

# STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

HEARING TYPE:    \_\_\_X\_\_\_ ACTION

DATE:                March 26-27, 2008

SUBJECT:            **SYSTEM PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDEX AND CONTRACTS**

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

PRESENTER:         Dr. Kris Mayer, Board Lead  
                          Ms. Edie Harding, Executive Director  
                          Dr. Evelyn Hawkins, Research Associate  
                          State Board of Education

## **BACKGROUND:**

Staff has enclosed a shortened synopsis of the System Performance Accountability (SPA) update memo plus the notes from the February 26, 2008 work session. For more detailed information you can refer to your SPA February Work Session packet.

### **Accountability Index**

Over the last year we have developed an accountability index to allocate schools by tiers to determine which schools will be recognized for extraordinary performance and which schools may need more assistance. At the February SPA work session, staff provided a memo and Board members and advisors discussed the index and potential policy changes.

Staff will be asking for your guidance on policy issues for the accountability index.

### **Contracts**

To enhance the Board's work on state wide system performance accountability, we have advertised nationally for proposals to address two pieces of critical work: 1) policy barriers to student achievement, and 2) state/local partnerships for low performing schools. We have selected the following contractors: Northwest Regional Education Laboratory (\$81, 591) and Mass Insight Education (\$165,000) respectively. Summaries of their proposed budget, work plan, deliverables, and timing of products are provided for your review.

Staff will be asking for your approval of these contracts.

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## **System Performance Accountability (SPA) Short Synopsis of Work and Notes from February SPA Work Session**

### **Background**

When the legislature reconstituted the State Board in 2005, it transferred the responsibilities for creating a statewide accountability system from the A+ Commission to the State Board of Education. The requirements<sup>1</sup> for an accountability system include:

- Setting performance improvement goals.
- Setting cut scores on state assessments.
- Identifying criteria for successful schools and districts in need of assistance and those where students persistently fail.
- Identifying criteria for schools and districts where intervention and appropriate strategies are needed.
- Creating performance incentives.
- Reviewing the assessment reporting system to ensure fairness, accuracy, timeliness, and equity of opportunity.
- Providing biennial report on progress.
- Determining when school districts should choose from a curricular and instructional materials menu (2SHB 1906 from the 2007 Legislative Session).

The Board adopted three draft concepts at its September 2007 meeting to frame its work:

1. Performance Improvement Goals and Indicators to Measure System Progress.
2. A Tiered System of Continuous Improvement for All Schools.
3. Targeted Strategies for Chronically Underperforming Schools.

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<sup>1</sup> RCW 28A.305.130 (4)

## Board Deliverables and Timeline

The Board established September 2008 as its target for action on a proposed statewide system performance accountability for two reasons. First, the Board needs to prepare its recommended budget request and suggested law changes for accountability by September 2008. These requests will be submitted to the Governor for the 2009 legislative session. Second, the Board would like to provide these accountability pieces to inform the work of the Joint Basic Education Funding Task Force. In order to meet the September target, staff has prepared the following deliverables and timetable outlined in the table below. At the March 2008 Board meeting, members will examine the accountability index to develop tiers and the consultants' scope of work.

The following products are anticipated to address the concepts outlined above:

- Proposed accountability index to identify schools and districts.
- Policy barriers study.
- Student voices video.
- Development of tiers with detail for continuous school and district improvement with OSPI.
- Proposal on when school districts must adopt a state curricular menu.
- Proposal on blueprint strategies for state/local partnerships for low performing schools and districts.
- Revisions to school and district improvement plans through SBE rules and guidelines.
- Legislative package on final proposals for school and district support.
- Proposals on revision and adoption of performance goals.
- SBE report card.

The timeline for accomplishing these deliverables is as follows:

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>January-March 2008</b>	Student voices video produced
<b>February 26, 2008</b>	Selection of consultants to assist with policy barriers study and state/local partnership blueprint
<b>February 26, 2008</b>	Board work session, with advisors, on tiers for continuous school and district improvement, accountability index for tiers and ESD accreditation
<b>March-June 2008</b>	Consultants to assist with policy barriers study (final report due June 2008) and state/local partnership blueprint (final report due September 2008)
<b>March 26-27, 2008</b>	Board meeting to discuss accountability index and consultants scope of work
<b>May 14-15, 2008</b>	Board meeting to discuss SPA updates
<b>June 19, 2008</b>	Board work session, with advisors, on results of policy barriers study, update on state/local partnership blueprint

<b>July 23-24, 2008</b>	Board meeting to review policy barriers study and update on state/local partnership blueprint
<b>Summer 2008</b>	Outreach to stakeholders on initial accountability concepts
<b>September 24-25, 2008</b>	Board meeting to adopt full proposal package for 2009 session on accountability and proposed rule changes for School Improvement Plan
<b>September 30, 2008</b>	Submit legislative and budget proposals to the Governor
<b>Fall 2008-Winter 2009</b>	Continued Board outreach to key stakeholders and community on proposed legislative and budget package  Board work session and meetings on performance improvement goals and performance indicators
<b>Fall 2009</b>	SBE Symposium with Professional Educators Standards Board and others First SBE Report Card produced

For more details on the above work please refer to the SPA February 26 Work Session Package that was emailed out in mid February. Additional copies may be obtained from the SBE Office.

## **Washington State Board of Education System Performance Accountability Notes from Work Session February 26, 2008**

Attendees: Kris Mayer, Sheila Fox, Steve Dal Porto, Amy Bragdon, Jack Schuster, Bernal Baca, Brian Jeffries, Martha Rice, Gary Kipp, Marc Cummings, Scott Poirier, Janell Newman, Shannon Thompson, Carolyn Lint, Vicki Bates, Mike Bernard, Roger Erskine, and Bill Rossman

### **School/District Improvement Assistance Program and Performance Review Rubrics**

Janell Newman – Assistant Superintendent, District and School Improvement, OSPI

- Provided information on the rationale for moving from a school based improvement model to a district based improvement model.
  - More schools not meeting AYP (728 in 2007, up from 338 in 2006) and limited ability to offer sustainable assistance.
  - Largest number of kids in schools not meeting AYP is in the Puget Sound ESD area, whereas the Yakima ESD 105 has the highest percent of schools not meeting AYP (but the number of students in those schools is lower).

- Discussed current school and district improvement efforts—currently 148 schools have been served through voluntary three-year cohorts (funding at \$135,000 per year) and 30 districts served through voluntary district cohorts (funding at \$70,000 per year).
- Total OSPI school and district improvement funding is now \$14 million, mostly from feds (State and foundations provide \$4 million); going to \$19 million next year.
- Biggest challenge for schools and districts is to move from knowing what best practice is to implementing it.

Shannon Thompson – Director, Education Reinvention, District and School Improvement, OSPI

- Discussed OSPI proposed District Comprehensive Improvement Assistance Program.
- It would still be voluntary.
- Received federal funding to field test in three to five districts plus hire vendors to build capacity and sustainability in the following areas:
  - Effective leadership
  - Quality teaching and learning
  - Support for system wide performance
  - Clear and collaborative relationships
  - Data analysis and formative assessments
- Envision a tiered system of support working the SBE to these districts.
- Use of district review tool to determine individual progress made in more detail on the above components.

### **Accountability Index Review**

Evelyn Hawkins, Research Associate, SBE

- Discussed the purpose of the accountability index to help classify schools into tiers for recognition of awards or need for additional assistance.
- Guiding principles:
  - Simple and include readily available data
  - Recognize improvement
  - Use multiple measures
  - Incorporate NCLB AYP and accommodate future changes in AYP
- Components of index:
  - AYP status
  - Achievement status (use WASL scores in reading, writing, math and science plus high school graduation on a school level)

- Improvement status (use WASL scores in reading, writing, math and on a school level)
- Technical Review panel comments:
  - Proposed Accountability Index is technically sound
  - Recommended Board consider whether to:
    - Use percent of AYP cells met instead of steps of improvement.
    - Phase in science.
    - Use average of two years performance data for achievement.
    - Use an average of two years as baseline to determine improvement.
    - Add measure of percent reduction in not meeting standard to the improvement measure.
- SBE Report Card Options (in addition to Accountability Index) to consider:
  - Measure of achievement despite challenges.
  - Achievement gap measure.
- Discussion from Board members and advisors
  - What is our policy goal?
    - Close achievement gap
  - Important to look at multiple measures:
    - Note that there is a difference between measures and sources.
  - Can we look at individual student growth rather than whole school?
  - We prefer not to weigh performance of low income students higher in the index.
  - We might want to explore: GPA, attendance, accreditation, and breadth of program.
  - What happens if the WASL changes?
  - We should keep science in the index.
  - Find a different name for chronically underperforming schools.

### **Educational Service District Accreditation Process**

Dr Terry Munther Superintendent of ESD 101  
 Ms. Helene Paroff, Assistant Superintendent for ESD 101  
 Mr. Tim Winter, Principal Peninsula High School

The ESDs provided an update on the accreditation process that they use with schools. They stand willing to assist the State Board of Education with any work needed in accountability. Tim Winter spoke about the usefulness of the process as a new high school principal. The ESDs want to know if the SBE wants a continued role in working with them on the accreditation process as it relates to school improvement. (The legislature removed the Board's role in public accreditation two years ago).

Staff is seeking guidance on how to proceed on the following two questions:

1. Does the SBE wish to re-enter the accreditation role by partnering with ESDs/AESD in this process, (which may require a statutory change request); or leave this work to other organizations such as AESD, NAAS and others?
2. Schools that were approved under previous statute, by SBE, had a three year review requirement. What is the SBE plan for handling those schools accredited/approved by SBE who are now coming up on their three year review?

Note: The SBE staff has communicated to Dr. Terry Munther, at ESD 101, that it is not prepared at this time to undertake accreditation of public schools. It will consider the role of ESDs in its accountability work this year.







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## **The Proposed Accountability Index (AI)**

### **Background**

The State Board of Education has two goals to guide its work:

1. Raise student achievement dramatically.
2. Provide all students the opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education, the 21<sup>st</sup> century world of work and citizenship.

The legislature has asked the Board to propose a statewide accountability system. The Board is developing proposals to meet its Board goals through the following three draft concepts:

1. Performance Improvement Goals and Indicators to Measure System Progress.
2. A Tiered System of Continuous Improvement for All Schools.
3. Targeted Strategies for Chronically Underperforming Schools.

The state has an interest in ensuring that all its students meet or make progress towards meeting the minimum state expectations identified through its math, reading, writing, and science standards. In addition, the state wants to ensure that students graduate from high school with the ability to succeed in whatever pathway they choose.

There are over 2,000 schools in the state. The number of schools that did not make Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) in 2007 is 728. The number will continue to grow as the statewide bar for reading and math proficiency rises to meet No Child Left Behind's 2014 goal of 100% proficiency. Clearly, ways must be found to create a system that recognizes the progress schools are making, as well as prioritizes and focuses assistance to schools and districts that need improvement.

The accountability index was created to identify and prioritize schools (and districts) into tiers of assistance. OSPI and SBE are working on the types of assistance that would be offered in each tier. The final determination of which schools are identified for tier 4 (the lowest performing schools) will require analyzing more detailed data, both quantitative and qualitative. The AI will also serve to identify schools for recognition; the details of that usage will need to be further defined. However, the first task for the Board is to

agree upon the details of the components that make up the index to be used in the initial identification of schools into tiers of assistance.

The development of the AI was guided by four principles. The AI is:

- Simple and includes **readily available** data.
- Recognizes improvement.
- Uses multiple measures.
- Incorporates NCLB AYP and will accommodate future changes in AYP.

A panel of five experts reviewed the technical aspects of the proposed Accountability Index (AI). While they found the proposed AI technically sound and reasonable for the purpose of assigning schools into tiers of assistance and for determining awards, they suggested policy considerations for changes to each of the components. The Board will consider the proposed policy considerations and determine the final composition of the index.

### **The Proposed Accountability Index (AI) and Policy Considerations**

The proposed accountability index consists of three components: AYP Status, Achievement Status, and Improvement Status. Each of these components is briefly described below and includes the suggested policy considerations for modifications to the component.

AYP Status. A school's AYP status is based on whether it met AYP and the step of improvement it is in.

#### ***Policy Consideration***

Should the Board define AYP status based on the percent of AYP cells meeting its target instead of steps of improvement?

There are 37 cells that determine whether a school made AYP. A school may not make AYP, based on one cell only. Therefore, it might make more sense to look at the percent of cells rather than step of Improvement in defining AYP status.

Achievement Status. The school's achievement status is based on the percent who met standard on the reading, writing, mathematics, and science WASL assessments for all grades in the school. For schools that graduate high school students, achievement status also incorporates the extended graduation rate. The proposed index weighted the performance of low-income students, in both the WASL and graduation rate, higher.

## ***Policy Considerations***

- Should the Board phase in the inclusion of science?

Schools have primarily focused on reading, writing, and mathematics rather than science instruction, as the federal and state accountability provisions for science have not yet come on line. Consequently, schools have not experienced the growth in science performance on the WASL as they have in the other areas. Schools are beginning to recognize the need to expend more effort in the area of science and improvements are expected in the next few years. The requirement to include science performance for NCLB AYP begins in 2010 and the requirement to pass the science WASL for high school graduation begins with the Class of 2013.

- Should the Board weigh the performance of low-income students higher?

The reason for weighting the performance of low-income students higher than that of non-low income students is based on the fact that low-income students tend to score lower on tests, such as the WASL, than non-low income students. Further, schools tend to encounter challenges to increasing the performance of low-income students in efforts to close the achievement gap that exists. The higher weighting places an emphasis on closing this achievement gap.

In the SPA work session, the argument was made against a higher weighting of the performance of low-income students because schools with higher proportions of low-income students should not be penalized further in this identification system than they already are, by having to deal with the challenges they face.

- Should the Board use a two-year average of WASL performance?

Some of our consultants suggested that we should consider a way to mitigate year-to-year fluctuations in performance, due to different students being in a school from one year to the next. A two-year average would be a possible solution. On the other hand, the argument against a two-year average is that it increases the complexity of calculating the index while increasing the reliability of the index, minimally only. The fact that the achievement status is based on an aggregate of all grades and all content area tests, in a school itself, tends to increase the stability and therefore, reliability, of the measure.

Improvement Status. The school's improvement index is based on the change from the prior year to the current in the Learning Index (as defined by the Commission on Learning and modified by the A+ Commission). The Learning Index takes into consideration the percent of all students performing at the different levels on the reading, writing, mathematics, and science WASLs.

Based on the recommendations of the technical review panel, the improvement index will be revised to reflect the following:

- The gain/loss change will be measured from a baseline that is the average of two years—the fifth and fourth years prior to the current. This change is to allow schools to have more than one year to make improvements. It will also increase the reliability of the baseline.
- The baseline will be a moving baseline, meaning that it will always be the average of the fifth and fourth years prior to the current.

### **Future Considerations**

- Changes in graduation requirement from math WASL to End-of-Course exams. We will re-visit the accountability index and make appropriate changes to its component measures as this change in graduation requirement takes effect.
- Changes in NCLB AYP accountability measures. We will re-visit the accountability index, should changes be made to Washington's AYP accountability measures.
- Use of individual student growth measures. We will consider incorporating individual student growth into the index measuring such growth with the WASL becomes technically feasible.



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## **Results of State Board of Education Competitive Proposals for Assistance with System Performance Accountability**

### **I. Policy Barriers to Student Achievement Study – Awarded to Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) for \$81,591**

#### **A. State Board of Education’s Study Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the perceived policy and management barriers for districts to improve students through a literature review, interviews with key education stakeholders and selected district case studies. The study will focus specifically on district practices and the policy environment in which districts are implementing school improvement efforts (e.g. collective bargaining agreements; human resource policies and practices; allocation of funding and other resources among schools within a district; and local and state school board and other district policies). In addition, the findings of the study will be used to inform any necessary revisions to the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 180-16-220 regarding school improvement plans.

The State Board of Education (SBE) posed the following questions:

- Which district and school management structures and policies have facilitated or hindered school improvement planning and actions, as districts and schools worked to improve student achievement?
  - What changes in federal, state, and local policies and practices would facilitate the creation of coherence and alignment among the various initiatives and requirements being implemented in schools, and guide a district and its schools’ improvement efforts, which are essential for making transformational change?
  - How has the school and district used staff members and data resources, which are available at the school and district level, to plan school improvement, evaluate gaps in student skills and knowledge, and continuously monitor student achievement?
  - What are the lessons learned from the barrier study that the SBE and its consultants should take into account as it creates a statewide accountability framework for a new partnership between the state and local districts, and
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helps districts and schools make transformational changes to assure that student achievement is dramatically increased?

- The approach for this study and its specific methods were defined to meet these objectives. In so doing, the specific research questions listed in the RFP are addressed and form the basis for successfully meeting the objectives.

## **B. Consultant Approach and Timeline**

This study will use a descriptive, analytical approach to address the policy questions regarding the perceived barriers, from the perspectives of different education stakeholders. To ensure a smooth flow of information and analysis, the study will organize activities into nine stages. The stages of the study are:

### **1. Review literature and data-bases.**

As a part of this study NWREL will conduct a literature review of federal, state, and local barriers (both policy and management) experienced by districts and schools, that hinder them from helping students make significant gains in achievement. This review and bibliography will be established using existing major sources of educational documents which are available and searchable electronically. This literature review will strengthen Washington State's base of information and help insure that any policy and management decisions related to state and local barriers to raising student achievement is grounded in the best and latest research. The literature review will also help shape the questions asked of respondents. The NWREL Professional Library maintains both conventional and automated information retrieval systems.

### **2. Select study respondents from different key education stakeholders.**

NWREL, in collaboration with the SBE, will select the stakeholder groups and specific representatives of those groups to be respondents for the study. The study is expected to include 30 to 40 respondents appropriately selected from the various education stakeholder groups and policymakers, such as state legislators; Office of Financial Management (OFM); Governor's Office; Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; representatives from the Washington Education Association (WEA); the Washington Association of School Principals (AWSP); the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA); the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA); the Parent, Teacher, Student Association (PTSA); Education Service Districts; researchers and faculty from university and college schools of education; business groups; and nonprofit partners working on education issues.

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### **3. Create a study design and develop an analysis plan.**

NWREL will design the study, including the data collection methodology and the data analysis plan, to summarize the data collected, and make the information accessible to policymakers. The study is expected to reveal policy barriers experienced by districts and their schools in creating the necessary conditions for high student achievement. NWREL will document and analyze school level practices in at least six Washington school districts across the state, to be selected in collaboration with SBE. The school districts selected will be chosen from different geographical regions and communities (rural, urban, and suburban). Chosen school district sites, to be visited by Dr. Kruger, Dr. Woo, and Ms. Davis, are those which can provide the most insight into the issues surrounding perceived barriers from the perspectives of different education stakeholders. The visits will consist of a full day, and will be used to conduct individual interviews with the person(s) most knowledgeable of the school and district policies. Administrators and teachers will also be surveyed regarding the school improvement process and barriers to raising student achievement

Note: SBE has asked NWREL for a prioritization on key policy issues identified that can lead to a maximum return on improving student achievement. The tentative districts selected for interviews are still under discussion. We are looking for about six districts - east and west as well as small and large. We have revised an earlier list we sent some of you. By the end of March we hope to have a final list. We need to make sure the districts are willing to participate. We expect NWREL will do focus groups with teachers and administrators on policies related to people, money, time, program and structures.

### **4. Develop data collection instruments.**

NWREL will develop the data collection instruments, as required by the study design, in order to accomplish two goals:

- 1) Assure standardization of data collected across different stakeholder groups, and
- 2) Probe deeper on questions targeted to the responsibilities or the purview of the specific stakeholder group.

NWREL will follow a three-step process in developing the protocols to be used in the study. First, in addition to the topical questions listed in the RFP, major challenges and barriers discovered as a result of the literature review will be incorporated into a stakeholder interview protocol. Secondly, the SBE designated stakeholders will be interviewed to select the list of challenges and barriers they deem to be most pertinent and appropriate for Washington schools. Third, the resulting list of pertinent challenges and barriers will be incorporated into the onsite administrator and teacher interview and survey protocols. The data collection instruments will focus on the following topics:

- State, district, and school structures, and policies
  - Vision for improving student achievement
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- Use of data
- Statewide accountability framework

#### **5. Conduct data collection.**

NWREL will work with the various stakeholder groups to arrange for, and conduct the data collection efforts. The study is expected to include 30 to 40 respondents appropriately selected from the various education stakeholder groups and policy makers. NWREL will develop interview protocols specifically aligned to the question set required by the RFP and to the barriers discovered during the literature review. The respondents will be interviewed by phone. Onsite visits will be conducted in six districts across the state. Interviews of selected administrators and teachers will be conducted and surveys will be administered to all district and school staff members. Follow-up interviews will be scheduled with key stakeholders, as appropriate, on the basis of unique characteristics of school and district policies discovered during the onsite visits. Stakeholders selected for follow-up interviews will respond to a more in-depth set of questions related to barriers in raising student achievement and the implications for Washington State. These protocols are designed to determine what potential outcomes are caused by differences in school and district policies. This is expected to be a rich data source. The experiences of these key stakeholders will provide valuable insights to the state and local barriers to raising student achievement.

#### **6. Coordinate findings with participants in other SBE studies.**

NWREL will share and discuss their findings from interviews and data collection with SBE staff members and SBE consultants, who are working on state and local partnerships for chronically underperforming schools. Results of the study will be cycled back to SBE in a timely fashion to inform and enhance study effectiveness. The briefings with staff members and participants in other SBE studies will promote discussion of the state and local barriers to raising student achievement encountered, the strategies used to resolve them, and lessons learned.

#### **7. Provide recommendations for amendments to Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 180-16-220.**

NWREL will work with SBE and OSPI staff members on amendments to WAC 180-16-220 regarding school improvement plans. Currently, the school improvement plan for each school in the district is approved annually by the school district board of directors, using its determined approval process. Each school is required to have a school improvement plan that is data driven, promotes a positive impact on student learning, and includes a continuous improvement process that reflects the ongoing process used by a school to monitor, adjust, and update its school improvement plan. The plan will address the improvement of student achievement of the state learning goals and essential academic learning requirements; nonacademic student learning and growth; characteristics of successful schools; educational equity; and parent, family, and community involvement. The recommendations for amendments will be

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supported by findings from this study regarding relevant barriers.

#### **8. Prepare deliverables.**

NWREL will prepare several deliverables:

- A detailed work plan.
- Draft interview instruments.
- Literature review.
- A draft report, which will include a summary of the findings and implications for consideration, under the State Board of Education's plans for a new statewide accountability framework.
- Proposed amendments to WAC 180-16-220.
- A formal report that contains the NWREL's assessment of the major policy barriers that confront districts and schools in improving student achievement, and recommendations for overcoming such barriers for policy makers.
- Communication tools, such as small case studies and PowerPoint presentations that illustrate the formal report's findings to a wide variety of audiences.

#### **9. Present to the Board.**

NWREL will share their draft findings at a Board System Performance Accountability work session to be held on June 19, 2008 in Seattle, Washington. The final report will be presented at a Board meeting to be held July 23-24, 2008 in Vancouver, Washington, at the Evergreen School District.

## **II. State and Local Partnership for Lowest Performing Schools – Mass Insight Education awarded the contract for \$165,000**

### **A. State Board of Education's Study Objectives**

The consultant will assist the State Board of Education (SBE) by developing a state/local partnership model based on the research and practices of current and past school/district turnaround efforts that is tailored specifically to Washington State conditions. The consultant(s) will work with the SBE, as well as education stakeholders and policy makers, to develop a state/local partnership model to create policy options to address chronically underperforming schools and their districts, as defined by tier 4 of the proposed SBE accountability index. The consultant will also review the proposed new Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction state district assistance program elements (tiers 1-3) for all schools and districts, to ensure consistency in the approach for all tiers.

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The options will be based on the research and practices of current and past school/district turnaround efforts, findings from the SBE barrier study that will be conducted in spring 2008, and tailored specifically to Washington State conditions. The model will include options for addressing schools in tier 4 and their districts, to significantly turn around student achievement. Elements of the model shall include the roles, processes, resources, and responsibilities of the state, local school boards and districts, and regional and other potential entities (teachers unions, educational service districts, universities/colleges, quasi private public partnerships) to address the needs of schools identified in tiers 3- 4. The consultant will lay out the procedural steps the state and local district must follow for schools and districts to participate in the zones of excellence and the consequences for not participating.

The focus of the state/local partnership model for tier 4 shall be “zones of excellence.” These zones will include clusters of schools within districts of similar characteristics (e.g. low performance in math, high concentration of English Language Learners, etc.) that will develop specific strategies to improve student achievement and graduation rates. These zones of excellence will be created with incentives (e.g., having the legal authority to enact change or having waivers from some state legal requirements) as well as partnership agreements between the state and local districts (that is, a turnaround plan that includes: funding, staffing, professional development and support, specific areas to address for improvement, performance expectations and milestones, duration, reporting and oversight). The overall expectation is to build the state and local capacity to address the issues of chronically underperforming schools in Washington.

## **B. Consultant Approach and Timeline**

Mass Insight’s approach to implementing the work involves an approach that must build consensus around the assumption that different, deeper, more transformational change is required for these Tier 4 schools. The approach must encompass a number of important understandings about what *effective, comprehensive turnaround* requires. And finally the approach must encompass more than school-level strategies for change; it must also contemplate change strategies at the level of statewide turnaround management. Turnaround will demand strong, coordinated action from the state – in collaboration with local communities and a strong resource base of turnaround partners.

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## **1. Policy Blueprint**

Mass Insight will develop a comprehensive policy “blueprint” that is divided into three main sections (which are also used here in this Work Plan); a corollary set of implementation strategies and recommendations designed to amplify the policy blueprint for the State Board of Education; supporting presentation materials; and additional guidance to the SBE in developing its legislative proposals.

### **a. Engaging stakeholders to inform planning and build consensus**

The turnaround model must be designed to address the roles and responsibilities of essential stakeholders, including principals and teachers. Our Work Plan includes a variety of opportunities for teachers, principals, educator-leaders and other stakeholders, to provide input and ideas and have an impact on the final framework that is proposed. We will draw on our own directly relevant experience as members of the Massachusetts Turnaround Stakeholder Working Group – a body created by the Commonwealth in 2007 – approach to school intervention. Mass Insight has our own contact base in Washington State, but we will work closely with Education First to manage this stakeholder engagement dimension of the project. Education First and Mass Insight will also interview education, policy, business and community leaders to learn their perspective about chronically low-performing schools

### **b. Developing the Washington State Zones of Excellence: A Comprehensive Blueprint for School Turnaround**

Our development of the policy blueprint will revolve around the following three areas:

The three areas of focus for the main policy blueprint are defined as follows:

#### **i. Defining the Challenge and Changing the Incentives**

This area may well be the most important aspect of this initiative. Washington State’s experience with school improvement suggests a well-considered comprehensiveness and strong emphasis on collaboration. But Mass Insight’s 2007 analysis of the state’s intervention strategies turned up little awareness of the need for much more transformative change in the state’s failing schools, and a set of state policies that had clearly failed to incentivize schools and districts to undertake that kind of change. Consequently, our work here will focus on how state policy can better define the level of transformation required of schools reaching Tier 4 – and how it can galvanize schools, districts, communities, and partner organizations to implement it. That means a focus on these potential levers for change:

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- ***Analysis of the state’s proposed tier approach:*** This analysis will look at the structure of Washington’s proposed accountability tiers, detail its strengths and weaknesses, and provide suggestions for improvement.
- ***Incentive change through accountability and support:*** We will examine and develop ways for the state to rationalize the mix of mandatory requirements and voluntary engagement opportunities that comprise an effective state intervention policy. This will involve connections between the Tier 3 and Tier 4 levels of state policy, as well as the development of an ultimate consequence for schools that simply fail to improve or even to engage in meaningful turnaround. The key is to provide a range of positive and negative incentives that are capable of breaking the inertia of the status quo in too many failing schools, but that engage reform-minded educators on the ground so that the turnaround initiatives are “owned” at the school level.
- ***Clarifying the need for major change, the “proof-point” benchmarks, and the nature of the strategies required:*** Current intervention strategies need to be honored for their role as *part* of a comprehensive turnaround solution, but the discussion in Washington about school intervention must move away from incremental reforms for failing schools and towards a much deeper understanding of the reform challenge these schools represent. We will provide the basis for some of this change under this contract to the SBE. We are also planning to approach Washington grantmakers with requests for additional support to fill out this work, if we are named to receive the State Board contract. We would use the additional funding to build profiles of chronically underperforming schools in Washington State, as well as high performing, high-poverty schools, and develop step-by-step ground-level blueprints for school turnaround work once the new state policies are put in place.

## ii. Providing for Operating Conditions that Support Reform

A key finding of *The Turnaround Challenge* was the impact of various operating conditions in defeating even the most well-designed reform initiatives. (For example: the inability of principals and districts to shape the teaching workforce in a given school, because of contractual requirements). This portion of the policy blueprint and Work Plan will address the ways that Washington State can create supportive operating conditions in its Zones of Excellence schools. The work will include identification of the most important conditions; research on what other states and districts have been able to accomplish related to this issue when they have created “zones” to address failing schools; an examination specifically of extended time, pension portability, “bumping” or seniority-based teacher assignment processes; and analysis of challenges at the school level caused by their compliance burden and inflexibility in budget allocation. The work will draw from our Washington

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stakeholder feedback.

### **iii. Building Capacity for Effective Turnaround of Tier 4 Schools**

This third dimension of the policy blueprint is in some ways the most challenging to accomplish on the ground, because it involves so many complex dynamics and so many public and private systems. But the need for turnaround of public schools, at bottom, stems from public education's failure to adopt truly professional standards and practices of human resource management – an irony, given the mission of the field. Our work in this area will involve recommendations for improved HR policies and practices in Zones of Excellence schools, analysis of current pipelines for school leadership in Washington State, and additional analysis of all of the capacity *outside of the schools* that is required for effective turnaround. That includes capacity to manage comprehensive turnaround at the state and district levels, and capacity to plan and implement it among the state's current resource base of partner organizations. We plan to ask for additional support from Washington grantmakers to expand our analysis of the state's resource base of turnaround providers (or potential providers) and to develop specific recommendations to deepen that resource.

Our work in each area will include the following components:

- Analysis of current Washington State policy and resulting practice in the field (as well as outcomes from those practices), including data and information from interviews and stakeholder group meetings.
- Examination of relevant national research, drawing from Mass Insight's growing resource clearinghouse of information on state intervention policy and practice in struggling schools.
- In-depth discussions with State Board of Education and OSPI staff.
- Development of initial policy recommendations and the vetting of those recommendations with selected partners and stakeholders (to be discussed with SBE staff) and then refinement based on feedback.

## **2. Organizing a Comprehensive State Turnaround Strategy**

Along with the policy blueprint, we plan to provide a range of additional guidance to the State Board of Education, along with tools that will assist its efforts to implement that blueprint. The ultimate forms this guidance will take are briefly described in the Deliverables section, below. Some aspects may end up becoming codified in the policies themselves, or in relevant regulatory changes; other aspects will help the Board answer questions from legislators and others on the nature and impact of the proposed policies. The reason for our emphasis here on implementation strategies is simple: it became clear to us, after our years of research on school intervention initiatives across the country, that establishing good policy is a critical beginning to successful school reform – but it is only that, a beginning. The impact of new state

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policy on school turnarounds in Washington State will be shaped by questions such as these, all of which will be the focus of our attention in this area of the Work Plan:

- In practical terms, where does the locus of decision-making about turnaround strategy lie in conducting the work – with the State, the district, the school, or the partner? If there is shared decision-making, how can it be clarified for all concerned?
- If the work is conducted in groups or clusters of schools, how can those clusters be created so that they provide purpose and meaning to the turnaround design and the implementation of the change?
- What is the specific role of a turnaround partner organization, and what is the expectation for that partner's continuing role following initial years of turnaround?
- What skill sets are needed at the state level to manage this kind of initiative, and where should management reside? (With the SBE? With OSPI? Jointly shared?)

### **3. Prepare Deliverables**

Mass Insight will prepare the following deliverables: A comprehensive blueprint for school turnaround, a state comprehensive turnaround strategy, presentation materials for Board members and others to use, assistance on legislative and budget proposals for 2009 session. A draft report will be due July 14<sup>th</sup> and a final report will be due September 9<sup>th</sup>.

### **4. Present to Board**

Mass Insight will share draft concepts at the June 19<sup>th</sup> Board System Performance Accountability work session and present the draft report at the July 23-24 Board meeting and the final report at the September 24-25 Board meeting.

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