



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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

SUMMARY OF THE YAKIMA, SEATTLE, AND SPOKANE COMMUNITY FORUMS

Prepared for the August 2018 Board meeting

Overview

In spring and summer of 2018, the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) hosted a series of community forums to solicit input on the highest priority issues to be addressed in the SBE 2018 strategic plan. The forums were held in Yakima (May), Seattle (June), and Spokane (July). The Spokane forum was co-hosted by the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC). Board members and staff participated in the forum discussions, and served as facilitators and notetakers at each roundtable discussion.

One hundred and three participants, plus SBE members and staff, attended the forums. The July forum was also attended by EOGOAC members and staff. Participants were encouraged to share their perspectives on hopes and aspirations for students, as well as broad barriers to success. The bulk of the forum time was devoted to discussions of the participants' suggestions for state and district-level strategies to overcome barriers and to increase success for all students. These strategies were included (verbatim) in individual summaries of each forum.

The suggested strategies for improvement from all three forums are summarized below. The following broad themes emerged across the three forums:

1. Student well-being
2. Communication and connections between schools, families, and communities
3. Learning environments and cultural competency
4. Systems, structures and policies
5. Early learning and pre-kindergarten
6. Grade-level and graduation requirements, and transitions beyond high school
7. Funding

Across all the forums participants shared concerns and suggestions for change which would afford all students the same opportunities to be safe, to be engaged in learning, to achieve high educational standards, to be taught by culturally-competent and well-trained educators, to achieve the students' self-defined educational success, and to be prepared for a pathway beyond high school, regardless of which school they attend.

Themes

1. Student well-being

Students need individualized guidance, as well as instruction, to achieve their goals for high school graduation and beyond. They need to have a sense of belonging in the school community, to include having their voices heard in parent/teacher/student conferences and in school climate surveys. Students need an opportunity to become community leaders, especially within their schools and districts.

Students need learning environments that are safe and supportive, both physically and psychologically. Many students are struggling with trauma and stressors such as bullying, violence in their neighborhoods or homes, inadequate housing and food, drug abuse, suicide, and poverty. Students need increased access to staff and community providers who can specifically address these challenges, as well as mental health issues. Staff and educators need training to support all students. Students and families need support beyond that which a classroom teacher typically can provide.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving student well-being include:

- "Mentors/advocate for students to help them navigate school, career options, social emotional development. Help kids on different paths – 4-year, 2-year, vocational, etc."
- "School climate surveys and use of data to improve practice."
- "Integrated student support. Mental health, ACIS [Assessment and Crisis Intervention Service], MTSS [Multi-tiered System of Support], nurses, teacher training and support, and more."
- "Social emotional 'soft skills' in early elementary."
- "Teaching students to intervene, and advocate for other students."
- "Have the school environment be warm, friendly, and especially safe."
- "More counselors, more community engagement coordinators, more nurses, more social workers."

2. Communication and connections between schools, families, and communities

Students need a cohesive education system, with coordinated efforts and support from family, schools, social and cultural communities, and employers. This requires development of intentional strategies to engage all parties.

Students and families need clear communication to make informed decisions about education and career pathways. Likewise, school administrators and state leaders need to understand the needs of the students and families across the state to enact policies and support processes meeting those needs. Students, families, cultural communities, and educators from the classroom and administrative levels all have a role in communicating expectations, questions, and support for student success.

Moving beyond communication to collaboration requires relationship building. To develop connections beyond communication of expectations and requirements, and further strengthen support systems, educators must meet with students and families in their communities, as well as welcoming parental and family involvement in the school. Developing strong connections amongst these various contributors to the conversation requires consideration of language and cultural differences, as well as awareness of and appreciation for the unique demographics of each district.

Each district will have distinct needs regarding culturally-relevant communications and policies. Multilingual communications are required in many communities. Schools should be specific in

communications about who to contact for specific information or assistance, and what parental involvement is encouraged and supported.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving communications and connections include:

- "Family and community engagement that meets them where they are (tribes, churches, community centers, events)."
- "Descriptive, skills-based report cards."
- "'Natural leaders' programs for parent engagement."
- "Bring the knowledge of life possibilities to rural and isolated communities."
- "Encourage volunteerism."
- "Add parental outreach coordinators or develop natural leaders from the community to serve as interface for families with schools."
- "Whole spectrum schools. Gender-safe, LGBTQ, cultural competence, accurate history of US."

3. Learning environments and cultural competency

TEACHER PREPARATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Students need teachers who are prepared to teach all of their students, using culturally, academically, and developmentally-appropriate methods, without bias. Teachers need innovative pre-service training, mentoring, and career-long professional development to continue to meet the needs of the changing demographics of their students – and to prepare students for the changing world in which they will be learning and working, beyond high school. Educators and staff must be culturally competent.

Students need teachers who are well-prepared for the highly diverse needs of their students. This may include bilingual skills and skills in teaching English Language Learners, as well as broader skills in identifying resources for students with specific needs such as language-based disabilities (an example is dyslexia).

Teachers and staff need ongoing preparation and support to create innovative, contextualized learning environments that incorporate technology and up-to-date research on assessment, teaching and learning methods. Facilitating learning and assessing student achievement using multiple methods (such as Universal Design for Learning) to meet students' needs requires flexibility, time, and expertise; teachers and staff need training from career preparation and throughout their careers to provide this type of learning environment.

Students who have an interest in education as a career should have a clear pathway, from advising and support from career-connected learning in K-12 to entry into pre-service programs. The phrase "growing our own" was heard in reference to encouraging the pathways of our students who want to become educators in their own communities.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving teacher preparation and professional development include:

- "Promote teaching as a career earlier in the school system."
- "Mentorship for teachers."
- "Serious, intentional strategies to recruit and retain teachers of color."

- "Develop capacity for students to graduate from HS fluent in two languages, which means dramatically increasing the number of trained, bilingual teachers.
- "Improve teacher prep to include cultural competency and teaching in diverse classrooms."
- "Educator prep programs teach culturally explicit methods."

CURRICULUM AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Students need individualized instruction and support to meet their academic and social-emotional needs. A well-educated student needs a broad range of courses, taught in a manner that is suited for the student's individual learning preferences and abilities. Students should advance in each subject at a pace appropriate for the individual student. That is, the student may advance more quickly in some subjects than others, resulting in multi-age classes.

Students need problem-based learning environments that connect knowledge and skills to the students' career and other interests. Curriculum should include contextualized learning, including projects, civics, and study skills.

Students should be actively engaged in discussions of how their education is benefiting them, and should also have opportunities to voice their experiences of barriers that are inhibiting their success. Students should be active participants in planning, understanding, and taking ownership of their educational pathways.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improvement include:

- "Study and success skills for all students - elementary, MS, & HS, so they can be more successful as they advance."
- "Active project learning. More arts. Create, perform, present, respond. Meaningful, transferable, engaging, students are stars!"
- "Teach civics. Make it part of education process."
- "Interweaving (interdisciplinary) classes/grade levels (so student could be in 3rd grade math and 7th grade reading). Open classrooms to work as fast/as slow as you need to."
- "Integrate career-related information and exposure into high schools so young people have clearer understanding of possible careers and what's required in those different career fields."
- "Shift in language around CTE: 'raise the trades'."
- "Encourage students to find their passions, as well as career path; and bolster their path."
- "More internship and work-based learning. More hands on experiences."

4. Systems, structures, and policies

Students need systemic support and education - without bias. Structures, policies and practices must support all students, eliminating systemic bias, barriers and inequities in education opportunities. Students in all districts and all classrooms should have educational opportunities to meet their needs.

A structure which assumes a loss of momentum and a need for re-learning - at every grade - is not optimal. Examining the current structure of the annual school calendar, the daily schedule, and the way achievement is measured (competency versus hours of attendance) through a lens of equity and an eye for college, career, and life requirements is required. In addition, other structures, including

transportation schedules and limitations, should meet student needs to be fully involved in their school-community, including extracurricular activities.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving systems, structures and policies include:

- "Examine systemic institutional barriers that lead to racial inequity."
- "Blow-up – figuratively! "Common School" model. Research and implement successful models."
- "Study effects/impact of "local control." Is it working or not?"
- "More balanced use of the calendar year to minimize learning loss."
- "Transportation options that go beyond getting kids to/from school. For instance, support for getting to appointments and flexible bus systems for mobile students."
- "Stop using "WA is a local control state" as an excuse! We have to have some state sponsored systems to combat inequality in small to large district opportunities."
- "Through state policy, deregulate schools to allow a district to devise a school structure and plan to meet students' needs in today's and tomorrow's technology driven economy."

5. Early learning and pre-kindergarten

Families are the first teachers. Developing habits of lifelong learning begins at home. Support for parents and children in the pre-kindergarten years is important to give each child the greatest opportunity for success in school. Outreach to children and their families should begin early on, with home visits and early learning access in local neighborhoods.

Students need to begin school with every opportunity for success. High-quality preschool should be available to all students. Access to pre-K education should not be limited by income or location.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving early learning include:

- "Home visiting programs for all families with young children."
- "Early interventions. ECAEP. Early mental health identification."
- "Access to early childhood education for ALL students - provide transportation."
- "Improve quality of preschool."

6. Grade-level and graduation requirements, and transitions beyond high school

Students can show what they know and what they can do through a variety of means. State policies which allow for flexibility in assessing a student has met standards - such as awarding credits for demonstrated competence to meet grade-level and graduation requirements - should be expanded.

Graduation requirements – including all alternate pathways – should be communicated clearly to students and families. Students and families need to understand why the 24 credit graduation requirements are important, and how the required coursework relates to the student's career and post-secondary plans. Dual credit opportunities or other post-secondary transition opportunities should be available to all students.

Student pathways toward their chosen careers should be clear of barriers at the transition from high school to colleges, technical training, or jobs. The High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) can be an effective tool to guide the student's course and curricular activities planning. The HSBP should be

incorporated into student planning at an earlier point and be used as a guiding document to support a successful transition to a student's next steps after graduation. The HSBP should be electronic and portable to actually be used after high school, for college and career purposes. High School and Beyond Plans can be strong tools for planning and supporting students' success in their individual pathways. All students should be supported in taking ownership of their dynamic High School and Beyond Plan and using it as an ongoing guide and expression of their personal aspirations.

Examples of participant suggestions for improvement include:

- "Standards based promotion vs. "grade level" promotion (promote when they are ready)."
- "Re-evaluate the 24-credit diploma. Can there be options. Medical issues/trauma, etc."
- "Look at articulation of credits to higher ed – why does the transition have to be so difficult and different at our state institutions?"
- "Graduate requirements need to match post-secondary success."
- "Better identify and clarify options and support for meeting graduation requirements."
- "Consistent, quality implementation of the HS & Beyond Plan. Connect it to families, higher ed, employers, other stakeholders."
- "'Running Start' type pathway for transition-eligible students with disabilities. Or, ability to use Running Start dollars for college-based transition programs."
- "State-level policy and oversight to ensure HSBP is an effective student tool."
- "Robust guidance for students and their post-high school plans."

7. Funding

Students need adequately funded systems of support. Funding should be needs-based to accommodate differences in individual students, schools, and districts. Funds should be used to provide equitable opportunities for students to participate in accelerated learning programs, arts, ELL and special education programs, among other programs. Additionally, the mental health issues and other trauma-related issues that affect a student's ability to learn require a commitment of additional funding for staff and training. Needs-based funding may provide for teacher professional development, education support staff, social workers, counselors, nurses and others who are critical to supporting student success.

Students' access to education opportunities and support should not be determined by the location of their residence. Small, rural and low-income schools struggle to meet the needs of their students with the funding they are allotted.

A few examples of participant suggestions for improving funding for K-12 education include:

- "Pay teachers well."
- "Fund the arts."
- "Advocate legislature for a true student needs-based funding system."
- "Equitable funding. Equitable resource distribution."
- "Re-vamp school funding to disconnect it from "seat time" (proficiency)."
- "Increase funding through collaborative grants between school districts and other entities w/same missions like CIS [Communities in Schools]."