



Pasco School District #1

C. L. Booth Education Service Center
1215 W. Lewis Street • Pasco, Washington 99301

Saundra L. Hill, Superintendent • (509) 546-2800 • FAX (509) 543-6781

August 19, 2013

Arne Duncan
Secretary, U.S. Department of Education

RE: Support for the Ever ELL Cell

Dear Secretary Duncan:

The Washington State Board of Education got this one right. The Board is proposing the replacement of the current ELL cell with the Ever ELL cell for accountability purposes. I strongly encourage the U.S. Department of Education approve this innovative change.

The proposed change would increase accountability for the group of students who exit the ELL cell yet are still moving towards proficiency in academic English. The Ever ELL cell would highlight the need for ongoing support and intervention for students who have exited the ELL cell under state criteria. The fact that students meet State criteria for exit does not mean that an ELL student has become sufficiently proficient to be able to access the more rigorous academic language and content of subsequent grade levels. Their exit status basically releases the state from providing additional funding needed to achieve full competency in English.

I believe that the Ever ELL cell would constitute an improved, more reasonable and accurate way to hold school systems accountable for these students. It would tell a more complete story about the programs' efficacy as students move through the grade levels.

Our state only tests students in English even when they do not speak English, then it uses these results as providing the "truth" about the academic achievement of these students and their schools. This is not a valid or reliable assessment of these students' actual achievement in reading or math, only their achievement, at that point, in English reading and math. Likewise, it is not a valid assessment of their school's performance.

Schools having a majority of their student population who are ELL will not be accurately assessed under such a system, especially in the elementary grade levels. Nor will they be recognized for doing truly outstanding and innovative work in moving students to full English proficiency. It takes time to acquire academic English. The schools that successfully start them on their learning journeys never get credit for their school's part in the students' ultimate success. The Ever ELL cell would be one step toward improving this situation.

According to the solid, nationally-recognized research, it takes 7-10 years to develop academic English. We have data in our own system that show elementary students failing the state assessments because they have not had sufficient time to learn English excelling on the state assessments by the time they are in high school. The Ever ELL cell would better capture the impact of the system on these students, and provide policy makers with a better measure of the effectiveness of programs designed to help ELL children achieve full competency in English.

Celebrating academics, diversity, and innovation.

If the central purpose of the achievement index is to evaluate the effectiveness of schools and the programs that serve the students in them, then policy makers would be in a better position to evaluate the schools and programs under an Ever ELL paradigm.

Please support this improvement in the accountability framework.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Saundra L. Hill".

Saundra L. Hill
Superintendent