Summary of the Diverse Communities Roundtable Discussion

Description of the Diverse Communities Roundtable Event

On March 10, 2015, the State Board of Education invited leaders of community organizations, education advocacy groups, and district staff who represented diverse communities to join board members and staff for a Diverse Communities Roundtable. The goal of the meeting was to engage communities that have traditionally been underserved, listen to their feedback on education policy, and begin to build stronger relationships to engage diverse communities in future development of SBE policy work. The meeting was attended by nearly 40 participants, six staff members, and six board members. The meeting was held at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma.

Participants expressed appreciation at the opportunity to discuss important topics with board members and staff. Participants expressed concern that the system has been entrusted with their kids and has failed them; they said that the state needs to act. They cautioned that meaningful action to correct inequity would need to come out of this sort of meeting for it to be a true success.

This document summarizes feedback from the participants of the meeting, so the Board may use the feedback to improve policy.

Executive Summary

The following recommendations or concerns were offered by most attendees:

- Improve parental engagement within schools.
- Create a welcoming environment for students and parents in schools.
- Recruit and retain educators who are racially, culturally, and linguistically representative of the students.
- Engage community in policy-making process; create feedback loop in community; harness the power of community organizations.
- Incorporate suggestions for improving outreach to diverse communities.

The following recommendations or concerns were offered by some attendees:

- Have high expectations for kids; have a growth mindset instead of a deficit mindset.
- More instructional time helps close gaps.
- The principal is the key; leadership sets the culture in a school building.
- Reform discipline practices to reduce disproportionality
- Bolster early learning; reading early in life is important.
- Reforms need resources.
- State policy keeps changing; the definition of success keeps changing.
- Have a state plan that provides a system of overall coordination, P-16 transitions, and is not siloed.
- Support teachers with professional development and good pay.
- Strengthen and expand cultural competence and cultural representation.
- Improve the use of data and the accountability system.

- Concern that teachers' unions are getting in the way.
- Concern with early identification of students for Special Education Services.
- Concern with exit exams and Common Core.

List of Participants

Participants at the Diverse Communities Roundtable included representatives of the following organizations:

- Commission on African American Affairs
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Tacoma
- Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee
- Senator John McCoy's Office
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
- University of Puget Sound
- Boys and Girls' Club of King County
- Equity in Education
- Commission on Hispanic Affairs
- Stand for Children
- League of Education Voters
- Black Education Strategy Roundtable
- Tacoma Public Schools
- Tacoma School Board
- Kids at Hope Tacoma
- Bellevue Special Needs Parent-Teacher Association
- Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs
- Tacoma Housing Authority

Methodology

This document was prepared using the following three sources of feedback:

- Notes taken during large group discussion involving the entire room.
- Notes taken during small group discussions. A board and staff member took notes at each table.
- Feedback forms that approximately 25 percent of participants filled out in response to these guiding questions:
  - What is your organization's connection to education in Washington?
  - What challenges to the education system do you observe?
  - What are your recommendations to the Board?
  - What recommendations do you have for the Board to strengthen outreach to diverse communities?

The summary of feedback was created using a method of analyzing qualitative data meant to reduce the author's opinion or bias in the writing. This method is believed to produce a document more closely representing participant feedback. This method of qualitative analysis is commonly used in social sciences such as anthropology or sociology when the author intends to accurately represent or understand people without including the bias of the author's culture or background.

1. All of the feedback forms and notes are transcribed into a Word document. Some data are lost due to illegible handwriting.
2. The document is coded, a process of highlighting repeated comments to come up with major categories or themes of feedback.
3. Each comment within a theme is organized under that theme so the author can determine approximately how many participants shared the same opinion or voiced the same concern. Cryptic or miscellaneous feedback is removed if the meaning or relevance is unclear.
4. The author writes a summary of each theme and includes analysis of whether it was a common theme that was agreed upon or if participants had conflicting opinions. When useful, direct quotes from feedback forms or discussion are included in the summary.
5. The draft summary was sent to the Board's staff, the executive committee, and the board members who were present. After their review, the document was shared with the entire Board, invited participants of the roundtable discussion, and the public. The final document will be included in the board packet that is sent to the entire board in preparation for the May 2015 board meeting.

Recommendations or Concerns Offered by Most Attendees

Improve Parental Engagement within Schools

Participants voiced concern that there is a lack of parental involvement. Some participants stated that parents are seen as threats or adversaries by educators. Some responses broadened the engagement topic to student, family, and community engagement. Participants offered the following ideas for improving engagement:

- Go to where the parents are in order to effectively engage them. Don't wait for them to come to you; go to them.
- Talk to every student about opportunities like Advanced Placement and college.
- The message of the growth mindset is important when engaging students and families.
- Bolster engagement at the start and end of the year.
- Improve engagement with immigrant communities that do not necessarily understand the education system in the United States.
- Relying solely on appointments decreases engagement. Create more open opportunities to get involved.
- Parents also need to be educated on the students' options, requirements, and ways to teach or learn.
- Find ways to make instructional leaders feel less threatened by family, thus removing the barrier of educator resistance to parental engagement.
- The student should be placed at the top of the pyramid of conversation.

The following are direct quotes of participants:

- "The parents need to be educated right along with the children. They need the support too."
- "The lack of an organization-wide approach to solving learning problems. Involving parents and students with solving the problems does not seem to be welcome."
- "Expand our definition of parent involvement – meet parents where they are and walk with them down the continuum from no involvement to involvement to engagement at their pace!"
- "Lack of relationship-building as a core value."

- "In my study of the education system, lack of parental involvement has been used and used again. But throughout history, their communities have relied on the education system to educate the kids. The system and the people in the system were entrusted to do the right thing for the kids. There has been a huge gap. There is a huge immigrant community that does not understand the system. There are many people who know the system but still don't get involved. The challenges for this community are higher. They have multiple jobs and may not have time to get involved. The people who have responsibility, how are they being held accountable to educate all of the kids? Not just the easy ones who look good and not just the squeaky wheels. If we are waiting on a certain level of parental engagement, how do we start implementing system change right now?"

Create a Welcoming Environment for Students and Parents in Schools

Participants said an environment needs to be created to welcome students and parents to the school. This conversation focused on how to open up a historically closed system of education that is not welcoming to all parents and kids.

The following are suggestions for ways to create a welcoming environment:

- Display artwork or language that is supportive of diverse cultures or, at the very least, is representative of the school's student population.
- Teach cultural knowledge from multiple cultures.
- Improve school culture and climate so students and parents of diverse groups do not feel disenfranchised and unwelcome.
- Find ways to make kids who are poor, have poor hygiene, or are otherwise disenfranchised feel like they are still valuable people in the education system.
- Proactive attempts to create a welcoming environment go a long way.
- Host dinners or other social events to bring the students and parents into the school to interact with staff.
- Upon entry to the school, the parents should be welcomed instead of being treated as uninvited intruders.
- Create an atmosphere that inspires students to have meaningful moments or experiences during their education.

The following are direct quotes of participants:

- "The environment needs to be welcoming. Pictures on the wall and languages on the wall should represent all races. In Mount Tahoma, you don't see many faces who are Latino yet many of the students are Latino."
- "You walk into a school, you see many European posters. There were not many elements of the culture. There wasn't much to connect with."
- "Kids feel left out if they are poor or if they have poor hygiene. The students are treated differently when their parents don't volunteer at school."
- "At the least, you have to be welcoming to parents when they walk in the door. Parents need to feel welcome. My experiences have been unwelcoming when entering the school."
- "Public education is a historically closed system, especially to communities of color."

Recruit and Retain Educators who are Racially, Culturally, and Linguistically Representative of the Students

Participants stated that educators need to be more representative of the students whom they serve. Many participants clarified that all staff at all levels including leadership, not just teachers, should be more representative of the students. They also noted the importance of not just having the right demographics of teachers, but also having well-trained teachers.

The following are ideas that were offered for diversifying the staff:

- Volunteers can improve diversity, not just paid staff.
- Make sure that you have staff who speak the language of the students and families.
- Offer additional compensation for teachers serving groups of students with extra needs.
- Hiring practices need to be improved at the district level.
- Some white people neither understand the constraints from the legacy of slavery nor understand how to share the power that they hold.
- The chief diversity officers should be white so that other white staff see someone of their own racial background voicing the importance of a diverse workforce and leading the understanding of diversity.
- Students need to see professionals from the community that represent diverse groups.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "Teachers are mostly white and that isn't representative of the kids in the system. There are a lot of factors, but one policy that could address this is office staff who are required to be reflective of the demographics of the school. If there is a school with mostly Hispanic students, they need Spanish speaking staff. There needs to be people of the same demographics to help the students. Even if they aren't staff, just having volunteers is good. Education is a story of a closed system, how do you invite people in so that it can become an opened system. When students are showing up high and with no place to live then there are troubles for a teacher. Then, they are starting to play the role of raising kids."
- "First of all, hire them. Second, they need to be well prepared, not just representing their race."
- "Need more educators of color – hiring practices are concentrated at the district level."
- "Educators – recruiting, hiring, supporting, training, retraining."
- "Hiring teachers and public education staff (at all levels) reflective of community that is being served."

Engage Community in Policy-Making Process; Create Feedback Loop in Community; Harness Power of Community Organizations

By engaging the community in the policy-making process, education policies become more relevant; goals can be agreed upon and championed by members of the community. Several participants encouraged a community-wide approach to system improvement.

The following are ideas for a community-wide approach to policy-making and the improvement of education:

- Engage community organizations, including faith-based organizations, for after school events and role modeling. This will create a sense of community and service

- Use the concept of collective impact to promote schools working with communities to agree upon goals and evaluate progress towards those goals. This involves talking to the communities that are impacted and asking the community what success looks like. Multiple participants noted the Tacoma model of engaging the community in looking at collective impact.
- Find champions within the community to engage with.
- Bring the policy process closer to end users like teachers. Take a grassroots approach.
- Communicate the relevance of education policy to communities to encourage feedback.
- When taking a community-wide approach, be mindful that not all parents speak English or were educated in the American system.
- Community organizations like the NAACP need to address their intergenerational gaps by recruiting fresh members.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "Develop a community-wide approach to student learning. Include that some parents are not English speaking or educated in the American systems."
- "Recruit community organizations and members to provide support to families lacking confidence to work with the system to help students to get through the system."
- "Partner with community organizations on their meeting schedules."

Incorporate Suggestions for Improving Outreach to Diverse Communities

Participants responded positively to the Board holding the Diverse Communities Roundtable. However, they cautioned that the outcome would be disappointing and the engagement would break down if the state does not do the necessary work to improve the education system. Simply put, don't just talk with us, do something about it! That being said, participants encouraged further engagement.

Participants offered the following strategies for improving outreach:

- Extend invitations and openness to more people and groups. Invite not only advocates, but also people who work within the system. Take a grassroots approach to focus on youth, family, and leaders.
- Use a similar feedback form as the one provided to Diverse Communities Roundtable participants to gather feedback from the community. Train community members to engage their fellow community members to fill out the form so that more feedback could be gathered.
- Partner with diverse communities to determine what success looks like.
- After decisions are made, stakeholders will come out of the woodwork; engage them.
- Communicate policy with a "what's in it for me" context to stimulate engagement.
- Combine a listening session with the roundtable.
- Observe schools undercover.
- Go to community organization meetings. Participants stressed the importance of going to them where they are on their schedule, not waiting for them to engage you.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "Consider equity import framework – personal connect – go to the community help in policy development process – racial equity lens @ state level."
- "Take the show on the road – host convenings in many communities to train the trainer so that feedback can be collected within our community and fed back to you – lots of missing voices – Asian Pacific Islander, Native American."

- "Nobody listens to us - our voices – when we take time off of work or whatever… but no change. Very frustrating!"
- "SBE is inaccessible. No momentum to effectuate real change."

Recommendations or Concerns Offered by Some Attendees

Have High Expectations for Kids; Have a Growth Mindset instead of a Deficit Mindset

In most cases, participants urged high expectations for all kids and holding a growth mindset over a deficit mindset. However, one participant said that the state should back off of high expectations.

The following are direct quotes from feedback forms:

- "Lack of belief in students' ability to be successful"
- "Deficient mindset/focus on child's potential – need to be asset"
- "Disposition towards love and compassion; mantra
    - Show love; reinforce gifted; gifted talent
    - Don't put kids down
    - Affirmation
    - High expectations"
- "Provide every student with a rigorous academic program."
- "High expectations to close the achievement gap"
- "Lighten up on high expectations – reading by five – focus on exploration"
- "Self-actualization – self-efficacy – hope is vitally successful"

More Instructional Time Helps Close Gaps

Several participants voiced support for increasing instructional time as a way to close achievement gaps. While most of these comments were about extending the school year, one participant noted that requirements in state policy can adversely impact the teacher's time with a student.

The following is a direct quote from a participant:

- "Students need excellent teachers, more time in instruction, more supports to help the students. It needs to be a whole system to support them. If that means they continue through summer, then it needs to happen. If they need that extra time, then we need to do that."

The Principal is the Key; Leadership Sets the Culture in a School Building

Participants stressed the importance of school leadership in setting the organizational culture within a school. In regards to sustainability of improvement efforts, participants noted that culture doesn't remain the same after a leader leaves and districts transfer good leaders around when they are in short supply. A participant noted the importance of principal accountability.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "The culture in the building impacts the result. Research shows that the culture set in place by the leader impacts the entire school. When schools are lacking good leaders, they move the good leaders around."
- "Having good leaders and teachers sharing their practices matters a lot."
- "The culture doesn't remain after the good leader leaves."

Reform Discipline Practices to Reduce Disproportionality

Participants expressed concern at the disproportionality of discipline rate among student groups. Participants urged reform of disciplinary practices or resources to get students back into school and support programs.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "Disproportionate discipline – reforms for large districts – help with policy reform."
- "Disproportionality in suspension of minority students and special education – resource to get back into school, support, and resources that will help them with knowledge of Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration programs"

Bolster Early Learning; Reading Early in Life is Important

Many participants supported strengthened and expanded early learning. They offered the following suggestions for implementation:

- Strengthen the focus on reading early in life; focus on language acquisition.
- Include early education as part of Basic Education.
- Ensure seamless transitions between early learning and K-12.
- Learning to read is important because the ability to read leads to further learning.

Reforms Need Resources

An ambitious plan must be matched by the means to achieve its goals. Participants noted that there have been excellent reports commissioned in 2008 on closing the achievement gap for each major student group and, if implemented, would successfully close achievement gaps. However, they stated that those reforms will never be realized without the will and resources to improve. One participant voiced concern that extra resources will still lead to the same outcomes.

The following are direct quotes:

- "A contract is a policy basically. What can you do with your community to ensure that there are good, constructive things to do? Reading those reports that suggest reforms is good, but there needs to be resources for support. The Board setting higher standards has been a good thing, but how many more students will fail to graduate with higher standards. Perhaps there needs to be more funding for that support."
- "High expectations with resources ($) to help support the catch up – not more teachers"
- "Put money into closing the achievement gap
  - Early learning
  - Excellent teachers
  - More instructional time for students
  - More resources for students and parents
  - A culture that encourages student engagement and parent investment"
- "Even with $2 billion, outcomes will be the same"

State Policy Keeps Changing; Definition of Success Keeps Changing

Participants voiced concern that constant change in state policy generates the following problems:

- Confusing for parents and teachers.
- Pulling administrators in many directions.

- Premature tinkering with policy.
- Choosing the newest policy fix.
- Trend-driven activity that drives in different directions. For example, preparing for Common Core and preparing to eliminate it.

Have a State Plan that Provides a System of Overall Coordination, P-16 Transitions, and is not Siloed

Participants urged that the state have a plan that provides overall coordination, smooth transitions between grade bands, and encourages communication between early learning, K-12, and postsecondary organizations. Some participants criticized the state for a lack of political will, being guided by politics, and lack of follow-through.

The following are direct quotes:

- "I am also trustee of EWU. This is a huge problem between K-12 and higher education. They don't talk with each other but they depend on each other."
- "P-16 - connect the system"

Support Teachers with Professional Development and Good Pay

Participants were supportive of professional development and good pay for teachers. One participant noted that additional pay is warranted for working with students who are challenging and benefit from extra support.

Strengthen and Expand Cultural Competence and Cultural Representation

Participants noted the importance of cultural competence. The comments had a focus on either cultural competency training or integrating multiple cultures into instruction.

The following points were made about cultural competence:

- Encourage students to explore their heritage. Share history with the next generation to engender a sense of community, belonging, and purpose. One participant described a powerful experience of visiting Ellis Island with her mom who immigrated and had not returned to the Statue of Liberty.
- Silence from Native American students does not mean that they are not learning.
- Cross-cultural competence will reduce negative assumptions about our children and reverse low expectations.
- There are a lack of cultural resources within schools and outside of schools.
- Cultural competency and bias training should be at all levels of staff training.
- Use "American Denial" as a tool for assessing perspective.
- Design specific multicultural curriculum. For instance, a course that teaches native symbols for art.
- Recognize how students learn and support their styles of learning.

Improve the Use of Data and the Accountability System

Participants offered a variety of suggestions on how to improve the use of data and the accountability system. The following are direct quotes:

- "Education is about experience, policy is made off of data."
- "Find ways to hold school boards accountable for educating all kids."

- "Strategic Plan to move from multi-year data to adjust."
- "More user-friendly data system – more current data, particularly even if it's preliminary."
- "Develop a state system having data feedback."
- "Charter schools are <u>really</u> accountable."
- "State policy making (data driven) must be tied to the anecdotal. Get stories to go with the data."
- "Multiple measures of accountability =
  - Family input
  - Student impact
  - Qualitative data
  - Feedback"

Concern that Teachers' Unions are Getting in the Way

At least three participants voiced concern that teachers' unions were getting in the way. Their concerns included details related to contract negotiations inhibiting progress towards an open school environment, a need for streamlining due to many unions, and leaders spending time on human resource management instead of instructional leadership.

The following are direct quotes:

- "Schools should be made more open. There are things that should be made a bit easier so that the situation can become more open. It [from the conversation, 'it' refers to specifications on a 48-hour notice to visit a student classroom] is in the teacher contract. The contract negotiation process is an obstacle. There are things that the school and the community need to do so that an open environment can be created."
- "School districts have too many unions – some continuum of consideration for streamlining."
- "School districts have too many unions. Too many work schedules – leaders have to be human resource managers, not instructional leaders."

Concern with Early Identification of Students for Special Education Services

Multiple participants voiced concern that students are being identified for Special Education Services too early in their education, before they have had a chance to learn. These participants supported identification in third grade or after but not in kindergarten. One participant had a contradictory point that some students are allowed to fail for years before being assessed for Special Education Services.

The following are direct quotes from participants:

- "One of the challenges is that some kids who go into kindergarten are identified as needing special education. I find this very disturbing in kindergarten. No referral to special education should be made before third grade. Some students of color have their own cultural background and language. They should not be identified so early before they have a chance to learn."
- "Students are identified in Kindergarten for special education. Students should not be referred to special education during the first three years of their education."

Concern with Exit Exams and Common Core

During discussion, a couple of participants voiced support for delinking exit exams from graduation requirements and getting rid of Common Core. One participant stated that a self-directed set of learning standards should be chosen instead of Common Core. However, many participants urged the

importance of having high expectations for all kids and accountability, as covered in a different part of this summary document, without explicitly mentioning exit exams or Common Core as a means to hold high expectations for all kids.

If you have any questions about this document, please email Parker Teed, Operations and Data Coordinator, at parker.teed@k12.wa.us or if you have questions about SBE outreach and communications, please contact Stefanie Randolph, Communications Manager, at stefanie.randolph@k12.wa.us