



THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Governance | Accountability | Achievement | Oversight | Career & College Readiness

March 6, 2014

Randy Dorn
Superintendent of Public Instruction
Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
600 Washington Street SE
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Superintendent Dorn:

The State Board of Education (SBE) appreciates the ongoing collaboration with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) Office of Student and School Success on the development of the Synergy Accountability System. Mr. Andy Kelly and his team presented to the SBE and engaged in discussions with the Board in November 2013 and January 2014. The SBE appreciates that the state is positioned to implement a unified accountability system.

In accordance with the Board's statutory responsibility under E2SSB 5329 to recommend "approval or modifications of the system design by January 1, 2014", I wrote you on behalf of the Board on December 10, 2014. I am writing to you again to express the Board's recommendation for approval of the progress and direction of the development of the state accountability system. The Board feels there is additional work to continue to build the efficacy and alignment of the system as a whole, and the Board looks forward to continued collaboration with the Office of Student and School Success.

Areas of continued work to further develop a unified accountability system are listed and described below:

- The Board is impressed with OSPI's stated commitment to take the Synergy model to scale for all struggling schools in our state, in accordance E2SSB 5329 (2013). After reviewing the model, and learning how significantly the number of identified schools will increase as a result of serving all struggling schools—not just Title-eligible schools as before—the Board is interested in monitoring how the agency is able to respond to the growing needs for services, given the existing level of federal and state resources. It is important to the Board that the school identification process be seen as one that comes with significant assistance. Our ability to provide some basic level of value-added assistance to all identified schools will be an important consideration to the Board as we move forward.
- The Board has reviewed the Synergy model visuals and materials in some detail. Our review suggests that while the priorities and areas of focus articulated in the Synergy model and the accompanying Theory of Action are the correct ones (Transformational Teaching, and Courageous Leadership), collectively we would struggle to articulate to

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stakeholders how a school utilizing the Synergy model is experiencing an improvement process verifiably different from existing School Improvement Grant (SIG) turnaround models. The primary strategies articulated in the Synergy model (performance audit, data analysis, utilization of action-planning tool, community engagement, job-embedded professional development, etc.) as reflected in the System Design visual are, on some level, presumed to already be underway in schools implementing the federal SIG models. Our belief in the new Synergy model is premised on our faith in Superintendent Dorn and staff to leverage positive change in collaboration with local leaders. We look forward to monitoring and observing how the Synergy model is implemented to produce improved achievement for schools.

- The Board sees its role in this process as focusing primarily on student outcomes; in particular, how those outcomes are defined and measured. The Board continues to work on a framework for reviewing system performance, and looks forward to working with the Superintendent as we move forward. In defining desired outcomes for all of our struggling schools, we will need to remain consistent with the values of the revised Achievement Index—which is our primary means for evaluating school-level performance—and the Indicators of Educational System Health, now in statute—which are our primary means of measuring system-wide achievement. In particular, as we monitor the progress of our schools in improvement status, we need to stay focused on opportunity gaps, expressed both as proficiency gaps and as gaps in growth rates among our student subgroups.
- As the Board fulfills its joint responsibilities for the development of the accountability framework, and the implementation of the charter school initiative, there is an understanding that these two initiatives potentially have interplay. We wish to jointly develop with OSPI an understanding regarding how authorization of charter schools in Washington under Initiative 1240 creates the opportunity for schools to choose a charter school “restart” model option under existing ESEA regulations. Furthermore, a similar framework of understanding needs to exist for how charter schools graduate through the steps of the state’s accountability framework, given their unique authorization structure, and performance standards.

The SBE recognizes the work of the Office of Student and School Success in creating a system that meaningfully works to help schools raise student achievement. The Board looks forward to continuing to work with you and your staff on behalf of the students in Washington state.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kristina L. Mayer
Chair

cc: Andy Kelly, OSPI