



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

A high-quality education system that prepares all students for college, career, and life.

Feedback Summary of the January 12, 2016 Community Forum

Thirty-two participants, plus six board members and seven staff, attended the January community forum in Tumwater.

Parents, educators, community leaders, and administrators attended the forum. The notes below are collected from board and staff members' notes and nine feedback forms. Many expressed concerns about the following topics (bold and bold underlined items indicate high relative frequency):

Washington's Education system:

- **The system needs to focus on all kids**
- **Improve flexibility for individual students**
- **Work on system alignment**
- **Need consistent funding to support struggling kids**
- **Need to improve trust on all levels**
- **Need sustained leadership**
- Don't just manage a bureaucracy: define and lead an education system culture
- Look at the intersection between public health, mental health, and education
- Identifying issues through data – if a school only has 20 students with FRL, those are the ones likely to not graduate

Opportunity and Achievement Gaps:

- **Provide more support to students, especially those who enter high school unprepared**
- Create alternatives
- Recognizing how trauma affects education

Assessments

- **Need alternatives to assessments**
- Assessment and remediation can create barriers to enrollment in other classes

School administration

- **Need diversity in teacher staffing and equity in pay**
- Need sustained leadership
- Need to address teacher attrition

High School and Beyond Plan

- It's a good tool

Feedback on Outreach Efforts

- **Continue outreach to communities**
- **Look at community models to innovate**
- Identify the services a community has for students in school
- Continue to reach out to kid advocates, not just education organizations

- Have State Board of Education members visit school board meetings
- Be more transparent
- It's still hard to find the community forum event information. Some were searching on the OSPI site.

If you have questions about this feedback summary or future community forums or outreach efforts, please contact Stefanie Randolph, Communications Manager, at Stefanie.randolph@k12.wa.us

Community Forum Feedback for the State Board of Education

The following was included in the packet at the request of Dr. Pete Bylsma.

Community Forum Feedback Form
January 12, 2016

Name Pete Bylsma, Mukilteo School District
Director, Assessment & Program Evaluation

What challenges to the education system do you observe?

- Balancing the high expectations for students and setting the bar at a realistic level so most students can graduate.
- Addressing the negative impact on school and student schedules and staffing levels that result from assessments that students must pass to graduate (especially for those who do not pass the first time).
- The accountability system has been driven by federal requirements that often have been invalid, but even though we have had more flexibility, there has been a reluctance to think in new ways and make changes to the status quo (e.g., keeping the same accountability requirements in place after losing the federal waiver, even when parts of the system that were required by the waiver do not make sense).
- Lack of input during the policymaking process from stakeholders who have expertise on the subject matter.
- OSPI focuses mainly on compliance and does not provide much help to the field.

What are your recommendations to the Board?

- Change the accountability and assessment systems to make it simpler and easier to understand, more transparent, more valid, and less onerous. Start by having a small group of informed stakeholders draft new blueprints with everything open for revision and using the above guiding principles. Then get feedback from a wider audience using an iterative process, refining the system as you go and using “impact” data to confirm the validity of the system. (This process was used when the original Achievement Index was created.) Resist the pressure to include so many things to appease all interest groups that the result is overly complex systems. Having simple but valid systems increase the likelihood that the information they provide will be used and useful.
- Make the following changes:
 1. Do not identify any Focus schools this year and change the process for identifying Focus schools. The current system that “stacks” all the subgroups together identifies schools mainly based on their student characteristics (i.e., large schools with significant populations of ELL and special education students, who by definition will be lower performers). This generates invalid results. If Focus schools are needed, identify low performing schools based on each subgroup. Exit Focus schools from this status if they do not meet the new criteria for identifying these schools (option B). **Do this as soon as possible** and start with a new set of schools that are labeled Focus based on the new criteria.
 2. Eliminate the use of Indistar for Priority and Focus schools. This system is cumbersome, uses too many indicators/criteria, and duplicates school improvement planning processes required by the district.
 3. Change the Achievement Index to include a Peer rating. This indicator was included in the original Index and was very useful, but it was eliminated based on federal requirements. Since these requirements are no longer in place, bring back this indicator. It should compare “like schools” to each other (this is similar to how mutual funds are evaluated). Use regression to control for the percentage of students in a schools that are low income, ELL, special ed, gifted, and mobile for sets of schools that serve the same grade band (e.g., elementary, middle, high, multiple bands). Adding a peer rating adds context to the evaluation and will decrease the index’s correlation with school demographic characteristics.
 4. Create a district accountability system using the Achievement Index, and include financial data (current expenditures per weighted student) in the district peer analysis. (OSPI officials said it would create a district Index but they never did.) District accountability could also be based on the extent they meet the characteristics identified in research of effective districts (see OSPI document on this topic from 2004).

Having the district as a unit of analysis makes the entire system more transparent and accountable (schools within the district should not be able to get good ratings if they send their most challenging students to alternative schools, which would be included in a systemwide view).

5. Find a new way to measure growth on the Index rather than use student growth percentiles. SGPs are deceptive because they are a special form of norm-referenced system. It was selected for use without consideration of alternative models because it could be used with an assessment system that does not have a vertical scale. The Smarter Balanced system uses a vertical scale, so a different system can be designed that shows the amount of growth of individuals toward a fixed target (e.g., on grade level, being college ready), not just a comparison of students to others who have the same score.
6. Find more valid ways to measure ELL achievement and growth. This has been a problem for a long time, and it won't be easy to come up with an accurate measure. We need to take into consideration what level the student is in, how long a typical ELL student remains in each level, the time it takes to move from one level to the next, and how soon they exit based on when and at what level they started. This definitely requires informed stakeholders to be involved.
7. Report as many results as possible by the various subgroups to increase transparency, and expand reporting beyond what is required by law. For example, the state should post the ELA results for the 10th graders who took the Smarter Balanced assessments. Districts and schools can only access the results for their own district using a secure website that has restricted use, and there is no way to find out how the state, subgroups, or other schools/districts have performed on this assessment. Even though these results are used for graduation purposes, OSPI has not posted them on the Report Card because "they are not required for federal accountability."
8. Do not use 11th grade SBA results for schools and districts that have very high "non-participant" rates in accountability decisions – the results are not a true reflection of actual student performance.
9. Eliminate the required sanctions of Steps 1 and 2 (Choice and supplemental educational services) to free up Title I funds earlier in the process. These options have not proven to be effective remedies.
10. Eliminate the requirements related to Highly Qualified Teachers (HQT). This designation is invalid and the requirements are hard to meet in all situations (rural areas, small schools, special education)
11. Find a way to increase funding for homeless youth. McKinney-Vento funding is not enough, and Title I funds are sometimes tapped to fill the void.
12. Consider not requiring students to pass an assessment to graduate. The extra testing and many alternative routes impacts students' course-taking patterns, increases the testing burden at high schools that disrupts the daily schedule for an entire school and computer labs for weeks, and requires more staff and time to oversee and keep track of all the details. An alternative is to use the SAT, ACT, or a college placement exam (ASSET) as the required high school assessment. Students will take these more seriously, it saves them money, and will increase the number of students who consider college as a post-secondary option. To provide extra motivation, the diploma could indicate an "honor" rating upon graduation (e.g., with honor, magna cum laude) when students pass assessments at different levels. Those who did not pass would not get a diploma with this designation. Other states have moved to using college entrance exams as their high school assessment and have used differentiated diplomas rather than requiring a passing score on multiple tests. Those who do not pass could be required to take another course in that subject area. Earning 24 credits is enough of an academic requirement for students to meet.
13. Find a way to promote competency-based systems (e.g., standards-based grading, taking a proficiency exam to earn credit before taking a class). Perhaps have a statewide report card that differentiates content knowledge/skills from other important but non-content indicators, such as effort, participations, citizenship (Kentucky has done this).
14. Have the legislature provide additional funding to OSPI so it can take on more initiatives that will help the entire state as well as those needing it the most. Under-staffing of OSPI severely limits the agency's usefulness. OSPI is one of the lowest funded SEAs in the country on a per pupil basis.
15. Find ways to recruit more teachers of important world languages (e.g., Chinese, Arabic). Perhaps allow native speakers of these languages to teach even though they are not certificated.

The following community forum feedback was included in the packet at the request of Dr. Pete Bylsma.

Education Next

More on How States Should Navigate New Opportunities Under ESSA (Part 2 of 2)

January 7, 2016

Be More Creative About Evaluating Schools

by Linda Darling-Hammond

States should seize the possibilities for more innovative approaches to school improvement posed by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaces a law much criticized for its heavy-handed federal role and for focusing schools heavily on teaching for low-level multiple-choice tests in reading and math to the neglect of other subject areas and higher-level skills. These consequences were most severe in low-income schools most vulnerable to the law's sanctions for failing to raise test scores. As a result, inequalities in access to a full, rich curriculum widened, while achievement dropped on measures assessing higher-order thinking skills, like the international PISA tests.

The new law encourages states to use multiple measures to evaluate student and school progress. If the goal is to ensure that students are truly college and career ready and that gaps in opportunities and outcomes are closed, these measures should include:

- **Outcome measures** that are more related to serious skill development and later life success than were the multiple-choice tests of the NCLB era, for example:
 - completion of well-designed college and career preparatory courses of study;
 - demonstration of college-readiness by passing AP, IB, or transferable college courses;
 - 5-year as well as 4-year graduation rates, to encourage schools to keep, take back, and graduate students who fall behind or get off track;
 - state assessments—used for information, not sanctions—that measure performance against new standards with fidelity, including the problem-solving, critical thinking, writing, and research skills they entail, and that are designed to be useful for informing instruction;
 - progress on English language proficiency assessments;
 - success on more challenging performance assessments, likely those widely used in high-achieving countries, such as the research projects, mathematical and computer models, and design solutions a growing number of schools require for graduation and more than 800 colleges now accept as evidence of readiness.
- **Measures of opportunities to learn**, for example:
 - data on school resources (dollars, availability of technology, and qualified teachers);
 - access to a full, rich curriculum (science, history / social studies, art, music, world languages, and physical education);
 - data on school climate, student and teacher supports, and learning opportunities from student, teacher, and parent surveys.
- **Measures of student engagement**, for example:
 - attendance and chronic absenteeism rates;

– suspension and expulsion rates.

Rather than relying only on a numerical index or an A-F grading system that would obscure the critical information needed for improvement, the measures above should be part of a dashboard that informs educators and the community about progress in each area and allows for analysis of what’s working and where attention is needed. The data should be disaggregated by student group in order to assure progress and opportunities for all children, and to inform a process of continuous evaluation and improvement.

Accountability systems should no longer be dominated by a complex set of annual targets, labels, and sanctions, which inspire gaming, rather than efforts to meet students’ needs. Those old rules created incentives for schools to keep or push out the high-need students who lower average scores. And the old “percent proficient” metric caused schools to focus on the “bubble kids”—those right below the proficiency benchmark—while ignoring others.

Unfortunately, the new law’s prescriptive requirements for identifying the bottom 5 percent of Title I schools for intervention could lead states to assume they must replicate the old accountability metrics from No Child Left Behind (NCLB). However, there is room in the law for a better approach. A continuous improvement approach, like that adopted in California, would track progress on all of the measures in the dashboard, using scale scores to better measure growth and progress for all students, so that schools can continually assess and fine-tune their efforts.

As in California’s CORE districts, a collaborative of ten districts that received a federal waiver under NCLB, the multiple measures can be weighted periodically—the new law requires a determination once every three years—to allow a calculation of which schools are most in need of assistance. CORE publishes no ranking or labelling of all schools, but instead takes a holistic approach to improving education across all the areas in the dashboard and providing assistance where it is most needed.

One school may be doing fine on test scores but working to reduce chronic absenteeism, while another may be working with a network of schools on improving supports for English language learners. Schools receive assistance based on their areas of need. Help can include targeted, high-quality professional development; curriculum improvements; additional time for student learning after school or in the summers; establishment of wraparound services, including community school models; redesign of schools to support personalization and more authentic work in classrooms and internships; or pairing of struggling schools with successful ones serving similar students.

All of these approaches have proved successful when well-implemented. The job of the CORE network of districts—and soon, the new California Collaborative for Educational Excellence—is to ensure that solid strategies are known, disseminated, and well implemented. Schools with the greatest need will get the most intensive assistance, but all schools will be expected to learn and improve each year.

This focus on continuous improvement will be enhanced by replacing the unstable and notoriously imprecise value-added measures derived from state test scores with approaches to teacher evaluation that integrate expert observations with closely related classroom-based measures of student learning, so that teachers can receive productive feedback. States will also benefit from

supporting Peer Assistance and Review models that identify teachers who are struggling, provide them with intensive, expert assistance from mentor teachers in their content areas, and make a timely judgment about continued employment that is grounded in useful evidence, intensive support, and due process. A new framework for assessing both teaching and schooling, grounded in the right measures, will support continuous improvement more effectively than the straitjackets of the past.

Linda Darling-Hammond is Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education Emeritus at Stanford University and President of the Learning Policy Institute.