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State Board of Education Testimony

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Director Rarick and Board Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at the SBE. I've been a long-time advocate of Public Education. Growing up in New York provides an outside perspective to WA Education Funding and Policies. I'm a product of public schools, and a first generation college graduate. While I started as a full-time student, I finished my BA at night at a NY City University while working full-time. In Seattle, my son finished Running Start at Ingraham HS and just graduated 3 credits short of his AA degree. He finished his degree at Seattle North College and started at the UW last week. My daughter is now a senior at Ballard High School. Like you all, I am a huge supporter of public education.

I've been a public education advocate for quite a while and cut my teeth on "Washington Learns", I advocated for the "Basic Ed" bills and "McCleary". Through Seattle Council & WA State PTA, I've done scores of presentations and educated many hundreds of parents with "Basic Ed" and now "McCleary" presentations across the Puget Sound region.

Recently, I have expanded my advocacy efforts to Higher Education and for the first time ever, WA State PTA now has Higher Education on their platform and it is a top 5 issue. This issue, that I put forth, has focused on "increased access and affordable tuitions" which has the potential to include many possibilities.

My proposal is to expand Running Start and promote Vocational/Technical Certifications offered by our local State "community" Colleges to more high school students. By starting their vocational certification in high school, students can graduate ready or almost ready to start a technical job or a career and without tuition bills.

Here's some initial thoughts on why and how it would work:

- 2/3 of all jobs by 2018 will require some form of post-high school education – many will just require technical training not necessarily BA/BS degrees. Will these jobs go to WA Kids or will we continue to import employees or lose companies to other regions?
- Local employers struggle to find qualified vocational/technical workers, kids aren't aware that these good family-wage jobs are available nor are they qualified out of high school.
- College Bound is working, let's build off that success and include students who qualify a similar program for kids who want more immediate vocational or technical jobs. **Vocational/technical programs could be the carrot to keep kids in school and engaged.**

- WA State is one of the states where the achievement gap growing – our kids aren't less intelligent than kids in other states but we might not be engaging with our kids of color. A program like this could really help, similar to the success of STEM programs.
- “College and Beyond Plans” too often are not an effective tool but simply a check-off sheet that takes moments to complete.
 - o College and Career Counselors are a rare find at local districts due to budget cuts. In SPS there are **400 seniors to every counselor**. There's just not enough time to deal with non-crisis issues and “career/college counseling” most often isn't the counselor's proficiency.
- Districts due to budgets, have cut back their CTE classes/programs. While there are many courses at each HS to fulfill the CTE HS credit requirements, there's very few certificate program offers.
 - o Plus, certificate programs aren't available at all schools, in Seattle, only 2 of the 11 programs offered are north of the Ship Canal which services more than half of all SPS students.
- Many other countries encourage students to get technical degrees during high school so they graduate job ready. And conversely, too many US states ration job training so kids are not career upon graduation.
- Many WA Families and students need to start working directly out of high school, yet too few graduates are “career and work-ready” and have to grab low paying clerk jobs that don't offer career opportunities. Starting and completing real vocational training in high school would solve this issue.
- Tuition is expensive, local community colleges cost over \$4k per academic year for tuition, fees and books. Too many students cannot afford to complete their degrees. Yet, this is lower than the state allocates per K-12 student, so it could be cost neutral to the state.
- Many of our districts are struggling with capacity and high schools are the most expensive schools to build. Moving students to local “community colleges” would help with capacity but would need to ensure the local community colleges can accommodate this student growth.
- Increased graduation requirements, have made it harder to accommodate and pursue CTE pathways and some states are recognizing a separate rigorous pathway. The original 24-credit graduation proposals did include multiple pathways for 4-year degree, technical/vocational and other, but sadly they were eliminated from the final version.

What's the benefits:

- Kids would know about CT Degrees earlier in the education and look forward to finishing high school with a full or partially completed CERTIFICATION with HS graduation.
- Families and kids would incur less debt to finish these degrees, same benefits as Running Start.
- Introducing a bona-fide “program” would make CTE programs more attractive and desirable, eliminating the stigma that is sometimes associated with vocational programs.
- Similar to “College Bound”, program entry would be addressed in MS or 9th grade and a minimum GPA, and clean record could be required or earned-back.
- **This program is for all kids, as any WA State Student who wants to pursue technical/career training in HS should have access.**

What's the implications:

- To satisfy WA State Graduation Requirements, completing this program might require a waiver, similar to the IB Waiver that the legislature passed a few years back.
- The student funding allocated to the districts would need to be transferred to the community college – but again full time community college costs are lower than K-12 per pupil allocations.
- Grants from businesses and trade associations might help provide additional funding and pilot programs.
- Increased high school graduation rates, increase technical/career certifications and a more prosperous economy in WA State.

Thank you for your time and dedication to the students and families in Washington state. I look forward to continuing this dialog.

Regards,

Heidi Bennett

PS Join the conversation at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/HigherEdWA/?ref=bookmarks>