



Rural Education Center

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To: State Board of Education

Thank you for being in Spokane for your July board meetings. I serve as the superintendent for the Davenport School District located 35 miles west of Spokane. We are a small and rural district serving just under 600 K-12 students. Our high school girls' basketball team won the state championship here in Spokane just a few months ago this but what I am most proud of is that they also were the state academic champions! I also serve as the director of the Rural Education Center, comprised of 70 small and rural districts from across the state as well as several educational organizations.

I wanted to speak briefly regarding some possible changes to the Achievement Index that you are considering.

On page 113 in your meeting packed of the document titled. "Update on the ASW Recommendations and Possible Changes to the Achievement Index", the following question is asked: "Is access to dual credit programs equitable?" That is a question that needs to be continued to be asked, now and in the future. I realize that dual credit is already a factor in the current achievement index but as you work on a new index, please consider the following:

- ✓ Access to dual credit programs varies widely across districts and increased access for ALL students needs to be supported and encouraged. However, please don't punish districts for having no or minimal dual credit offerings. Instead, provide support to those districts. Small & rural districts have many challenges with providing dual credit opportunities and the playing field is not equitable. I am fortunate to lead a district that offers 65.5 College in the High School credits. We also offer five AP courses for our students. This did not happen overnight. Some of our districts do not have the capacity, staff, resources, or ability to easily add dual credit opportunities. Please focus your efforts on helping these districts, not on shaming districts.
- ✓ It is somewhat ironic that, to my knowledge, there is no current statues that require districts to offer dual credit, yet this is a measure for the index.
- ✓ In the current index there are some challenges and issues regarding the scoring of dual credits...we offer a number of dual credit offerings, yet we received a lower score on the 2015-16 index than a nearby district that offers very few dual credit offerings. My high school principal has notified SBE technical staff about this concern. These bugs have to be fixed on the current index and on any new index!

I also have several concerns about the chronic absenteeism measure that apparently will be part of the new index. The numerator you are considering is that students with a least two full-day absences (excused and unexcused) for every 30 days—in other words, two absences per month. With all due respect, this is "nuts" and needs to be significantly changed. Is a school field trip or extra-curricular activity that is held during the day considered in this category? Will districts be punished for having students participate in school related activities? Here are some other issues to consider:

- ✓ Mumps outbreak?
- ✓ Weather related school closures?
- ✓ A student who is having to miss school for cancer treatments?
- ✓ Students who need to take time from school to attend funeral or other religious services?

High school credit is no longer tied to seat time. Instead, it is earned by demonstrating proficiency. Here are some questions to ponder:

- ✓ A student enrolled in an on-line ALE program is apparently exempt from the chronic absenteeism requirement but a student attending a regular school would not...is this fair and appropriate?

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- ✓ A student and her family arranges with her school for a pre-arranged absence to take a three-week family trip to Mexico. The student has been on the honor roll for three straight school years and her teachers have arranged with her to modify assignments and course work so that she can use this experience as part of her learning. Will this student's absence be harmful to the school in relation to the chronic absenteeism score?

I am not saying that regular school attendance is not important—it is! However, the education of our kids is much more than just the time spent in a school classroom on a given school day. Please be careful as you implement a chronic absenteeism measure—there may be some significant unintended consequences that could occur.

I recently shared my concerns with Gayle Pauley and Gil Mendoza just a couple of weeks ago during a presentation they gave at the WASA/AWSP conference. I also shared my concerns with Supt. Rydal yesterday. Chris stopped by the Davenport School District for a quick visit!

It is apparent that each one of you care deeply about our students and about improving the quality of education in every one of our districts. Thank you for your service. Please continue to debate, argue, and reflect on the pros and cons of implementing changes to the achievement index.

Thank you for all of the work you do to help improve our public schools. I did want to take another second and offer a special thank you to MJ Bolt for her outstanding service as a State Board of Education member. Her advocacy for our schools has been amazing!

Sincerely,

Jim Kowalkowski
Director- Rural Education Center
&Superintendent- Davenport School District