

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE: X INFORMATION/NO ACTION

DATE: **July 19-20, 2007**

SUBJECT: **System Performance Accountability Preliminary Recommendations**

SERVICE UNIT: Edie Harding, Executive Director
State Board of Education

PRESENTER: Dr. Kris Mayer, System Performance Accountability Chair and
Committee members

BACKGROUND:

In 2005, the legislature charged the newly reconstituted Washington State Board of Education with the task of creating a statewide accountability system. The Board created in January 2007 a System Performance Accountability (SPA) Committee consisting of seven Board members as well as an advisory committee of stakeholders to guide its work.

COMMITTEE PROPOSALS FOR A STATE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

The SPA Committee has drafted a state accountability framework consisting of four distinct, but interrelated parts for Board consideration. The SPA Committee will ask the Board for approval of the concepts in September and final approval in November, after it engages in a dialogue with its advisory committee and the public.

- » **A Tiered System of Continuous Improvement for All Schools**
A tiered system of tools to address the varying needs of all schools and districts in improving student achievement.
- » **Targeted Interventions for Chronically Underperforming Schools**
A new approach to address chronically underperforming schools, called Summit Schools. This will require new authority for the state to intervene in specific cases.
- » **State Board of Education Report Card**
A statewide report card transmitting information and advocating for the health of the K-12 education system in Washington. The report card will be issued annually beginning in the year 2009.
- » **Data System Enhancement**
Data elements that are not currently available will be identified and developed to inform accountability and tracking of student and system outcomes over time.

Together, the four components recognize that all schools can improve student achievement, but some schools need to improve student achievement dramatically. The Mass Insight Education final report “Intervention in Washington State’s Underperforming Schools” is also provided in this tab.

Washington State Board of Education System Performance Accountability

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2005, the legislature charged the newly reconstituted Washington State Board of Education with the task of creating a statewide accountability system. In January 2007 the Board created a System Performance Accountability (SPA) Committee consisting of seven Board members as well as an advisory committee of stakeholders to guide its work.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

The SPA Committee has drafted a state accountability framework consisting of four distinct, but interrelated parts for Board consideration. The SPA Committee will ask the Board for approval of the draft concepts in September and final approval in November, after it engages in a dialogue with its advisory committee and the public. The Board anticipates preparing a legislative package to begin enacting certain pieces of these proposals.

1. **A Tiered System of Continuous Improvement for All Schools** - A tiered system of tools to address the varying needs of all schools and districts in improving student achievement.

Committee Recommendations:

- » Work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to obtain authority from the legislature for the Board and OSPI to intervene in selected schools and districts for performance improvement as defined by the recommendations in this framework.
- » Create a state accountability index to identify and prioritize schools and districts into three tiers for differing levels of interventions and recognition. The Board's accountability index will include student achievement data from the writing, science, reading, and mathematics Washington Assessment of Student Learning; student academic performance growth over time; non-academic indicators, including dropout rates and unexcused absences; and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) status.
- » Require all schools to participate in continuous school improvement with tiers that will provide recognition and progressively greater interventions and assistance.

2. **Targeted Interventions for Chronically Underperforming Schools** - A new approach to address chronically underperforming schools, called Summit Schools. This will require new authority for the state to intervene in specific cases.

Committee Recommendations:

- » Adopt intervention tools for up to 25 Summit Schools with a priority on middle schools that are chronically underperforming.
- » Ask the legislature to give the Board and OSPI shared authority to intervene in struggling schools. The state would identify schools that continue to struggle and require them to join the Summit Schools turnaround.

3. **State Board of Education Report Card** - A statewide report card transmitting information and advocating for the health of the K-12 education system in Washington. The report card will be issued annually beginning in the year 2009.

Committee Recommendation:

- » Adopt the following indicators for student and school/district performance on the State Report Card based upon the availability of highly-reliable data and acceptable measures:

Academic Achievement. The data will include performance on the WASL in the content areas of mathematics, reading, writing, and science, with other subjects to be determined in 2008.

Graduation and Dropout Rates. The data reported will be for both on-time and extended graduation rates as well as annual dropout rates by high school grade.

Unexcused Absence Rates. The unexcused absence rates calculated for No Child Left Behind AYP will be used for elementary and middle-level grades.

Teaching Quality. The data will include teacher qualifications and length of service.

Post-secondary Participation. The post-secondary participation data will be based on the behaviors of high school graduates in the year immediately following graduation.

Post-secondary Remedial Course Enrollment. Information on students enrolling in remedial courses in mathematics and English will be reported. The information on post-secondary remedial course-taking is based on what is reported by Washington's public two and four-year post-secondary institutions.

Fiscal Responsibility. School expenditure data by program area will be collected to ensure that money is being spent on high priority school programs. This data will then be used to evaluate the correlation between program expenditures and educational progress at the school level and across the state.

Opportunity to Learn. Information on what schools are providing to students in addition to the current school day.

4. **Data System Enhancement** - Data elements that are not currently available will be identified and developed to inform accountability and tracking of student and system outcomes over time.

Committee Recommendation:

- » Collaborate with the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, Office of Financial Management, the Professional Educators Standards Board, and the P-20 Council to identify data elements that inform accountability and tracking of student outcomes over time that are not available currently and create a teacher data system that is linked to the student data system.

Washington State Board of Education System Performance Accountability

INTRODUCTION

The State Board of Education has a deep sense of urgency to help all Washington students attain a 21st century education. Washington is at a critical juncture in its commitment to improve the quality of education for all its K-12 students. While great progress has been made in reading and writing, progress is uneven among the different subcategories of students and much work remains in both math and science.

The state needs a focused, coordinated accountability system to target resources in radically different ways. We have a responsibility to put students at the center of our work and seek new ways to make a difference. It is a moral and economic imperative that all students reach their potential and develop the skills and knowledge they need to go on to contribute to lead productive lives, attend post-secondary education and/or have a family-wage job.

In 2005, the legislature charged the newly reconstituted Washington State Board of Education with the task of creating a statewide accountability system. The Board adopted two overall goals to frame its work with accountability and the review of high school graduation requirements. The goals are:

- » Improve student performance dramatically
- » Provide all Washington students the opportunity to succeed in post-secondary education, the 21st century world of work, and citizenship

In January 2007 the Board created a System Performance Accountability (SPA) Committee consisting of seven Board members as well as an advisory committee of stakeholders to guide its work. (See Appendix A for a roster of all committee members.)

The SPA Committee, following the advice from consultants¹ and extensive readings, developed a framework for a statewide accountability system that:

- » Establishes clear, appropriate goals/objectives for educational outcomes;
- » Creates measures aligned with the desired outcomes;
- » Provides data reported at the state, district, and school levels disaggregated by student subgroups.

THE CURRENT ACCOUNTABILTY SYSTEM

In Washington, the state accountability system is presently defined by: 1) annual measurement of student academic performance on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in reading and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 10, as well as science and writing for selected grades, and 2) the high school graduation requirement that students meet the state standards for reading and writing by passing the 10th grade WASL. Beyond public reporting of the WASL

¹ Holland and Knight Presentation from Scott Palmer and Jonathan Furr to the State Board of Education in October 2006.

scores by different student subgroups at the school, district, and state level, there are no consequences to schools' or districts' poor performance.

Accountability for student achievement is strongly influenced by the federal law "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB), which requires schools and districts in each state to make "Adequate Yearly Progress" (AYP)² to increase the academic proficiency of all students. Washington's accountability system presently mirrors these federal measures.

NCLB requires a state to implement a system of corrective action for all schools and districts receiving Title I federal funds³. Some of the corrective actions include:

- » Notifying the public of schools' or districts' AYP status;
- » Providing school choice;
- » Providing supplemental services;
- » Providing technical assistance;
- » Replacing school personnel;
- » Taking over specific schools for governance; and
- » Taking over a district for governance.

NCLB encourages states to provide a system of rewards, assistance, and interventions; however, it falls short of compelling such actions.⁴ In Washington, the legislature has not authorized any state interventions to address poor student achievement except to permit the withholding of federal funds and providing professional development. Washington has used a voluntary approach of technical assistance to work with struggling schools since 2002.

New legislative authority is needed to enact additional interventions.

COMMITTEE PROPOSALS FOR A STATE ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK

The SPA Committee has drafted a state accountability framework consisting of four distinct, but interrelated parts for Board consideration. The SPA Committee will ask the Board for approval of the concepts in September and final approval in November, after it engages in a dialogue with its advisory committee and the public.

- 1. A Tiered System of Continuous Improvement for All Schools** - A tiered system of tools to address the varying needs of all schools and districts in improving student achievement.

2 Adequate Yearly Progress is defined by a baseline and increments of improvement in student performance on a state test in reading and math (Washington uses the WASL) so that by 2014 all students by all subgroups (race and ethnicity, special education, low income, English Language Learners) will reach proficiency. On-time graduation for high school and unexcused absences for elementary and middle school are also included as federal accountability measures.

3 Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (the current reauthorization is No Child Left Behind) provides states with additional funding to be distributed to schools and districts based on poverty as measured by having 40 percent or more students on free and reduced lunch.

4 Up to 20 percent of Title I or other funds are available to pay transportation for students who choose to go to another school or for supplemental education "tutoring services".

2. **Targeted Interventions for Chronically Underperforming Schools** - A new approach to address chronically underperforming schools, called Summit Schools. This will require new authority for the state to intervene in specific cases.
3. **State Board of Education Report Card** - A statewide report card transmitting information and advocating for the health of the K-12 education system in Washington. The report card will be issued annually beginning in the year 2009.
4. **Data System Enhancement** - Data elements that are not currently available will be identified and developed to inform accountability and tracking of student and system outcomes over time.

Together, the four components recognize that all schools can improve student achievement, but some schools need to improve student achievement dramatically.

1. A Tiered System of Continuous School Improvement for All Schools

Definition/Purpose. A tiered system uses clearly defined criteria to identify schools that need different levels of assistance and intervention. Schools classified at “tier 1” might require relatively little intervention because student achievement, though not perfect, is reasonably high. Conversely, schools classified as “tier 3” might need higher levels of intervention because student achievement overall or for certain subgroups is stalled.

Rationale. Washington is one of the few states with a voluntary program for school improvement. Over the last five years, the OSPI “focused assistance” or School Improvement Assistance Program has served 128 schools. Schools must participate for three years and the number of school participating has steadily increased; in 2006-07, OSPI served 75 schools. Nine million dollars, from federal, state, and foundation grant sources, was invested in 2007 School Improvement Assistance program schools. An additional \$2 million is provided for the High School Initiative and the District Assistance program—each school receives between \$100,000 and \$135,000 per year based on size and grade levels. The support of a school improvement facilitator is included in the school funding.

In the 2006-07 school year, there were 353 schools⁵ that did not make AYP. These schools served 243,000 students or one in four of all public school students in the state. Only 40% of these schools are Title I, which means that 60% of the schools not making AYP are not required to be served. Many of these schools are non-Title I and are high schools. The number is expected to double next year.

Why Schools Did Not Make AYP in 2006 ⁶	
Reason	Percent of Schools
Math Performance	47%
Reading Performance	1%
Math and Reading Performance	10%
Special Education Students or English Language Learners Performance	7%
Multiple Reasons	35%

⁵This is out of a total of about 2200 schools based on the spring 2006 administration of the WASL.

⁶Greg Lobdell, Center for Educational Effectiveness, State Board of Education presentation in January 2007.

Based on outside evaluations, the success of the OSPI School Improvement Assistance Program has been mixed in terms of improvement of student achievement as measured by the WASL. The program has contributed to the success of 30 schools exiting school improvement having made AYP two years in a row. Some of the challenges include: districts are not viewed as partners in the school improvement process, a lack of continuity in facilitation, and lack of sustainability of change once the three years of state service has concluded.⁷

The Board contracted with Mass Insight Education, a nonprofit research organization in Boston, to examine Washington's current school improvement assistance program. Mass Insight Education staff has been doing extensive research nationally to address the issues with schools that are chronically underperforming.

The consultants highlighted the strengths that the current Washington School Improvement Assistance Program has to build on:

- » Well-regarded facilitator network;
- » State targeted effort for improvement for those schools that volunteer;
- » Partially integrated approach with the nine elements of a high performing school; and
- » Collaborative nature.

The consultants noted problems with current school improvement initiatives across the nation, including Washington's. These include:

- » No incentives or disincentives to drive major change at the local level;
- » No means to change local operating conditions or address deeper needs of high poverty students;
- » Lack of comprehensiveness, intensity, and sustainability; and
- » Lack of high visibility public and private sector commitment.

Committee board members affirmed many of these findings from their spring field visits to selected schools across the state.

Based on investigations of other states including Massachusetts, Kentucky, and North Carolina, the Committee identified characteristics of high-performing schools and districts:

- » Strengthen leadership in schools and/or districts;
- » Ensure talented pool of effective educators to assist schools and districts;
- » Provide knowledge or access to knowledge about successful schools and districts;
- » Align district curriculum and state standards;
- » Use curriculum-based formative assessments to inform instruction;
- » Use data to improve instruction;
- » Focus professional development that is job-embedded and on-going; and
- » Apply a cycle of inquiry and reflection.

⁷ Evaluations of the OSPI School Improvement Assistance Program by the BERC Group and Northwest Regional Educational Lab.

Committee Recommendations:

1. Work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to obtain authority from the legislature for the Board and OSPI to intervene in selected schools and districts for performance improvement as defined by the recommendations in this framework.
2. Create a state accountability index to identify and prioritize schools and districts into three tiers for differing levels of interventions and recognition. The Board’s accountability index will include student achievement data⁸ from the writing, science, reading, and mathematics WASL; student academic performance growth over time; non-academic indicators, including dropout rates and unexcused absences; and AYP status.
3. Require all schools to participate in continuous school improvement with tiers that will provide recognition and progressively greater interventions and assistance.

The details of the state accountability index calculations and the criteria for tier placement will be determined. The tiers will allow the state and other funding entities to target resources strategically and create appropriate interventions. A proposed outline to begin the discussion with stakeholders is offered below:

	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
Leaders	School District/School	Regional entity/ School District	State /School District
Delivery System	Trained Internal Team	Trained External Partner/ Internal Team	Same as Tier 2
Improvement Plan	School Improvement Plan ⁹	Same as Tier 1	Same as Tier 2 plus a corrective action plan
Assistance	Self-review using performance audit ¹⁰ template to update School Improvement Plan. OSPI technical assistance on best practices and district capacity building.	Same as Tier 1, plus: Schools will receive a performance audit by a team of local school and district, regional, and state level personnel within six months and develop a plan of action to address deficiencies.	Same as Tier 2

⁸ Issues such as whether to use continuously enrolled students versus all students will need to be discussed.

⁹ The written plans for school improvement must indicate how they will: a) Utilize state-approved instructional materials aligned with standards with all student sub-groups; b) Provide a detailed tracking system of student learning; c) Use their school data from formative assessments to improve instruction through professional development; and d) Demonstrate spending that aligns with improvement goals and objectives.

¹⁰ A performance audit by external and internal teams in schools and districts in tiers 2 and 3 and a self performance audit for schools and districts that are in tier 1. The audit shall occur within the first six months after a school is identified. The audit will contain the following items: a) Teacher distribution analysis, b) Budget distribution analysis, c) Rigor assessment, d) Core and intervention materials used in area of challenge, e.g., math, e) Use of formative diagnostic assessments, f) Classroom instructional practices, g) Use of time analysis, h) Use of opportunity to learn beyond current school day and year calendar, i) Equity assessment of opportunity and achievement, j) Longitudinal assessment of student performance, k) Course availability (secondary school), l) Course taking patterns (secondary school) m) Leadership—principal and superintendent—quality and support

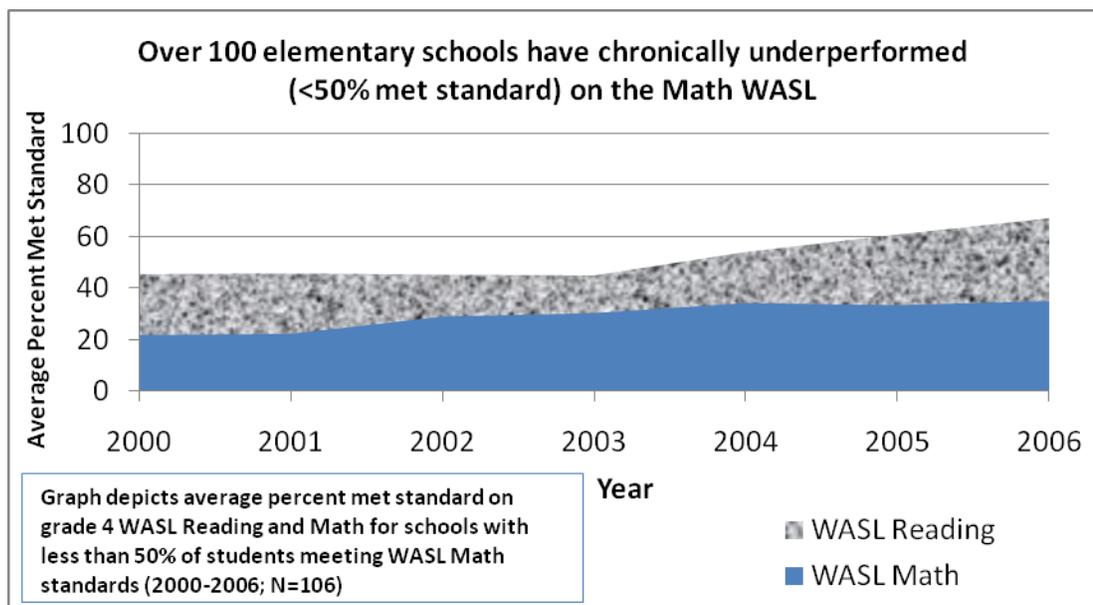
	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
		(continued) Facilitators and clustered services will be available to work on areas targeted for improvement.	
Resources and Changes in Authority			State and other resources provided to expand and make the most of school days, to restructure and focus on teacher and student skill and knowledge development. Legislative-mandated authority to transfer staff.
Expectations	Curriculum and benchmarks are aligned to standards. School has system of diagnostic assessments or progress monitoring and uses results to inform instruction and individual intervention. Teachers, within the first three years in the profession, are not disproportionately assigned to non-proficient students. Parents must attend student conferences in person.	Same as Tier 1, plus: State selected curricular and instructional materials are used where available. Content areas where students lack proficiency are targeted for extended and improved instructional time.	Same as Tier 2, plus: School day is lengthened for teachers and students. Advisory group would be created to facilitate and monitor linkages to relevant social agencies.
Consequences			If school shows a lack of improvement in two years, the school will be eligible as a Summit School
Funding	Additional targeted funding provided to district.	Same as Tier 1, plus funding for curricular and instructional materials.	Same as Tier 2, plus additional funding

2. Targeted Interventions for Chronically Underperforming Schools

Definition/Purpose. Chronically underperforming schools, or “Summit Schools”, are schools where students have underachieved for a period of five to seven years, and may require transformative interventions to turn them around.

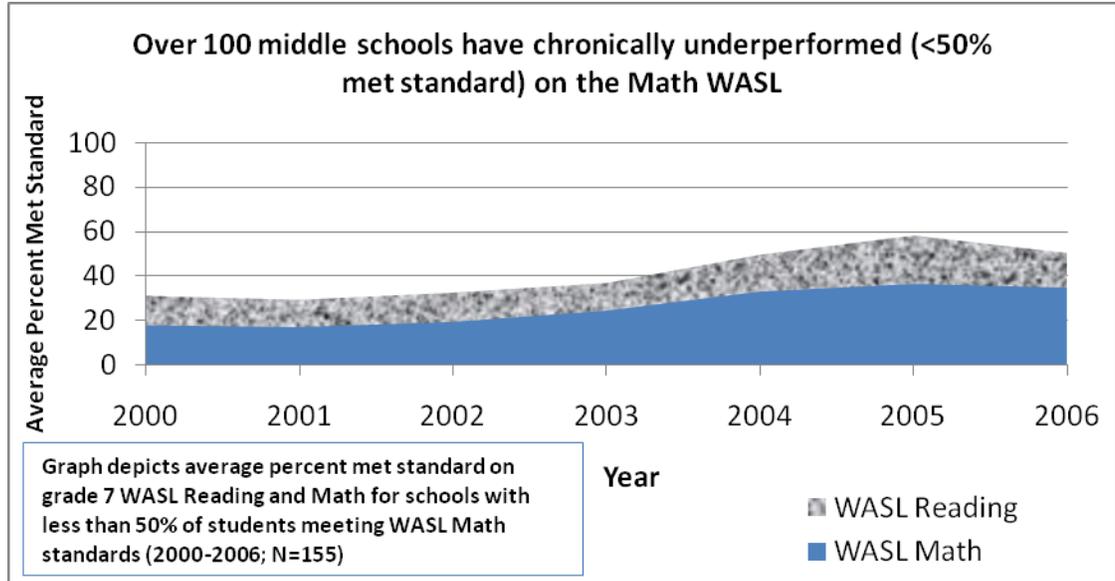
Rationale. The Board finds it unacceptable that so many of our students attend schools that continue not to make significant progress. Over the last seven years (2000 to 2006):

106 elementary schools (with 46,335 students) had fewer than 50% of their students meet standard on the **4th grade mathematics WASL**; 13 elementary schools (with 5,760 students) had fewer than 60% of their students meet standards on both the 4th grade reading and mathematics WASL.¹¹



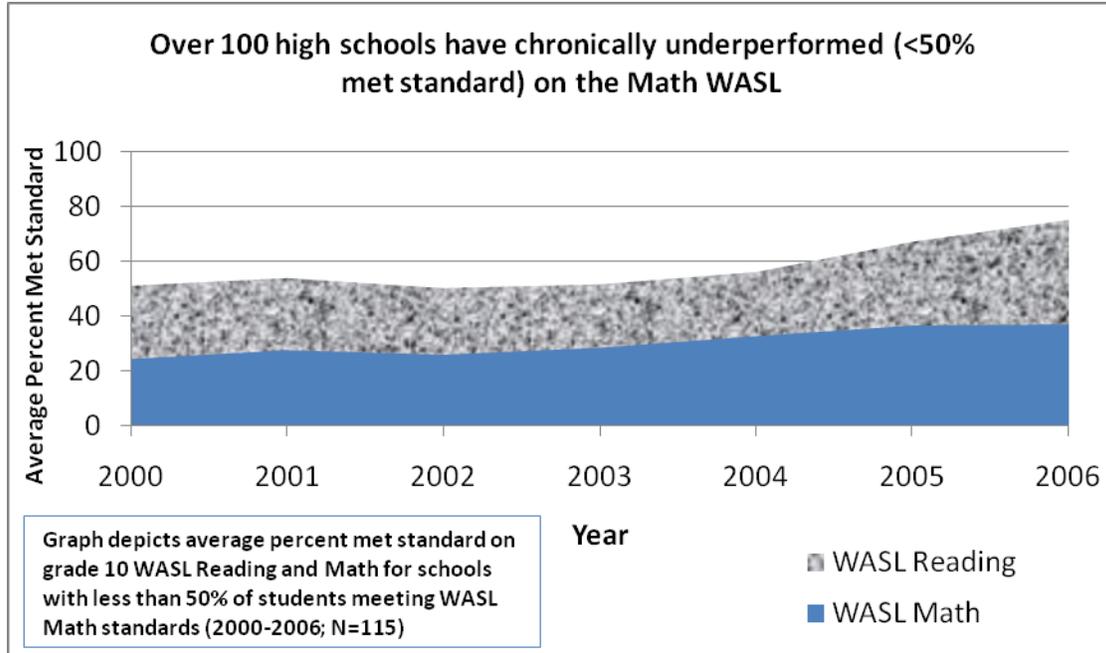
¹¹ There were 979 elementary schools that served 4th graders and had 7 years of reading and mathematics WASL data. The analysis excludes alternative schools. Some of these schools have seen some significant gains, but their overall math performance is still below 50%.

155 middle schools (with 84,130 students) had fewer than 50% of their students meet standard on the **7th grade mathematics WASL**; 80 middle schools (with 41,070 students) had fewer than 60% of their students meet standards on both the 7th grade reading and mathematics WASL.¹²



¹² There were 379 middle schools that served 7th graders and had 7 years of reading and mathematics WASL data. The analysis excludes alternative schools. Some of these schools have seen some significant gains, but their overall math performance is still below 50%.

116 high schools¹³ (with 105,786 students) had fewer than 50% of their students meet standard on the **10th grade mathematics WASL**.¹⁴ Five high schools (with 7,364 students) had fewer than 60% of their students meet standards on both the 10th grade reading and mathematics WASL.



Furthermore, for the past three years (2002-2003 to 2004-2005):

Five high schools (with 1,133 students) had **on-time graduation rates** of less than 50%; 20 more high schools (with 29,862 students) had one or more of its student subgroups¹⁵ with on-time graduations rate of less than 50%.

Eight high schools (4,144 students) had **annual dropout rates** of greater than 10%; 24 more high schools (with 25,868 students) had one or more of its student subgroups with annual dropout rates of greater than 10%.

¹³ This analysis excludes high schools that were identified as alternative.

¹⁴ There were 289 high schools that served 10th graders and had 7 years of reading and mathematics WASL data. The analysis excludes alternative schools. Some of these schools have seen some significant gains, but their overall math performance is still below 50%.

¹⁵ The student subgroups analyzed are the five major racial/ethnic groups—African American, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic, and White; and English Language Learner and low-income status.

To move forward, Mass Insight Education suggests that “The state is right to emphasize educator buy-in, a crucial element in school improvement of any kind, but it must seek ways to transform buy-in into fundamental change, more so than marginal improvements that meet status quo.” The consultants recommended that the Board consider the following turnaround strategies for schools that are chronically underperforming:

- » Create new rules for turnaround schools and provide incentives for fundamental change through school turnaround zones;
- » Focus resources on cohorts (up to 25 schools per year in three regional clusters);
- » Build internal capacity in schools and districts for turnaround;
- » Build external capacity to help lead the process of school turnaround;
- » Create an entrepreneurial agency with leverage and resources to establish the turnaround criteria and partnerships and lead the turnaround efforts; and
- » Give the lowest performing schools a restructuring option.

Washington must find ways to make radical changes in these schools that continue to underperform and enable schools and districts to cultivate effective leaders and strategies for sustainability. Based upon the schools’ performance, regional clusters of similar schools (e.g., feeder schools, ELL schools, or other kinds) could be created for assistance. All schools identified as a Summit School would be required to participate with their district.

Committee Recommendations:

1. Adopt intervention tools for up to 25 Summit Schools with a priority on middle schools that are chronically underperforming.
2. Ask the legislature to give the Board and OSPI shared authority to intervene in struggling schools. The State would identify schools that continue to struggle and require them to join the Summit Schools turnaround (see process highlighted in table below).

	Summit Schools
Leaders	Quasi State or Regional Entity /School District
Delivery system	External Partner (quasi state entity)
School Improvement Plan	School Improvement Plan with Corrective Action Plan
Assistance	<p>Within six months of identification, schools will receive a performance audit by an external team and have their corrective plan reviewed by a regional team composed of school board members, business people, service providers, community leaders, parents, and educators. The team will make a recommendation for approval or disapproval to local school board. If the local board does not approve the plan, then the school and district has two months to revise the plan for local board approval. State Board of Education will also review these revised plans.</p> <p>Intensive turnaround teams</p>
Resources and	“Zone of Empowerment”

	Summit Schools
Changes in Authority	<p>With an accepted corrective plan, the quasi state or regional entity(ies) will work with the schools and districts to create cluster “entrepreneurial zones” where incentives such as funding and new personnel rules for staff are implemented.</p> <p>School district has the authority to select principal; principal has authority to select and assign staff.</p> <p>State and other resources provided to expand and make the most of the school day to restructure and focus on teacher and student skill and knowledge development.</p>
Expectations	<p>Complete restructuring of school, which includes changes in staffing.</p> <p>Same as Tier 3</p>
Consequences	<p>If a corrective action plan is not acceptable to the local school board or the SBE, state could order school to be disbanded and students sent to other schools or to reconstitute the school.</p>
Funding	<p>Joint state and private funding sources</p>

3. State Board of Education Report Card

Definition/Purpose. A State Board of Education Report Card would provide information to parents, educators, legislators, and community members about the performance of students in a given school or district or to make comparisons across districts.

Rationale. A critical part of an accountability system is reliable data at both the state level and school level so that policy makers, educators, and parents can understand how well students and schools are doing. Our advisory committee members strongly recommended the use of multiple indicators rather than just the WASL to create a state accountability system.

After considering various performance indicators of system health, the accountability reporting requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the availability of reliable data sources, the SPA Committee agreed that our state’s accountability system should include student and school/district performance indicators.

Committee Recommendation:

1. Adopt the following indicators for student and school/district performance on the State Report Card:
 - » ***Academic Achievement.*** The data will include performance on the WASL in the content areas of mathematics, reading, writing, and science, with other subjects to be determined in 2008.
 - » ***Graduation and Dropout Rates.*** The data reported will be for both on-time and extended graduation rates, as well as annual dropout rates by high school grade.

- » **Unexcused Absence Rates.** The unexcused absence rates calculated for No Child Left Behind AYP will be used for elementary and middle-level grades.

The following indicators contingent on the availability of highly-reliable data and acceptable measures.

- » **Teaching Quality.** The data will include teacher qualifications and length of service.
- » **Post-secondary Participation.** The post-secondary participation data will be based on the behaviors of high school graduates in the year immediately following graduation.
- » **Post-secondary Remedial Course Enrollment.** Information on students enrolling in remedial courses in mathematics and English will be reported. The information on post-secondary remedial course taking is based on what is reported by Washington’s public two and four-year post-secondary institutions.
- » **Fiscal Responsibility.** School expenditure data by program area will be collected to ensure that money is being spent on high priority school programs. This data will then be used to evaluate the correlation between program expenditures and educational progress at the school level and across the state.
- » **Opportunity to Learn.** Information on what schools are providing to students in addition to the current school day.

The Board has identified additional performance indicators for tracking and reporting. Further information on these indicators is provided in Appendix B.

4. Data System Enhancement

Definition/Purpose. An integrated data system would track the progress of students from preschool through college.

Rationale. The current data system has many gaps that prohibit the Board and others from adequately assessing the progress of our students. For example, there is no single student identification number to track students from preschool through college to determine how successfully students move through the educational system. Nor do we know on a state level, the qualifications (endorsements, length of service, etc.) of teachers teaching in our schools, and which students they teach so that tracking of student outcomes can be linked to teacher data systems.

Committee Recommendation:

1. The Board, collaborate with the Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, Office of Financial Management, the Professional Educators Standards Board, and the P-20 Council should identify data elements that inform accountability and tracking of student outcomes over time that are not available currently and create a teacher data system that is linked to the student data system.

TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

Action	Due Date
SPA Advisory Committee meet and review preliminary recommendations	August 9
Board adopts draft concepts	September 18-19

Board conducts public outreach	October
SPA Advisory Committee meets and reviews draft recommendations and public feedback	October 25
Board adopts final recommendations	November 1-2

Next Steps	
Develop the state accountability index with assistance from OSPI as well as national and other state experts	
Work with OSPI and external experts to assist in refining the Summit Schools and Tiered Assistance Proposals	
Develop information on teacher distribution in selected districts (e.g. retention and experience)	
Continue to work on data performance indicators	
Develop model report card	

APPENDIX A– Roster

Board Committee Members

Dr. Kristina Mayer, Chair	Phyllis Bunker Frank
Dr. Steve Dal Porto	Zac Kinman
Steve Floyd	Jeff Vincent
Dr. Sheila Fox	Edie Harding

Advisory Committee Members

Mike Bernard Association of Washington Business	Don Rash AWSP
Karen Davis WEA	Martha Rice WSSDA
Roger Erskine PESB	Ben Soria, Superintendent Yakima School District
Bob Harmon OSPI	Ted Thomas WSSDA
Melissa Heaton Partnership for Learning	Marc Cummings Washington Roundtable
Glenn Johnson, Superintendent Cashmere School District (WASA)	Anne Walker Wiley Elementary School
Bruce Kelly ESD 113	Steven Warren Centralia Middle School
Janell Newman OSPI	

Appendix B – Performance Indicators

Indicators of System Health	Account-ability	Report Card
Teaching Quality Distribution of teachers by highly qualified, novice, etc.	✓	✓
WASL Performance By all students and by subgroups Reading, Mathematics, Science, Writing	✓	✓
On-Time and Extended Graduation Rates By all students and by subgroups	✓	✓
Annual Dropout Rate by Grade By all students and by subgroups Grades 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12	✓	✓
Post-Secondary Participation High school graduates in the year immediately after graduation by all students and subgroups	✓	✓
Post-Secondary Remedial Course Enrollment Enrollment of high school graduates enrolled in post-secondary education in the year immediately after graduation in remedial courses by all students and subgroups	✓	✓
Unexcused Absence Rate Elementary and middle schools	✓	✓
Fiscal Responsibility School expenditure data by program area will be collected to ensure that money is being spent on high priority school programs	✓	✓
Beat-the-Odds or Similar School Comparisons		✓
Access to Rigorous Course Offerings Eighth graders taking math courses at the level of Algebra I Students taking a full-year of science in middle school Advance Placement – courses offered, # taking exams and scoring ≥ 3 , disaggregated by subgroups of course taking International Baccalaureate - courses offered, subgroup course taking Career & Technical Education – program completers High school graduation requirements – exceeding state minimums, meeting college admission requirements		✓

Indicators of System Health	Account-ability	Report Card
Opportunity to Learn Information on additional learning opportunities provided to students	✓	✓
Global Challenge States – for comparisons to Washington State Demographics Children in homes where head of household is a high school dropout Children ages 5-12 who speak English less than “very well” Early Childhood Education Programs accredited by NAEYC Enrollment in state-funded pre-school (ages 3-4) State full-day kindergarten policy K-12 Expenditures State and local expenditures per pupil Operations expenditures K-12 teachers with a master’s degree in a content area NAEP Performance Grades 4 and 8 Reading and mathematics		✓

Intervention in Washington State's Underperforming Schools: A Brief Analysis and Recommendations

*Prepared for the Washington State Board of Education by
Mass Insight Education and Research Institute*

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Summary

Washington State offers a range of services and some additional funding to low-performing schools. Its approach has been collaborative and its services appear to be well-regarded, in general, by the schools and districts that choose to use them. However, it is clear that the state's current strategies will not solve the current and impending challenge of low-performing schools on either a qualitative or quantitative basis. Our research into state turnaround design strategies suggests that a much more proactive approach is needed.

Washington would better serve its neediest schools by transitioning from a strategy of incremental improvement towards a philosophy of fundamental transformation. While incremental school improvement strategies – assisting with new curriculum, providing staff development, implementing data analysis and student remediation initiatives – have been shown to help average-performing and moderately under-performing schools to improve, schools in the bottom five percent of performance need much more dramatic change. Washington's voluntary approach compounds the challenge because many of the most dysfunctional schools fail to opt into the support programs.

This report, prepared under contract to the Washington State Board of Education, provides a brief analysis of the current services that the state provides to its neediest schools, the impact (or lack of impact) of those services, and recommendations for how the state could improve its intervention policies and practices to make a real difference in those schools. The report draws from research assembled over the past two years by Mass Insight Education for its forthcoming report, *The Turnaround Challenge*, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It also draws from interviews conducted with a range of policymakers and practitioners in the state and from a review of documentation provided by the State Board of Education.

I. Current Services

We will not describe in detail the current Washington state intervention effort; state policymakers already know the outlines of the approach and it has been described in some detail in other reports. Our focus here lies in comparing the current approach with the recommendations that emerged from our study of state turnaround initiatives and the characteristics of schools that successfully serve high-poverty, highly challenged student populations – the student demographics commonly found among chronically under-performing schools.

Strengths of the Current Approach

While there is clearly a gap between the nature and the scope of the current effort and the intervention need, our interviews turned up some strengths (or at least, perceived strengths) of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s (OSPI) current intervention strategies that are worth building. These include:

- **Facilitator Network and School Audits:** The School and District Intervention Facilitators (SIFs/DIFs) received strong reviews from the field. The superintendents we interviewed who have used the services believe the SIFs and DIFs provide access to increased information, create opportunities for professional development, and introduce new strategies to the schools and districts. The external audit was also seen as beneficial. Both aspects of the current program can be integrated with the larger, more ambitious initiative we recommend below in ways that build on this solid regard and that expand their impact.
- **Initial Investments:** The state currently provides \$135,000 per school each year for three years – not an adequate sum to pay for expensive innovations such as extra time, but more than the investments being made in other states. However, far more schools are eligible for intervention than are selected in each cohort. Many districts currently apply for funds from external sources in order to provide additional needed services to their schools. The initial commitment to target low-performing schools is an important sign that Washington state recognizes the need, but that funding must be continued and ramped up in order to serve more schools and serve them more effectively.
- **Partially Integrated Approach:** Washington uses a partially integrated approach that is aligned with the state’s nine characteristics of effective schools. The approach recognizes that the needs of these schools extend across all nine characteristics, and that intervention strategies should address all of those needs in an integrated way. However, the approach is confined to what we call

providing help or program change strategies; there is little or no reference to the need to change operating conditions (i.e., principals' ability to shape school staff and allocate teachers without restrictive work-rule constraints), nor is there an appreciation of the far deeper needs of the high-poverty students who make up sizable percentages of the population at most chronically underperforming schools.

- **Strong Spirit of Collaboration:** Generally, there appears to be a fairly strong and positive relationship between OSPI and the districts using its intervention services. There is a good sense of collaboration with the professional associations with whom we spoke, one of which has a prominent role in training and managing the facilitators. OSPI has been open about using outside partners to conduct much of this intervention work, which bodes well for broader use of partners in an expanded turnaround initiative.

Washington would better serve its neediest schools by transitioning from a strategy of incremental improvement towards a philosophy of fundamental transformation.

II. Problems with the Current Strategy

Insufficient Incentives for Educators to Choose Major Change

The current Washington system has too few *positive incentives* to motivate school and district leaders to embrace the kind of major change that turnaround requires. It also has literally no *negative incentives*, in the form of a sufficiently unattractive “terminal consequence” that moves educators and local policymakers to challenge the status quo where that status quo is clearly not succeeding for children.

Moreover, each Washington school that elects to join the state's intervention initiative develops its own turnaround plan based primarily on its own criteria. Schools that do not meet AYP are expected to increase their scores, but there are no clear performance targets across the system. Schools and districts appreciate the assistance, but there are no real incentives to improve performance in a timely manner, against a specific goal with a consequence for under-performance. The entire system is designed to emphasize collaboration and support – which is a very good thing, but as the system stands today, it will not be sufficient to move the state's chronically struggling schools towards dramatic improvements in instruction and achievement. The state is right to emphasize educator buy-in – a crucial element in school improvement of any kind – but it must seek ways to

transform buy-in into fundamental change, more so than marginal improvements to reach the status quo.

Insufficient Comprehensiveness, Intensity, and Sustainability

The educators and researchers we interviewed praised the “comprehensiveness” of the state’s intervention effort, but frankly they are thinking inside the box of standard-issue school reform. The elements in place are good: a focus on improving school leadership, on curriculum and instructional strategies, and on data analysis. But as our research for *The Turnaround Challenge* uncovered, these strategies are essential but by themselves, insufficient to transform poorly-performing schools into high-performing teaching and learning organizations.

Transformational school turnaround is dependent upon much more than program improvement. It requires:

- **☒A baseline refocusing on *capacity*, or people strategies.** All of the ways these schools hire, support, allocate, organize, and evaluate their people should be examined. The current effort in Washington provides for some staff and leadership development, but like most state intervention initiatives, it stops there.
- **☒State leadership in changing operating *conditions* in turnaround schools.** Superintendents and principals need much more flexible authority than is granted to them in most states over their critical assets: people, money, time, and program. This is especially true in a turnaround context. Any state, including Washington, that charges a principal and school leadership team with the turnaround of a chronically underperforming school needs to commit to establishing the conditions at that school necessary for success. Principals should be able to answer “Yes” to each of the questions posed in the ten-point school-level audit included here in Appendix B. For an example of one state’s effort to establish those conditions, see Appendix C: the ten “enabling conditions” passed by Massachusetts’ State Board of Education last fall.
- **☒Clustering for support and scale.** Too many states, including Washington, are approaching school turnaround at the scale of the individual school. Individual facilitators who are working, for the most part, fairly independently from one another, are sent out to individual schools to mentor those schools’ leadership teams. The practitioners we talked to said that Washington’s SIFs and DIFs are helpful, but that they are not in the schools or districts enough and there is little connection to a broader set of supports. There are good reasons to cluster turnaround schools together for both effectiveness and efficiency: to give them an identity as cutting-edge turnaround initiatives; organize curriculum, assessment, staff development, transportation, supports for SPED or ELL or other special

student cohorts, or back-office services; provide a network for the sharing of practices and resources; or allow for students to progress through feeder patterns of similarly organized schools.

- **✕Getting the loose/tight *dynamic* right between the state and turnaround schools.** Washington’s approach is almost completely “loose.” There is very little, if any, structure provided from the state in terms of design or implementation of a turnaround plan. The organizations (school districts) that have produced consistently poor achievement results in these schools are given free reign to create and manage the intervention strategies. Our national research suggests that while this approach lends a positive air of collaboration to the work, it does not provide the leverage district and school leadership need to make significant changes at the ground level.
- **✕Organizing and improving the quality of *external partnership* support for turnaround.** Washington’s SIF/DIF facilitator model is patterned on Kentucky’s and looks similar to the approaches pursued in a number of other states as well (most notably, North Carolina). The state provides some training and organizing support to its network of SIFs and DIFs, but they are, essentially, a network of individual consultants whose strategy-set largely grows out of their own educational experience and predilections. The facilitators are in schools only a day and a half per week, and the facilitators themselves have little (if any) authority to do more than advise. Turnaround schools, we believe, need much more extensive outside support, and states must play a role in building a resource base of skilled turnaround partners to provide that support – including lead turnaround partners, who would integrate the all-too-often fragmented services of other partners playing different roles in the school.
- **✕Connecting and integrating district and school improvement efforts.** Washington state is not alone in having separate (though linked) improvement efforts at the district and school levels. In certain districts with strong, receptive leadership (i.e., Toppenish or to some degree, Auburn), turnaround work at the school level informs and supports more system reform at the district level. But the “loose” approach the state has taken with intervention design and implementation means that other districts fail to make these connections. A more robust, state-driven intervention initiative would create mini-district zones of turnaround schools that would provide laboratories for a new district model – one based more on service-providing than on compliance.

The state is right to emphasize educator buy-in – a crucial element in school improvement of any kind – but it must seek ways to transform buy-in into fundamental change, more so than marginal improvements to reach the status quo.

Insufficient Commitment to Turnaround

- **☒Lack of high-visibility public and private sector commitment.** Washington is embroiled in a larger debate about standards and the WASL graduation requirement. In one way, that makes it more difficult for an issue focused on a subset of schools to become prominent in the public eye. But in another, it may represent an opportunity. The sequence in Massachusetts was that students were held accountable for achievement (passing-level MCAS scores in order to graduate) before the schools and the adults in the system were held accountable. The state invested more than \$250 million in the years leading up to the 2003 institution of the graduation requirement in extra-help programs for at-risk students. The federal government invested sizable sums in Supplemental Education Services for the same purpose. Accountability was matched, in other words, by support. Massachusetts, like Washington and all states, is now seeing increasing numbers of schools fall into NCLB's underperforming categories. It is too soon to tell whether legislatures and political leaders (at the state and federal levels) will respond to clear data on "at-risk" schools with a similar ramp-up in public investment for turnaround.

The fact that one-quarter of Washington's public school students attend schools that are now on one of the state's improvement watch-lists is troubling, but our assessment is that this kind of sweeping categorization tends to lead to messenger-shooting rather than reform. (In other words: the news generates a blaming of the test and the standards movement, rather than a renewed focus on improving school quality.) The state would be better off focusing on those schools in the bottom five percent or fewer – schools with indefensibly poor records of achievement. These schools' poor track records, ironically, may be their most significant asset. Major change becomes more plausible when any discussion about whether a school is performing adequately or not is simply off the table.

Washington, like Massachusetts, has a strong community of public- and private-sector leaders with potential to generate a commitment to turnaround on grounds of fairness and civil rights to the students attending those schools. A range of groups that includes professional and parent organizations, business advocacy groups, and university-based nonprofit centers all represent potential allies for a statewide response on this issue. The state needs someone, or some agency (or agencies), to take the lead.

- **☒ A coordinating agency with sufficient operating flexibility to manage the work.** *The Turnaround Challenge* argues that schools demonstrably need more operating flexibility, including control over key resources such as staff, time, and money, to manage the turnaround process effectively. The same is true at the level of state administration. The status quo has not worked for failing schools, and status-quo management structures and supports are not likely to catalyze the fundamental, transformative change that these schools require.

The school and district intervention unit within OSPI appears to be staffed by very capable individuals. Our discussions with the OSPI School Improvement Assistance team were informed, productive, and far-reaching. They recognize the shortcomings of the state’s current approach – especially the limitations created by its voluntary nature. But they, like the schools, are hamstrung by regulation – a point that came up frequently in our conversations with them.

In order for the state to lead the way in implementing school-level changes in work rules and operating conditions, establishing high-impact criteria for turnaround design, distributing resources strategically instead of politically, and supporting the development of a resource base of external turnaround partners, a different kind of agency is needed. With the state board of education potentially taking the lead on turnaround, perhaps there is an opportunity here for a joint initiative propelled by both the board and OSPI that would recognize the need for flexibility and a relaxing of regulatory constraints at both the school level and the level of state management.

These schools’ poor track records, ironically, may be their most significant asset. Major change becomes more plausible when any discussion about whether a school is performing adequately or not is simply off the table.

III. The Path Forward

In light of the above analysis, and drawing from recommendations in *The Turnaround Challenge*, we suggest the following five steps for Washington to improve school intervention strategies:

1. **Create protected space for turnaround schools and an attractive choice for fundamental change through school turnaround zones and special collective**

bargaining agreements. There will be an argument over this recommendation. But the two key points to make are: a) these poorest-performing schools clearly need fundamental, dramatic change before more generations of students are lost; and b) this is all about providing districts, partners, and school leadership teams (including principals) with the flexibilities that any reasonable person would say are important for leaders in any context to have – i.e., the ability to shape the staff that works in a school. Massachusetts, Florida, and Arizona are all experimenting with some form of condition change in “zones” of turnaround schools, and districts such as Chicago, Miami-Dade, New York, and Philadelphia are experimenting as well, with agreement from their unions. It can be done.

2. **Focus resources on cohorts (e.g., 25 per year in three regional clusters) to produce success.** It is unrealistic (and probably undesirable) to expect to implement full-scale turnaround work in hundreds of schools on various improvement watch-lists. Washington is better off focusing its efforts on smaller cohorts of truly underperforming schools and while building exemplars of turnaround success. There is a likely political argument here as well, since state policymakers have a powerful urge to spread scarce resources thinly over the widest possible “net.” But increased public funding from the state is likely to depend on some proof of impact. Starting small is best at the start.
3. **Build *internal* capacity in schools and districts for turnaround.** Most districts, all except the largest ones, do not have the capacity or the outside support required to mount extensive skill-building and recruitment efforts themselves for their turnaround schools. There is an important state role to play here, in recruiting mission-directed educators to a cutting-edge turnaround cohort, lining up private support for the state’s turnaround initiative, and establishing solid training programs for turnaround leadership teams.
4. **Build *external* capacity to help lead the process of school turnaround.** This is not a customary role for states and public agencies. But it is vital that turnaround schools be supported by coherent, high-capacity outside partners. The structure of outside support must also change, to address the fragmentation and disconnectedness that characterizes the ways schools currently work with external providers. The state can engineer this change by stipulating that districts and schools work with partners to produce turnaround plans that meet rigorous state criteria; issuing RFPs that help consolidate Washington’s current cottage-industry of individual consultants into organizations that can act as lead turnaround partners; and working directly with partners to ensure that they are pursuing turnaround strategies that fulfill the state’s turnaround criteria. Washington’s regional educational service bureaus represent potential respondents to that kind of turnaround opportunity.

5. **Create an entrepreneurial agency, with leverage and resources, to establish the turnaround criteria and partnerships and lead the turnaround effort.** The state board of education is clearly the agency most likely to initiate a new approach to school turnaround. It should work together with OSPI, the governor, and some of the state's other public and private education reform leaders to create a vision statement for turnaround that incorporates the analysis provided here (and elsewhere in *The Turnaround Challenge*). The statement should include provisions for a semi-autonomous agency connected to both the board and OSPI to manage the work.

These are just the headlines, of course, for ideas that would significantly alter the ways Washington goes about the business of shaping school turnaround. The research, we would say, amply supports this choice to take a different tack on the issue of failing schools. In the absence of a coordinated, proactive state initiative, the future of those schools and of the students they serve is a dim one. Washington's newly reconstituted state board of education seeks levers that would bring about enduring, fundamental school improvement and consequent improvements in student achievement. Turnaround of chronically underperforming schools, we suggest, is exactly the timely and urgent challenge that the board should take up.

Mass Insight Education and Research Institute is honored to have been invited to advise the board on this issue, and stands ready to work with the State of Washington to help make it a national model for successful turnaround of underperforming schools.

Appendix A

Report on Information-Finding: Interviews

In conjunction with its research on school turnaround policies in Washington, Mass Insight Education conducted interviews with practitioners, policy makers, and third-party researchers, and consultants. These interviews were designed to provide insight into the strengths and shortcomings of the current approach to school turnaround in Washington. The interviews also provided foundational information that was useful for comparing the approach of Washington to that used in other states and against Mass Insight’s model for effective intervention in underperforming schools. The individuals contacted were identified by the Washington State Board of Education staff. This set of interviews constitutes an extremely limited sampling, so the results can be viewed as directional only. The following is a distillation of what we heard.

What the State Does Well: Strengths of the Current Approach

Practitioner Perspective

Practitioners interviewed expressed general satisfaction with the quality of the intervention programming that Washington has in place, with the caveats outlined in the “What Can Be Improved” section below. The state’s school auditing procedure was viewed as especially effective. Interviewees said that that the audits both helped the districts being audited and were useful as professional development tools for the auditors themselves. The audits were seen as “honest assessments,” with at least one practitioner citing the use of focus groups as an effective practice.

Also given satisfactory marks were the support services provided by the state’s School Improvement and District Improvement Facilitators (SIFs/DIFs). These SIFs were seen as effective in providing increased professional development, including problem solving techniques and on use of data. Professional development was seen as too segmented by subject. Such segmentation made it hard for elementary school teachers to receive services. The coaching of school leaders, however, was seen as effective. Local practitioners also saw the facilitator as an effective communication link with state administrators and officials. There was strong feeling expressed that the effectiveness of the practitioner-facilitator relationship was dependent on the strength of the underlying personal relationships involved. Local practitioners felt that input on the hiring of these facilitators helped to overcome potential problems of personality fit between the facilitator and local practitioners.

Other areas of strength cited included the data carousel, the alignment of curricula, and the OSPI tiered approach to intervention in elementary and middle schools. The state's programming and funding in the area of reading were also seen to be effective.

Policy-maker Perspective

Washington state officials believed that the current improvement program is fairly sophisticated, that it can produce improvement, that it operates collaboratively with local districts in positive ways – but that it does not adequately serve the neediest schools because of its voluntary nature and because it does not go far enough in requiring substantial change.

Officials estimated that they have about 350 schools that are struggling (failed AYP at least once), but only approximately 75 are being served by the state. While 80-110 schools are selectively invited to participate each year, only about 20-26 schools decide to enter the cohort each year. They think that the increased focus on the schools not being served is a positive development. The officials think that there is a positive attitude toward change at the school level. These schools “pushed back” in the beginning, thinking that “this too shall pass.” They have begun to come around, however, and in the officials' view are beginning to understand that the status quo is unacceptable.

State officials cited an individual district, the Toppenish School District, as an example of how well the system that is in place can work in a cooperative district. The new Toppenish superintendent has an accountability focus and has embraced the improvement model. The district engaged the state to procure services and resources. District leaders have also exhibited a lack of tolerance for ineffective teachers and a readiness to act on unsatisfactory teacher evaluations.

We met for a half-day with the primary administrators of the current program for OSPI. To their credit, this team was very mission-focused and open to analysis of current strategies. They feel hamstrung, to a strong degree, by the challenges described under “What Can Be Improved,” below, and demonstrated an openness to alternative strategies – particularly, movement away from the current voluntary nature of state intervention – that would bring turnaround services to all of the state's most chronically underperforming schools.

Third-Party Perspective

The third-party researchers and consultants that we spoke with liked the design of the Washington intervention program – in particular, somewhat ironically, its voluntary nature. The consistency of approach (with the state superintendent serving over a

decade) was seen as a positive aspect of the Washington experience, reducing the policy churn that might be problematic elsewhere. The use of private companies to provide some services was seen as a good approach, given the current small staff of the OSPI program. The use of these companies also helped to provide some consistency in the wake of OSPI staff turnover. The audit process was praised for its thoroughness.

The voluntary nature of the program was seen as important because it “ensures buy-in” by the affected parties, according to the researchers with whom we spoke. They recognized that the issue going forward will be how to deal with schools with chronically poor performance that cannot muster such a consensus among the faculty for state assistance.

The third parties we spoke with maintained that Washington is somewhat ahead of the other northwestern U.S. states in terms of quality of intervention services. All of these states, with the exception of Alaska, have a voluntary nature to their program – an artifact, they said, of the strong tradition of local control in northwest schools.

The audit programs were seen as well founded – upon the nine characteristics of effective schools which have been adopted by the legislature. All of the rubrics and tools are well designed to determine whether the school has these nine characteristics. There was also an acknowledgement that the approach focuses on building on strengths, and in that way is closely modeled after the Kentucky system.

The third parties believed that the state is using private groups productively. Generally, they use them in to evaluate and produce formative feedback. The state has also shown a willingness, they said, to trust the third-party groups.

What Can Be Improved: Cited Areas of Weakness

Practitioner Perspective

Practitioners expressed a general displeasure with the data systems employed in Washington. They cited a belief that a growth model or value-added data system would provide for more fair identification of underperforming schools. They also believed that such a system would properly focus the system’s goals on improvement, not adherence to arbitrary targets. The need for improved state-provided data analysis tools was also cited. The state’s testing system was seen as an ineffective diagnostic tool for individual students. Several LEAs were seen as being more advanced in data analysis and the use of diagnostic data than the state.

Practitioners would like the state to take a proactive, rather than reactive, approach to school improvement. There was concern that the state does not do enough to assist the

schools in danger of not meeting performance standards. A focus on these schools was seen as an effective alternative to merely conducting intervention activities after a school has been repeatedly labeled underperforming. Practitioners also cited a need for positive incentives, rather than sanctions.

The current intervention model was criticized for its failure to build local capacity to support school improvement, an insufficient focus on leadership development, and the lack of an exit strategy for SIFs. Practitioners expressed a belief that there needs to be an increased effort to build the capacity of LEAs to support school improvement. They stated that the system in place provides some support to schools, but does not do much to improve the capacity of the LEA to assist with school intervention down the road. Likewise, the lack of an exit strategy for SIFs was seen as problematic. Schools and districts are devising their own plans for transitioning away from the SIF, and there is no guidance from the state. The need for an increased focus on leadership development was also cited. Though there is a new program for supporting and developing school leaders, there was a belief that the system as a whole should focus on leadership development. There was a view that improved leadership would make the biggest difference.

Local practitioners called for increased resources for public schooling, as well as additional spending flexibility. They doubted that there were adequate resources to bring schools to the desired level of educational effectiveness. One practitioner estimated that private schools spend about \$23,000 per student, while the public schools spend only \$8,000. This differential caused the practitioner to question the state's commitment to children. They sought more flexibility for spending, and money that was free from categorical limitations which do not recognize local differences in need. Practitioners also cited a lack of money to buy classroom materials and the high rates of spending on transportation in rural districts as two financial issues.

The local practitioners were deeply concerned about the state's mathematics curriculum and math achievement in general. Practitioners felt that the math program was in some disarray currently, lacking direction and focus even as achievement results point to a real problem. There was discontent with the number of math coaches and the scarcity of professional development opportunities. Practitioners said they eagerly await an aligned mathematics curriculum and spend their own money on professional development, hoping it will fit with the curriculum.

In a number of different ways, the educators to whom we spoke expressed the need for more flexibility and latitude in implementing school reform. There were several requests for information on agreements in other states between teacher unions and district management that provide for collaborative, "out-of-the-box" approaches to turnaround of underperforming schools. (Several of these are profiled in Mass Insight's forthcoming national report.) Many of the provisions of those agreements that we discussed with

Washington school district leaders would be embraced by teachers, such as more collaborative planning and teaching time (carrying extra compensation), and a greater degree of flexibility with scheduling within the school day. Practitioners also expressed concern that the Highly Qualified teacher requirements of NCLB prevent them from using good teachers in certain classes. They are concerned that these requirements will become more restrictive.

Practitioners also felt that the state could easily bear the public outcry for dramatic systemic changes more than the localities could – hence the need for more proactive state leadership on these issues. Localities struggle with more proactive intervention, they said, because they face intensive local political obstacles.

Policy-maker Perspective

State officials were concerned primarily that there is no common vision for school intervention (or, really, for standards-based reform) among the state legislature, state education officials, and the state board of education. They think that the lack of a legislative mandate with teeth has hurt the effort to turn around the state’s lowest performing schools. They said that the legislature is more focused on diversifying ways that schools and students can show performance than on taking steps to mandate accountability and stronger interventions in failing schools.

State officials believe that the visibility of school improvement is low in the state and that the voluntary nature of the system is problematic. They think there is a need for a change in the local belief structure that school improvement is a “four letter word” and that identification of schools for improvement is stigmatizing. Rather, they said, improvement needs to be talked about as a positive development for children.

They believe that schools would benefit from the ability to “carve out” low performing schools and treat them differently. They would also like to change the voluntary nature of the program so as to ensure support for every school that needs it. They also think that there may need to be more of a focus at the district level, as capacity concerns will make it hard to serve all schools identified for improvement.

State board members believe that better data is needed to track student progress, including a graduation assessment. They also feel that improving the quality and effectiveness of school leaders must become a higher priority.

Third-Party Perspective

There was recognition among the third parties that the OSPI office charged with carrying out the turnaround efforts is understaffed and underfunded. They also stated that OSPI staff turnover in this department is very high (one estimate: 18 months), so there is a lot of time spent training new staff members. This turnover may be related to the amount of work that falls on individuals due to short staffing. One third party suggested that the intervention office within OSPI should be restructured, so that it operates more like a foundation. The OSPI staffers would be in charge of coordinating private providers and awarding grants. This might be more effective given the limited state resources, this contact suggested, than the current model in which the staffers are spread too thin.

There is a clear need, cited by all of the third parties we interviewed, to address how the state will deal with the massive number of schools that are about to enter the improvement and turnaround programs.

There was some third-party criticism of the program because of its limited focus on instructional strategies, concentrating mainly on structure and school organization. One third party thought the state needs to settle on one or two instructional intervention strategies, and outsource them. The third party also felt that there was a need to focus on multiple levels of intervention and support. Rather than just intervening at one level (leaders), there was a need to implement more training on policy-making executives (local board members, etc.) and teachers. The workforce undertaking the current structural interventions (SIFs/DIFs and coaches) was seen as high quality and effective.

The reform plan has been around for 15 years, but there have been few classroom-level changes or interventions, according to the third parties. They believed that, for student achievement to really improve, the state must focus more on inciting change in instructional quality. One of the third parties pointed out that the lack of focus on instruction might be related to a lack of capacity within the state (including among external partners) to provide effective professional development for teachers. This third party expressed a view that there were only one or two really good professional development providers, and the state would have to invest heavily to create the capacity to provide effective professional development for teachers (though it could be done).

The third parties had governance and control concerns. One concern was the need for strong central leadership to oversee the services provided by the state's regional entities, which are seen to vary widely. There was some concern that the quality of services provided by these centers was uneven, and in some circumstances, lacking.

There was concern regarding a lack of coordination within OSPI. The OSPI structure was seen as somewhat like a "silo system." There was little perceived collaboration, for instance, between the school improvement staff and the federal programs staff. As a

result, there is no cohesive approach that encompasses the state approach and the NCLB mandates. This lack of coordination was seen as the reason that there is such a divide between the federal and state mandates.

The WASL assessment system was cited as a very challenging (“top five in the nation”) assessment. This is seen as a positive, but also means that more schools will end up in improvement and restructuring. The setting of “proficiency” as the passing score on the WASL has also resulted in the current controversy over the state’s graduation requirement.

The third parties cited the lack of political will to pass reform legislation as a major impediment to effective interventions. One third party compared Massachusetts, which the party said “ripped the band-aid off” and accepted accountability, to Washington, which has taken a much slower, more deliberate approach to reform, and staked the difference to lack of political will. The extreme closeness of the election won by the current governor, this observer speculated, has also resulted in a lack of political capital in her office. That has cost the movement for higher standards some momentum.

Appendix B

“Can Turnaround Be Successful at Our School?” A Ten-Point Self-Audit (and Manifesto) for Principals

1. Have you and key members of your staff had a leadership role in shaping your school turnaround plan? Has the planning team benefited significantly from knowledgeable outside support? Has the process moved swiftly in order to meet an external deadline?
2. Do you as principal and turnaround leader have the authority to shape your school staff to so that you are best positioned to implement the plan? In the following HR areas, can you use these practices drawn from research in high-performance, high-poverty schools?
 - recruiting: open posting of positions
 - hiring and placement: freedom from seniority, bumping and force-placing, ability to adjust positions to suit student needs
 - firing: discretion to excess teachers who are not performing or are unwilling to participate fully in the turnaround plan for the school
 - compensation: ability to differentiate compensation, providing bonus incentives to attract high quality teachers and/or performance- ore responsibility-related pay
3. Do you have the authority to adjust your school’s schedule to suit the needs of your students and instructional approach?
4. Do you have discretion over how to allocate your school budget as you see fit to support your mission? Is your turnaround plan sufficiently supported by extra funding and outside resources?
5. Do you have the authority to adjust programs, focus the curriculum and choose materials to address individual instructional needs, increase cultural engagement, and incorporate special programs into schoolwide priorities?
6. Do you have the authority to shape your own leadership team by creating teacher leadership positions and differentiating responsibilities? Will you and your team be provided, as part of the turnaround plan, with professional development to increase your expertise in turnaround management?

7. Do you currently have the technology, systems, and analysis expertise necessary to implement the frequent formative assessment and feedback that is central to increasing performance in high-risk populations?
8. Is your work supported by a lead turnaround partner that, in your judgment, will help put your school in the best possible position to meet your student achievement goals? Does your district or state provide you with a choice of support services tailored to high-poverty settings and to your school's priorities?
9. Will you be provided, as part of your turnaround status, with the support of a network of schools involved in similar turnarounds?
10. Do you feel that you have been provided with unambiguous expectations, clear measures of accountability and related motivators to best organize your school to succeed in turning around student performance?

Appendix C

Massachusetts' Ten Essential Conditions

These ten requirements form the basis of Massachusetts' new turnaround policy, passed in October 2006. Schools entering "Priority" status in the state (following four years of failure to make AYP) must submit restructuring plans that incorporate these ten elements. With sufficient state allocation for the initiative in FY2008 in doubt, the state has some hesitation about fully implementing the plan. However, four schools that have come before the board of education for chronic underperformance since the policy was passed were required to produce turnaround plans that fulfilled all of these criteria. There is evidence from the field, also, that change-oriented superintendents are using the so-called "ten commandments" as levers to reshape budgets more strategically and in negotiations with their local union leaders.

1. The school's principal has authority to select and assign staff to positions in the school without regard to seniority;
2. The school's principal has control over financial resources necessary to successfully implement the school improvement plan;
3. The school is implementing curricula that are aligned to state frameworks in core academic subjects;
4. The school implements systematically a program of interim assessments (4-6 times per year) in English language arts and mathematics that are aligned to school curriculum and state frameworks;
5. The school has a system to provide detailed tracking and analysis of assessment results and uses those results to inform curriculum, instruction and individual interventions;
6. The school schedule for student learning provides adequate time on a daily and weekly basis for the delivery of instruction and provision of individualized support as needed in English language arts and math, which for students not yet proficient is presumed to be at least 90 minutes per day in each subject;
7. The school provides daily after-school tutoring and homework help for students who need supplemental instruction and focused work on skill development;

8. The school has a least two full-time subject-area coaches, one each for English language arts/reading and for mathematics, who are responsible to provide faculty at the school with consistent classroom observation and feedback on the quality and effectiveness of curriculum delivery, instructional practice, and data use;
9. School administrators periodically evaluate faculty, including direct evaluation of applicable content knowledge and annual evaluation of overall performance tied in part to solid growth in student learning and commitment to the school's culture, educational model, and improvement strategy;
10. The weekly and annual work schedule for teachers provides adequate time for regular, frequent, department and/or grade-level faculty meetings to discuss individual student progress, curriculum issues, instructional practice, and school-wide improvement efforts. As a general rule no less than one hour per week shall be dedicated to leadership-directed, collaborative work, and no fewer than 5 days per year, or hours equivalent thereto, when teachers are not responsible for supervising or teaching students, shall be dedicated to professional development and planning activities directed by school leaders.

Source: Massachusetts Department of Education