THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Accountability | World-Class Math and Science Standards | Meaningful Diploma/CORE 24

CORE 24 Implementation Task Force Notes – May 18, 2009

ITF Task Force Attendees: Michael Christianson, Jean Countryman, Linda Dezellem, Lynn Eisenhauer, Larry Francois, Lisa Hechtman, Sergio Hernandez, Julie Kratzig, Bridget Lewis, Dennis Maguire, Mark Mansell, Mick Miller, Alex Otoupal, Harjeet Sandhu, Jennifer Shaw, Brad Sprague, and Michael Tolley

SBE Board and Staff Members: Steve Dal Porto and Jack Schuster (ITF Board Co-Leads); Amy Bragdon, Bunker Frank; Edie Harding (Executive Director), Brad Burnham (Legislative and Policy Specialist), and Kathe Taylor (Policy Director)

Invited Speakers and Observers: John Deeder (Evergreen SD), Lesley Klenk (OSPI), Dan Phelan (Lake Washington SD), Linda Lamb (former Board member)

Note:

- Handouts and presentations for which there were electronic copies can be found on the State Board of Education website at: http://www.sbe.wa.gov/CORE24Dates&Materials2.html
- The August meeting date has been changed to **August 14** (not August 7), from **9:00 to 3:00** at the Puget Sound ESD. More people could make August 14, and the earlier start and finish time will enable people to get on the road a little ahead of Friday afternoon traffic.

Welcome, Overview of Agenda, and Task Force Revised Work Plan. After Jack Schuster welcomed the group, Kathe Taylor reviewed the agenda. The purpose of today's meeting was to explore the Board's charges to the Task Force around schedules and credits. Specifically, the Board asked the Task Force to make recommendations about: 1) scheduling approaches to 24 credits that can meet the required 150 instructional hours and 2) ways to operationalize competency-based methods for meeting graduation requirements. The day's agenda was structured to provide a base of information that the Task Force could use to pursue the Board's questions.

Kathe also reviewed the revised work plan, explaining that revisions to the work plan were made to accommodate the schedule of the Quality Education Council (QEC) established by ESHB 2261. The QEC has a report due on January 1, 2010 that will address phase-in of various elements of the basic education restructuring plan.

Competency-based Approaches: District and State. Three guests were invited to share their perspectives on competency-based approaches at a local, district level (Lake Washington and Evergreen) and scaled up to the state level (Collection of Evidence).

Dan Phelan, Chief Academic Officer of Lake Washington SD, described Lake Washington's comprehensive approach to competency-based requirements. He distributed a brochure that described the interdisciplinary skills, attributes, and content knowledge that

Lake Washington students were expected to develop, and described the district performance graduation requirements. In order to receive a diploma, Lake Washington requires students to demonstrate competency on two standards: communication and quantitative and scientific reasoning (QSR). To meet competency on the communication standard, students complete three writing assignments, including a literary analysis essay, a persuasive essay, and a cause-effect or compare-contrast essay. To meet competency on the QSR standard, students demonstrate proficiency on a formal lab report and on a problem solving and reasoning report. These competency-based requirements are evaluated based on district-wide rubrics. (Dan's PowerPoint presentation is on the SBE website in the list of materials.)

John Deeder, Superintendent of Evergreen SD, described Evergreen's process for students to earn competency-based credit by passing examinations developed by the district in designated subjects. Evergreen established a graduation requirements policy that included "developing, by September 2006, the process and testing instruments to grant credit based upon competence testing, in lieu of enrollment, for the following core subject minimum requirements: English, mathematics, science and social studies." The district invested $25,000 to hire a consultant to develop assessments, and developed a process that enables students to challenge a course in August, prior to taking a class. (The school will provide study materials over the summer to help the student prepare.) Students who successfully challenge a course will have that noted on their transcripts as a "pass;" failures will not be recorded. [Note: The NCAA will not accept courses completed through credit-by-exam.]

Only one student has challenged a course since the exams have been made available. Two factors may account for the lack of student interest: 1) insufficient marketing to inform students of the new option, and 2) lack of incentive—sufficient flexibility in current schedules allows students to take what they want. John speculated that if the requirements of CORE 24 made schedules tighter, it could increase students' motivation to challenge a course in order to free up time in their schedules. In the future, the district may consider allowing students to take an examination for the purpose of credit retrieval if they have taken a class and failed it.

Lesley Klenk, Certificate of Academic Achievement Options Manager, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, explained how a standards-based review process could be scaled up to assess literally thousands of pieces of student work. She showed a short PowerPoint presentation to describe the history and origins of the state's Collection of Evidence (COE). The COE is a set of work samples developed under the supervision of a teacher that can help a student who has not met standard on the WASL establish proficiency in reading, writing, or math. (The 2009 legislature recently postponed the mathematics COE for two years because it was so costly (approximately $2 million per year), given the large number of students participating (4,200 in February 2009; 10,000+ since its inception in summer 2007). Students who submit a COE tend to have one or more of the following characteristics; they are: independent/hard workers, passionate about topics not covered in the traditional curriculum, and/or students who may be more likely to find the traditional high school environment and testing environment challenging.

The work samples, after being signed off as authentic representations of the student's work by the student, teacher, and principal, are submitted to the state for evaluation. Trained teachers come together from around the state and use the COE's elaborate, rubric-based scoring system to score COEs in February (seniors only) and in June (all students). Lesley

provided an example of a piece of writing submitted for the reading collection of evidence and asked the group to determine whether it would meet proficiency. Exemplar COE tasks are available on the COE website (www.coe.k12.wa.us). (Lesley's PowerPoint presentation is on the SBE website with the list of materials.)

Schedules and Credits. Two brief presentations provided more information to serve as a foundation for the afternoon's discussion of schedules and credit.

Brad Burnham, SBE Legislative and Policy Specialist, reviewed an analysis of district graduation credit requirements and bell schedules that he had conducted by merging two databases of information collected at different times. The data, although dated by a few years, illustrated patterns. Briefly, schools requiring 27 credits or fewer tended to be on standard schedules (6 or 7 period schedules), and those with graduation requirements between 28 and 31 credits tended to use block schedules.

When the approximate minutes per period were calculated to determine how close districts might be coming to the 150 instructional hour requirement per credit, the instructional hours ranged from 135 (for a 4 block with 4 or 8 periods) to 165 (for a 6-period schedule).

Kathe Taylor, SBE Policy Director, reviewed a synopsis of states' definitions of credit, taken from states' administrative codes. Twenty-seven (27) states, including Washington, define credits in terms of time; 17 states do not include a time requirement, and six states do not define credit at the state level. Among the 12 states that require 24 credits, the definition of a credit ranges from unspecified (3 states) to 177 hours for a six-period day (Louisiana). Louisiana is the only state whose time-based requirement exceeds Washington's.

Kathe also noted that 34 states have competency-based policies, and described examples of the different approaches states have taken.

Handouts from both Brad's and Kathe's presentations are included in the list of meeting materials.

Small Group Work. Task Force members disbursed into small groups to address the discussion questions of the day:

- What will it take to move the state toward more competency-based approaches to credit?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of a state-specified, seat-based credit requirement?
- Assuming that a seat-based requirement is maintained, suggest a definition for what should "count" as an instructional hour, and what number of hours you believe to be appropriate and why.
- What policy guidelines are needed to assure that the proposed CORE 24 graduation requirements framework will work with different types of schedules?

Following is a synopsis of the groups' responses.

What will it take to move the state toward more competency-based approaches?

- Establish standards for grades 11 and 12 (e.g., English has no standards past 10th grade)

- Have the state define minimum standards to move on to the next course level (particularly for core courses), then allow students to challenge courses
- We need a more consistent curriculum for competency-based approaches to be fair
- Develop assessments that are aligned to the standards.
- Change the funding formula so there is no penalty if students earn credit by competency; or, create a new, broader definition of "FTE" (or find other funding to support the additional work this will require)
- Provide clear guidelines from the state so districts (particularly small ones) can find the capacity to offer competency-based opportunities
- Use the Collection of Evidence Model—clear targets, parameters, competencies and learning targets that are the same for all
- Look at coordination with higher education and nationally (NCAA), as well as international accreditation, to assure that students' credits will be accepted
- Determine grading procedures/policy (Are there differences in rigor between grades vs. Pass/Fail?)
- Assure that standards are consistent and stable over time
- Provide support for stronger instructional planning and professional development for approaches like differentiated instruction
- Provide more on-line options
- Consider making pre-WASL (9th and 10th grade) credit seat-time based; post-WASL, it could be competency-based

What are the benefits and drawbacks of a state-specified, seat-based credit requirement?
Benefits:

- The public understands "credit"
- It builds uniformity
- It's easy to equate to a funding formula
- It's objective, measureable
- It provides extra incentive to get kids to come to school—to "get" credit
- It's an equalizer—a form of standardization that reduces the likelihood that districts will cut corners

Drawbacks:

- It limits flexibility (150 hours is seen as a standard target, on the assumption that 150 hours = success; credit is granted without demonstrated understanding, which gives a false sense of comfort)
- It's contrary to standards-based
- Seat-time doesn't mean that students are "in the seat"
- Does not ensure learning; artificially connects learning to time
- Quality of instruction is not defined by hours; "Instructional hours" are not well defined: What counts? Should state-required testing count as instructional time? How is experiential learning time included? (One group said take testing time out of the mix at the state level).
- Contradiction of ALE rules and 150 hours of planned instruction
- Doesn't acknowledge individual student differences--Holds some students back (who can progress faster) and inappropriately labels others as failures (because they require more time)
- Assumes all disciplines are equal
- Misses the point that we need to help students think as well as know

Assuming that a seat-based requirement is maintained, suggest a definition for what should "count" as an instructional hour, and what number of hours you believe to be appropriate and why.

- Definition: The period of time that a student is receiving planned instruction associated with a content area and assessment. Take the total time and subtract non-instructional items such as passing time and non-academic assemblies.
- Definition: The time when students are engaged.
- Definition: In-class time
- Number of Hours: Only one group, very reluctantly, suggested a concrete number of hours (120). Others made comments such as:
    - Any number of hours will be imperfect because it will not be connected to individual student learning.
    - Philosophically, there's a concern with seat time in a standards-based environment, so any numbers are arbitrary

What policy guidelines are needed to assure that the proposed CORE 24 graduation requirements framework will work with different types of schedules?

- All schedules must have some space for students (if 24 credits, must have at least 25 offerings, etc.)
- What about a state-wide schedule? Credit requirements will drive schedule choice.
- Remove time requirements or lower number of hours to something like 120. This would give all districts scheduling flexibility.
- Define a credit as the successful completion of the summative assessment for a CORE 24 subject. The assessment is either state-developed or state-approved. "Successful completion" is determined at the local level but cannot be a score less than 70% on the summative assessment.
- Allow a waiver/flexibility option to meet local needs as long as state standards are met
- A deficiency of CORE 24 is that it's a credit-based model, yet we're not entirely sure what a credit means or ought to mean.
- Expand time—longer days/weeks/years to add flexibility (e.g., Saturday school, monthly experiential weekend, longer year, on-line combined with site-based learning)
- Address bargaining/contractual issues—this would be a big cultural shift—How much flexibility is there with a teacher day/or year from the state level?

Policy Questions and Preliminary Recommendations. The following key ideas surfaced in a discussion of policy questions and preliminary recommendations.

- Try to learn from current competency-based systems and the state-wide model.
- Learning is the base unit, not time; how you keep track of the learning is key
- Funding should be based on the learning model—students working towards standards.
- Alignment with colleges is key
- From the state policy perspective—what can enable some of this to occur?
- What constitutes a class? Learning the standards may not always occur in the classroom. Using the COE model may be valuable/important.
- Create a stepped, phase-in process with flexibility for local districts.
- Districts need flexibility with schedule – local control.

Legislative Update and Communication Strategies. Brad Burnham provided a quick synopsis of bills related to the SBE's work, focusing especially on ESHB 2261 (see document entitled ESHB 2261 in materials list).

The SBE agreed to provide Talking Points for Task Force members to use when they share information with outside groups. The Talking Points will provide a common frame of reference to use as a starting point. The SBE also agreed to post each meeting's agenda, notes, and materials on the SBE website, along with the Task Force work plan and membership list. Task Force members agreed to provide the names of listservs with which they could share information. This will help facilitate a more organized outreach.

Jennifer Shaw and Mark Mansell agreed to be the co-chairpersons of the ITF. In this capacity, they will be called upon occasionally to speak to the Board about the ITF work. They will also provide input on agendas and may be pressed into service occasionally to facilitate an ITF discussion.

Checking Back on April 13 Preliminary Task Force Recommendations. The SBE provided its summary of draft career-related Task Force recommendations from the April 13, 2009 discussion for members to consider and provide feedback. The draft recommendations were:

1. Consider a definition of career concentration that integrates both academic and CTE/occupational courses with sufficient flexibility to address students' interests in a variety of ways, such as:

> Fulfill three (3) credits of career concentration courses by taking: CTE courses; credited, work-based learning experiences; approved independent study, and/or general education courses that prepare students for postsecondary education based on their identified program of study in their high school and beyond plan. One of the three credits should meet the standards of an exploratory CTE course.

2. Consider implementing a "2 for 1" or "Credit Plus" policy that would enable students taking classes formally identified as course equivalents to document the academic credit on the transcript and satisfy a CTE requirement at the same time, thereby creating space for an additional elective.

Most people were satisfied with the recommendations as written. Written comments included:

- Consider the apparent "watering down" of the importance of CTE.
- Consider whether a four-year college-bound band kid could use world language or other core academic requirements as part of a career concentration or in lieu of the second arts credit
- Consider whether we can include arts courses in occupational education requirement (yes, if they have been established by the districts as course equivalents)
- Need state guidelines for cross-crediting—now too based at individual building level
- (in the context of the "2 for 1" policy recommendation) Only 2 elective credits are not enough; students need some freedom to pursue interests and try new things in order to learn more about their talents and lifetime options.