



MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
FROM: Greg Baker, Superintendent
DATE: April 7, 2021
SUBJECT: Monitoring Report for EL-6, Academic Standards and Practices

I certify that the following is accurate as of April 7, 2021. The reporting period is from April 10, 2019 to April 6, 2021.

Policy Type: Executive Limitation

Policy: EL-6 Academic Standards and Practices

Adopted: September 10, 2009; revised February 14, 2013 and July 6, 2017

Background Information: This is our report on Executive Limitation (EL) 6—Academic Standards and Practices. EL reports are annual, they often feature an update on work in progress, as well as an emphasis on “new” work. Given the situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not report to the board on EL-6 in the spring of 2020. As such, this report covers events occurring during the period from April of 2019 to the present day. Suffice to say a lot has occurred over this time!

- 1. The superintendent shall not fail to take all reasonable and prudent actions with respect to academic standards and practices that are typical for similar and highly effective organizations.**

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff have demonstrated reasonable efforts to implement state and content-area standards and research-based instructional practices.

Evidence of Compliance:

- *New:* The COVID-19 pandemic struck in March of 2020. Since that time, we have pivoted repeatedly in delivering instruction that aligns to standards but is delivered in different ways. This included moving the system to fully remote instruction initially in the spring of 2020, and then gradually bringing students back into hybrid (combination of in-person and remote) instruction.

In addition, the district stood up a virtual learning option through the purchase of the *Edgenuity* program at the secondary level and the *Accelerate Education* program at the elementary level for all families whose desire was to remain in a fully remote mode of schooling longer term. Finally, families desiring to move in the direction of a home-schooling arrangement had the option of choosing to enroll their students in the Bellingham Family Partnership Program (BFPP). BFPP enrollment swelled during this year to over 500 students.

- *New:* To help respond to potential learning loss due to the closure of schools in the spring of 2020, the district purchased and implemented two new standards-based solutions for online/remote use. We looked for tools that would help teachers learn about what their students know and are able to do, as well as supporting their continued learning at home and in child-care centers. *Lexia* for literacy and *DreamBox* for mathematics were supplemental tools (not to replace core curriculum) that were selected. *Lexia* tracks students' progress in literacy and compares the percentage of students working in grade level material over time. In each grade, K-5, the early data showed evidence of increasing percentages of students working on material that is at or above grade level, while the percentage of students working on material considered "below grade level" was decreasing. *DreamBox* tracks where students are in terms of predicted end of year performance in mathematics at each grade level. *DreamBox* data gathered at the end of the month of January 2021 revealed at third, fourth and fifth grade levels a high majority of students are predicted to be on track for this year. The fact that these two programs generate data in real-time has been a boon to teachers for assessing student progress in the areas of math and literacy.
- *Update:* Continued implementation of the 1:1 technology effort. With the need for younger students to access remote learning options, we quickly scaled up the purchase and implementation of devices for grades P-2 over the late summer and into the fall of 2020. All students were provided with a device by October 2020. We continue to look to standards and best practices in the field to support this effort, including maintaining a commitment to staffing support for the work with educational technology coaches in every school. The work of the coaches over the past year has been essential to helping teachers navigate the changing modes of instruction.
- *Update:* Promise K has continued to grow since our last report, now totaling eight sites across the elementary schools in the district. Student enrollments once again increased; we are currently serving approximately 124 students in the program, our largest group yet. Since we last reported, the state has relied on the example of Bellingham's model to establish a mandate to make this kind of experience available in other Washington state school districts.

2a. The superintendent shall not fail to implement best-practices for aligned and rigorous: (i) academic content and standards; (ii) curriculum and materials; (iii) world-class instruction; and (iv) appropriately differentiated curriculum, materials and instruction for all students.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff will provide ongoing professional development in support of the development and implementation of clearly defined standards, aligned assessments, high quality research-based instructional materials and innovative instructional strategies.

Evidence of Compliance:

- *New:* In summer of 2020 over 300 Bellingham teachers rallied to engage in the planning effort to prepare to open schools remotely. Led by district administrators, TOSAs and educational

technology coaches, plans were developed to open the year with aligned curricular units connected to standards in the content areas. Teachers began this implementation at each grade level in the fall of 2020. Teacher leaders designed system-wide professional learning around five critical areas of focus linked directly to The Bellingham Promise.

- *New:* Five common instructional modules linked to the five critical areas of focus noted in the previous point were developed and completed by all teachers prior to the start of the 2020-21 school year. The modules emphasized a focus on cognitive engagement, instructional coherence, learning environment, family engagement and student feedback. The planning and development effort continues at the writing of this report, with ongoing common unit development across the elementary and middle levels.
- *New:* Hybrid learning experiences have continued to evolve as we have brought more and more students back to in-person learning over the course of the 2020-21 schools. Educational technology coaches have been instrumental in designing ongoing professional learning experiences and providing direct support to help teachers navigate teaching in dual modalities.
- *New:* Planning and professional development efforts have been greatly enhanced through provision of Wednesday planning and professional development time. Wednesday afternoons throughout this current 2020-21 school year have included 90 minutes of professional development time alternating between cross-district professional learning and planning work and building-based professional learning opportunities.
- *New:* A committee process to examine and make a curriculum adoption recommendation in early literacy is well underway. The adoption would augment our core curriculum with additional curricular solutions that focus on phonics and phonemic awareness in the primary grades. In addition, committee work is beginning that will lead to a recommendation for a district-identified dyslexia screening instrument. This is part of a state mandate to ensure that all districts are implementing screening procedures to identify and support students with dyslexia.
- *Update:* Our district-wide efforts to continue progress on The Bellingham Promise strategy of equity, diversity and inclusion got a big new boost with the hiring of director Dr. Janis Velasquez-Farmer who is bringing her expertise in these areas to bear on a broad array of district efforts ranging from policy formulation and review to curriculum adoption and review and student disciplinary practices.
- *Update:* Mental health and wellness efforts, alongside of the teaching of recently adopted social-emotional curricula, continue to grow. Within the past year, our district hired a mental health specialist whose work is focused on supporting students with special needs in the area of mental health, as well as a mental health coordinator, Chris Cochran, who serves as a liaison to families and a bridge to various community mental health partners and providers.
- *Update:* Efforts to improve math instruction and learning continued over the period of this report. To keep the math improvement focus on the front burner, we have been engaged in inquiry to better understand aspects of leadership, teacher practices, students' experiences, curriculum/instructional materials, professional learning and other conditions that support high quality math instruction. The work was reported in greater detail in the earlier Ends 2.1, Part 1 report and has spanned from targeted professional learning for members of the leadership team, all the way to a focus on selected individual classroom teachers and small groups of students they identified for purposes of increasing math understanding at one grade level in one of our elementary schools.

2b. The superintendent shall not fail to periodically report on: (i) systemic instructional training and development activities that are expected to lead to increases in efficiency and effectiveness; and (ii) programs and other school-related activities implemented to develop and promote the well-being of the whole child consistent with Board Ends.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff will facilitate the use of multiple strategies to periodically communicate training and development activities that increase efficiency and effectiveness and promote whole-child initiatives.

Evidence of Compliance:

- In reporting on our identified district outcomes, we continue to seek out evidence that sheds light on our work in new and more informative ways. Due to the fact that standardized state testing was halted last spring, our data sources for Ends 2.1 shifted to include local measures. Ends 2.1 reports were shared at school board meetings this year. The Ends 1, 2 and 3 combined report is scheduled for presentation at the May 12, 2021 board meeting. Spring reports from the 2019-20 school year were suspended due to the pandemic. Dates and times for the 2020-21-year follow:
 - Ends 2.1, Part 1: Feb. 10, 2021
 - Ends 2.1, Part 2: March 10, 2021
 - Ends 1, 2 and 3 combined report: To be presented May 12, 2021

In addition, we have included the following opportunities for the board to hear from schools and community groups:

- Monthly visits by school board members to schools to learn about the work in our schools consistent with the Ends outlined in The Bellingham Promise. Schools visited since we last reported included:
 - Squalicum May 7, 2019
 - Wade King June 4, 2019
 - Lowell Oct. 1, 2019
 - Bellingham Nov. 5, 2019
 - Alderwood Dec. 3, 2019
 - Shuksan Feb. 4, 2020
 - In-person visits have been suspended since March 2020 due to the pandemic.
- Periodic linkage meetings with targeted community groups that enabled school board members to meet face-to-face with stakeholders to listen and learn about student and family needs in relation to the system's efforts to support learning for all students continued to be a significant effort this year. Community linkages since we last reported included:
 - Community linkage: Student leaders (May 29, 2019)
 - Community linkage: Student roundtable special meeting (Nov. 6, 2019)
 - Community linkage: Exceptional students (Jan. 29, 2020)
 - Community linkage: Student roundtable special meeting (March 4, 2020)

- All school board members typically participate in regular school activities and programs at their adopted schools and share their learning publicly at school board meetings; these efforts have been truncated since the advent of the pandemic in March of 2020.
- The superintendent offers a report at regular public school board meetings on topics directly regarding the instructional program to keep the school board apprised of initiatives underway in the district that serve to promote the improvement of teaching and learning. Examples of reports since the last writing of this report include:
 - Update on various aspects of the district's response to the pandemic (a major emphasis at every public board meeting since March 18, 2020)
 - Update on capital projects (Nov. 20, 2019, March 18, 2020, Oct. 14, 2020, Feb. 10, 2021)
 - Update on high school grading practices (April 22, 2020, May 2020)
 - Update on student enrollment (Sept. 16, 2020)
 - Update on Promise K (Feb. 10, 2021)

2c. The superintendent shall not fail to encourage reasoned instructional innovation.

Interpretation: Through the direction provided by the superintendent, the administrative team and staff will design and implement educational programs that respond to the diverse and ever-changing needs of our students.

Evidence of Compliance:

The work to invent and discover innovative instructional strategies was imbued with new meaning over the past twelve months in our school system. To help our teachers, students and families thrive during the pandemic, several new opportunities have emerged this year, including:

- *New:* P-2 computing devices went into the hands of our primary grade students to ensure they had access to remote learning opportunities during the early part of the 2020-21 school year. This implementation was supported heavily by the work of Executive Director Kurt Gazow and the whole staff within educational technology. Device deployment in the primary grades happened well ahead of schedule and was prompted by the onset of the pandemic.
- *New:* Creative solutions to bringing students back to school safely continue to the writing of this report. We began with the return to school of preschool through primary grade students back in November of 2020, and since that time the system has experienced eight "first days of school" as we made it possible to continue to bring back grade levels by grade. Involved in this massive effort are innovative solutions to space, safety, master scheduling, transportation, cross school collaboration between teachers in content areas and robust efforts to ensure proper personal protective equipment is in use in all classrooms, schools and office settings.
- *New:* Instructional methods involving the use of Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Seesaw and other technology solutions went from brand new to many teachers back in the spring of 2020 (who remembers the debates about Zoom vs. Teams?) to part of our daily, common practice within a few weeks. Teachers from the intermediate grades through high school have figured out how to make the best of a hybrid learning situation in which they are teaching some students in person while others are logged in online. This learning continues at the writing of this report.
- *New:* Exploration of dual language program possibilities ramped up during the 2019-20 school year. A committee led by Director Amy Carder and Harvard resident Lance Huffman conducted research into different possible configurations for a dual language approach to learning and presented a white paper summary of that work to Dr. Baker and the executive team for

consideration. This work went on temporary hiatus when the virus struck.

- **Update:** Assistive technology solutions have continued to grow and permeate our work. Amy Fleischer, our new Assistive Technology Support Specialist, was hired to replace Linda Schleef who retired this past year. Amy has continued to expand our district's repertoire of new and innovative solutions used to help students engage in meaningful ways through remote connections during the pandemic. This includes the use of picture-based internet technologies that allow non-verbal students to engage productively in classroom activities and their own individualized education program (IEP) meetings.

2d. The superintendent shall not fail to provide an affirmative (or negative) statement the following actions have been taken: (i) involve stakeholder groups in substantive academic standards and practice decisions; (ii) provide access and utilization of electronically delivered curriculum, materials and instruction; and a periodic systematic review of academic content, standards, curriculum, materials, and (iii) instruction, involving stakeholders, has taken place to ensure continuous improvement and adherence to best practices.

Interpretation: None in question.

Evidence of Compliance: (Affirmative Statements)

Efforts to continue to seek advice from our community members in the various stakeholder groups are well-established. These include formal (ongoing) structures for stakeholder feedback, as well as informal structures that invite feedback from our various community members. Formal structures include:

- The Bellingham Public Schools Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS) focused on engaging parent representatives from each of the district's schools in review of curricular and programmatic directions underway in the district has continued to meet monthly under the leadership of parent co-chairs. At each meeting, the superintendent's report focuses on providing information and soliciting feedback on various aspects of the ongoing work of the district. Many recent meetings have focused on the issues associated with the pandemic and the district's response and were conducted remotely via Zoom.
 - *Topics covered since May of 2019 included:*
 - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) update; Boundary/Attendance Area update (May 23, 2019)
 - Food services update (Sept. 12, 2019)
 - Safety update; EDI update (Oct. 24, 2019)
 - Mental health/substance abuse prevention/sexual health education update (Dec. 12, 2019)
 - Elementary equity project - Bellingham Public Schools Foundation (BPSF) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs); homeless youth update (Jan. 23, 2020)
 - Tour of Alderwood and Parkview construction sites (Feb. 27, 2020)
 - Questions, concerns, silver linings of the COVID-19 emergency school closure (May 29, 2020 Zoom)
 - Successes/challenges students are experiencing in the remote learning environment (Oct. 5, 2020 Zoom)
 - Social emotional learning and mental health support (Dec. 10, 2020 Zoom)
 - Equity, diversity and inclusion panel (Jan. 14, 2021 Zoom)

- COVID update/transitioning more students back to school in person (Feb. 11, 2021 Zoom)
- Visit from school principals at each level/breakout rooms (March 11, 2021 Zoom)
- The Bellingham Public Schools Student Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (SACS) focused on engaging student representatives from each of the district's four high schools in review of programmatic directions underway in the district has continued to meet monthly under the leadership of Superintendent Baker. Recent meetings focused heavily on the student experience during the pandemic, and feedback on remote and hybrid approaches to learning.
 - *2020-21 Meetings*
 - Oct. 7, 2020, via Zoom
 - Nov. 4, 2020, via Zoom
 - Dec. 9, 2020, via Zoom
 - Jan. 6, 2021, via Zoom
 - Feb. 3, 2021, via Zoom
- The Highly Capable Learning (HCL) Parent Advisory Committee has continued to meet regularly under the leadership of Executive Director Trina Hall, Director Keith Schacht and Teacher on Special Assignment Jenny Lawrence.
 - *Topics covered during 2019-21 included:*
 - HCL internal program evaluation (May 29, 2019)
 - Social emotional learning (Nov. 26, 2019)
 - Input on HCL program goals; achievement/growth data for BPS HCL students; focus on anxiety with Dr. Sarah White (Jan. 7, 2020)
 - cancelled due to COVID (March 17, 2020)
 - cancelled due to COVID (May 19, 2020)
 - Program update; Promise Tomorrow initiative; middle school math (Dec. 16, 2020 Zoom)
 - Enrichment opportunities in our schools and community; mental health resources; return to in-person learning (Feb. 17, 2021 Zoom)
- Frequent written and video communications from Superintendent Baker to the entire Bellingham community in recent months heavily focused on updating the community on our response to the COVID situation, and on seeking input from the broader community through repeated open town hall meetings, email and board listening posts.

Statement of Compliance: The superintendent is **in compliance** with EL-6 Academic Standards and Practices.