the board's Web site, <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/>, to sign up for Highlights and other messages, read complete minutes of board meetings and learn more about K-12 education in Washington State.