



NORTH THURSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Community Conversation Overview:

On October 15, 2024, the Board of Directors of North Thurston Public Schools (NTPS) hosted a Community Conversation titled “Accelerating the Future.” The primary focus of the event was to understand the various ways students can participate and become proficient in advanced academic opportunities, aligning with Strategic Plan Goal 4: Outcome d, which aims to expand and improve specialized course offerings for all students.

The evening began with a welcome from Board Director Esperanza Badillo-Diiorio, who set the stage for a productive and engaging conversation. Following this, Sarah Rich, the Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Services, provided an overview of the various accelerated opportunities available to students. These programs are designed to offer more rigorous academic options that support students in achieving their post-secondary education and/or career goals. The opportunities include Honors, Advanced Placement (AP), College in the High School (CiHS), Career and Technical Education (CTE) Dual Credit, and Running Start (RS).

After the presentation, Board Director Michelle Gipson led a panel discussion featuring professionals from diverse fields. The panel included a Workforce Development Coordinator from Sierra Pacific Industries, a Sheet Metal Journeyman and North Thurston High School (NTHS) Graduate, representatives from South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC), including the Director of K12 Partnerships and a Math Instructor, NTPS’s Director of Career & Technical Education (CTE), and a NTHS Counselor. These panelists provided insights into how education and industry collaborate to support student success, particularly through partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, and local industries.

The evening continued with a structured small group discussion facilitated by Board President Gretchen Maliska, where selected students, parents, and educators shared their experiences and insights related to accelerated learning opportunities. This portion of the conversation showcased how participants were particularly encouraged by the growth of advanced academic programs within the District.

The expansion of dual credit opportunities was celebrated as a critical advantage for students, allowing them to earn both high school and college credits, giving them a significant head start on post-secondary education and/or career goals. The support system in place for students, particularly from Career and Technical Education (CTE) Dual Credit, was another highlight. Parents and students shared stories of how District staff play a crucial role in helping students navigate challenging coursework and build confidence. Students also expressed enthusiasm for the opportunities these programs provide, particularly in developing skills such as time management, collaboration, and critical thinking, which are essential for success beyond high school.

Despite the positive developments, important questions and concerns were raised by participants, reflecting areas where further growth and clarification are needed. Participants emphasized the need for the District to ensure equitable access to advanced programs, focusing on providing opportunities for all students, particularly those historically underrepresented. Participants expressed the need for communication tools for both students and parents/caregivers to better explain how the college credit options work and the potential benefits for students pursuing post-secondary education and/or career paths.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

GRETCHEN MALISKA • TIFFANY SEVRUK • SARAH TRACY • ESPERANZA BADILLO-DIIORIO • MICHELLE GIPSON
EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES - EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Board Director Tiffany Sevruck moved us into small table-group discussions aimed at gathering additional insights from all participants. Community members were encouraged by the District's focus on inclusivity and efforts to remove barriers. The progress the District has made over the past five years in expanding college credit offerings was widely acknowledged, with many seeing it as a strong foundation for continued success. The stories shared illustrated how these opportunities are helping to prepare students for both academic achievement and career readiness.

Some participants noted that the process of ensuring credits are properly transferred can be challenging, and there was interest in seeing better coordination between high schools and post-secondary institutions to simplify this process and protect students' hard-earned credits. Participants also discussed how some students, while academically capable, may require additional support to demonstrate mastery of the material and reiterated the importance of providing differentiated teaching as a key factor in helping students succeed in these demanding courses.

Additionally, there was good conversation regarding the long-term use of dual credits once students leave high school. Participants wondered how often students fully utilize these credits after graduation and whether there could be more communication to ensure that students and parents are fully aware of how to apply them (and the value of them) in collaboration with post-secondary institutions. Expanding cross-crediting opportunities, such as allowing cultural electives or specialized classes to fulfill multiple academic requirements, was also raised as a potential area for growth.

At the conclusion of the table discussions, Board Director Sarah Tracy closed the event, summarizing the key takeaways and thanking the participants for their valuable contributions. Highlighting how the event was an important step in understanding how NTPS can continue to support Strategic Plan Goal 4: Outcome d, by ensuring that our community has understanding of the ways and value of earning college credit while still in high school.

Board Determination:

As a result of this Community Conversation, the Board's Determination is as follows:

- The Board commends the District for its progress in expanding advanced academic opportunities over the past five years. This growth has greatly benefited students with increased access to rigorous academic pathways and demonstrates that NTPS is a leader throughout the state in this area, as evidenced by the data.
- The Board directs the Superintendent to enhance communication strategies to better inform parents, students, and community regarding the scope and benefits of our college credit options, the process for accessing the courses, and the ways to utilize these credits for post-secondary education and/or career paths.
- The Board directs the Superintendent to review accelerated course options and remove barriers to participation by renaming courses to remove prerequisites, or perceived prerequisites, and increase underrepresented student groups, ensuring that all students can benefit from these rigorous offerings.