MANAGEMENT ANALYSIS & PLANNING, INC.

Examining Washington's Opportunities to Learn: Exit Exam

Part I

Submitted to the Washington Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission

Richard C. Seder

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2925 Spafford Street, Suite E Davis, CA 95616 ♦ (530) 753-3130 ♦ map@edconsultants.com

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Washington is one of dozens of states moving forward with its standards-based education to improve the education of all students in the state by implementing a high school exit exam. Without the exit exam, 66 percent of Washington high school students graduate high school. In 2004, 39 percent of 10th-grade students did not pass one or more sections of the exit exam at the passing standard requiring a "proficient" score on all three subject-area sections, a result, if unchanged with increases due to student motivation and re-tests, would further lower the already low graduation rate in Washington. Though alternative passing standards are being evaluated, the current (and trend) pass rates, no matter the standard, leave much to be desired and should act to get the attention of educators, policymakers, and the public at large.

Pass rates should be expected to increase as passage requirements become real to students (student motivation) and overall pass rates will undoubtedly be higher upon the final retake in 2008 given the experiences in other states. However, the standards for a high school diploma are being raised which leads to opportunity-to-learn (OTL) issues being raised. Do students and educators have the resources available to them to meet the standards instituted by the state?

There are several OTL strategies available to educators: schedule adjustments, curriculum alignment and reform, professional development, remediation through out-of-school (OST) programs, and comprehensive school reform (CSR), to name a few. Washington has done well to provide the funding opportunities, through state and federal funds, to allow schools and school districts to pursue the OTL strategies of their choice. However, it is not entirely clear how effective those funding programs have been to date.

What becomes more difficult for state and local policymakers in choosing successful OTL strategies is the lack of conclusive evidence of the effectiveness of initiatives at the secondary level, in Washington and in locales around the nation. Most documented initiatives have taken the early-intervention approach, serving elementary schools and, to a lesser extent, middle schools. Though there may be some demonstrated success in these programs, the ability to generalize those effects to secondary schools remains speculative.

Without the exit exam, Washington policymakers should be alarmed at the low graduation rates of its secondary school students and should be prepared to act immediately on this fact alone. With low passing rates threatening to further lower the graduation rate, Washington policymakers should begin to explore a variety of remediation and reform initiatives to address the problems facing secondary schools.

However, little is known about the effectiveness of existing remediation and reform initiatives (and funding) in the state at the secondary level. As Washington policymakers prepare to raise the bar for students by implementing an exit exam, rather than "add on" entirely new, large-scale programs to assist secondary schools, a more prudent strategy would be to take inventory of existing OTL initiatives being implemented across the state, determine the effectiveness of those initiatives, and move immediately to experiment with innovative pilot programs across the state using existing funds in those schools that have had the least success with their current OTL initiatives.

As all current and new OTL initiatives are aggressively evaluated, the state can then explore how to bring those successful programs to scale, either with the reallocation of existing dollars or with new dollars, if deemed necessary. Just as students are being held accountable for their performance, schools and school districts should be held accountable to the public for creating and implementing quality instructional programs that provide students with a full opportunity to learn. Without prescribing any particular programs or OTL strategies because of the lack of quality supporting research, MAP recommends that the state move to experiment with a wide range of OTL initiatives aimed at improving student performance. Pilot programs should be targeted, first, to those schools with the lowest performance, prioritizing the need for change for those students most at risk of not graduating by passing the WASL, though all OTL programs should face the same scrutiny of proving their effectiveness to students.

II. INTRODUCTION

The Washington Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission (A+ Commission) was created by the Washington Legislature in 1999 to provide oversight of the state's evolving accountability system. Part of that accountability system is a high school exit exam first administered in the 10th grade. Students in the class of 2008 will be the first class required to pass the three subject-matter portions of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) – Reading, Mathematics, and Writing – and the class of 2010 will be required to pass an additional section in science as a condition of graduation.

An overarching issue facing the A+ Commission, the Legislature, and the students and educators in Washington's public schools is what is considered "passing" in order to graduate. In 2004, the Washington Legislature set the passing standard for students at the "Proficient" level, Level 3, in all subject areas. The Legislature followed this action by directing the A+ Commission consider alternative models of passing. The A+ Commission, in its May 10th meeting, narrowed the number of options under consideration to four, including the standard set by the Legislature. The four options include: A) Students must reach a "proficient" score or above, Level 3 according to current WASL standards in each subject, in all subject areas; B) Students must reach a "basic" score (Level 2) or above in each subject; C) Students must reach a "proficient" score or above in any two subjects and at least "basic" in one subject-area assessment; and D) Students must reach a "proficient" score or above in any one subject and at least "basic" in the other two subject-area assessments.[1]

Of concern to the A+ Commission are the current pass rates under all four options. According to 2004 WASL results, 39 percent of all students score "proficient" or above in all three subjects, the standard set by the Washington Legislature in 2004. When disaggregated by race and ethnicity, 44 percent of white and 47 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander students met the passing standard while 16 percent of Hispanics, 14 percent of African Americans, and 20 percent of Native Americans met the passing standards under Option A. The passing rates for students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or special education had passing rates of 4.6 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively.[2] Title-I eligible students had passing rates of 23 percent.

[1] These options considered for the high school classes of 2008 and 2009 that will only be required to take three subject-area WASL assessments.
[2] Results are 2004 WASL results provided by the A+ Commission.

The overall passing rates for Option B, Option C, and Option D were higher at 60 percent, 54 percent, and 59 percent, respectively. When disaggregated, the pattern is similar under each option as seen in Option A with white and Asian/Pacific Islander students passing at slightly higher rates than the overall average and Hispanic, African American, and Native American students scoring lower than the overall average, along with students identified as Title I eligible, English Language Learners, and special education.

Given the passing rates under all four options being considered, the A+ Commission hired Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. (MAP) to provide them with research-based and up-to-date information, analyses, and recommendations for programmatic and fiscal efforts that may need to be undertaken by school districts and the State of Washington to give students in the class of 2008 and beyond reasonable opportunities to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to meet certificate of academic achievement graduation requirements. In particular, the A+ Commission desired an analysis of current state initiatives to increase the number of high school students meeting the state standards for graduation, a review of the existing literature on high school academic strategies initiated by schools, districts, and states.

The results of this analysis resulted in a two-part final report. The first part of the final report describes the current condition in Washington – the accountability system and student performance – and provides a general discussion about the different opportunities to learn often considered to be necessary in a standards-based environment. The first part of the final report concludes with a summary of the available research on these opportunities-to-learn initiatives. The second part of the final report will summarize different opportunity-to-learn initiatives undertaken by other states and school districts and how much similarly devised initiatives would cost in Washington. This second part will serve as a guide to Washington policymakers as they explore providing opportunities to learn to their secondary school students by considering the experiences in other locales.

III. STATE OF WASHINGTON ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM

A. Comprehensive Accountability System

In 1993, the State of Washington began establishing a comprehensive, standards-based public education system. The purpose of Washington's accountability system is to improve student learning and student achievement of the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). These EALRs articulate the state's expectations, learning standards, and benchmarks in grades 4, 7, and 10. Content frameworks were subsequently developed to provide grade-level guidance with specific learning standards for students in grades K-10. Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) were developed to clarify the skills and strategies all students need to demonstrate proficiency in each content area. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) then measures whether students have met these standards.[3]

The accountability system, using WASL, measures student learning and achievement towards EALR and GLE standards in grades 4, 7, and 10 in English/language arts (E/LA), mathematics,

[3] "Washington State's Essential Academic Learning Requirements, Mathematics, K-10 Grade Level Expectations: A New Level of Specificity," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, www.k12.wa.us.

and writing. Student results on WASL reading and math are reported in one of four categories, Level 1 (Below Basic), Level 2 (Basic), Level 3 (Proficient), and Level 4 (Advanced). Results on the writing portion are reported as either "Meeting Standard" or "Not Meeting Standard." As the accountability system continues to evolve internal to the state and in response to the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements, additional learning standards and WASL tests will be developed and implemented across more grades.[45]

B. 10th-Grade Exit Exam

As part of the accountability system, the 10th-grade WASL will serve as the state's high school exit exam. That is, passage of the reading, math, and writing sections of the 10th-grade WASL will be a condition of earning the Certificate of Academic Achievement (CAA) beginning with the class of 2008.[6] The class of 2008 will first take the 10th-grade WASL in 2006, the spring of their sophomore year. Beginning in 2010, students will also be required to pass the science portion of the WASL. The state is also preparing to develop alternative options to earn the CAA beyond the initial WASL scores including allowing students four opportunities to retake all or portions of the 10th-grade WASL that they did not pass, creating an appeals process or an alternative assessment to demonstrate required skills and knowledge, and providing accommodations to students identified as English Language Learners (ELL) or special education.[7] Providing multiple retakes, an appeals process, alternative assessments, and special accommodations is similar to policies pursued in other states with exit-exam requirements.[8]

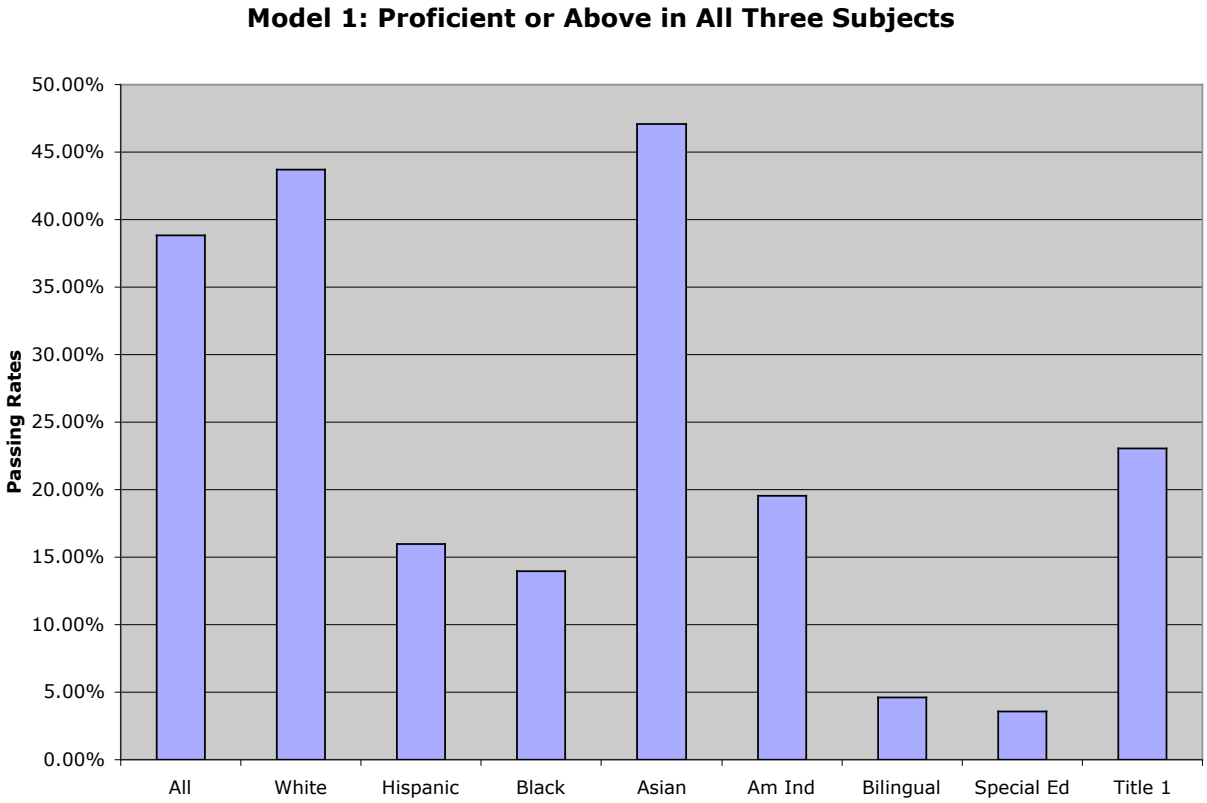
An issue that remains to be determined is what constitutes "passing" to earn the CAA. The default option that currently exists is for students to achieve scale scores of at least 400 on the reading and math portions of the 10th-grade WASL and a score of at least 17 on the writing portion of the WASL. These scale scores equate to the "Proficient" or "Level 3" achievement levels. This model being considered by the A+ Commission is considered Option A (Model 1).

C. 2003-0410th-Grade WASL Results

Results from the 2004 administration of the WASL showed that nearly 39 percent of 10th graders scored at the "proficient" level or higher (Levels 3 or 4) in all three subjects (Option A). Figure 1 shows the passing rates of Washington 10th graders as a whole and disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

[4] For a discussion about all NCLB requirements, go to http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/index.html.
[5] For instance, science learning standards have been developed and student learning and achievement have been assessed through WASL in grades 8 and 10.
[6] As part of 3ESHB 2195 as signed by the Governor, March 18, 2004.
[7] "Earning the Certificate of Academic Achievement: *Mastering the basic skills needed for life in the 21st century*," Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington, http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2004documents/CertificateAcademicAchievementsummary.doc.
[8] "State High School Exit Exams: A Maturing Reform," Center on Education Policy, August 2004, Washington, D.C.

Figure 1: Option A (Model 1) of Considered Passing Standards



Source: Washington A+ Commission.

White and Asian/Pacific Islander students passed at levels higher than the overall average at 44 percent and 47 percent, respectively. African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, however, passed at rates much lower than the overall average at 14 percent, 16 percent, and 20 percent, respectively. Finally, students classified as English Language Learners – those considered less-than-fluent in the English language – and special education passed at the lowest rates at 4.6 percent and 3.6 percent, respectively. Just over 23 percent of those students eligible for Title I services passed under this model.

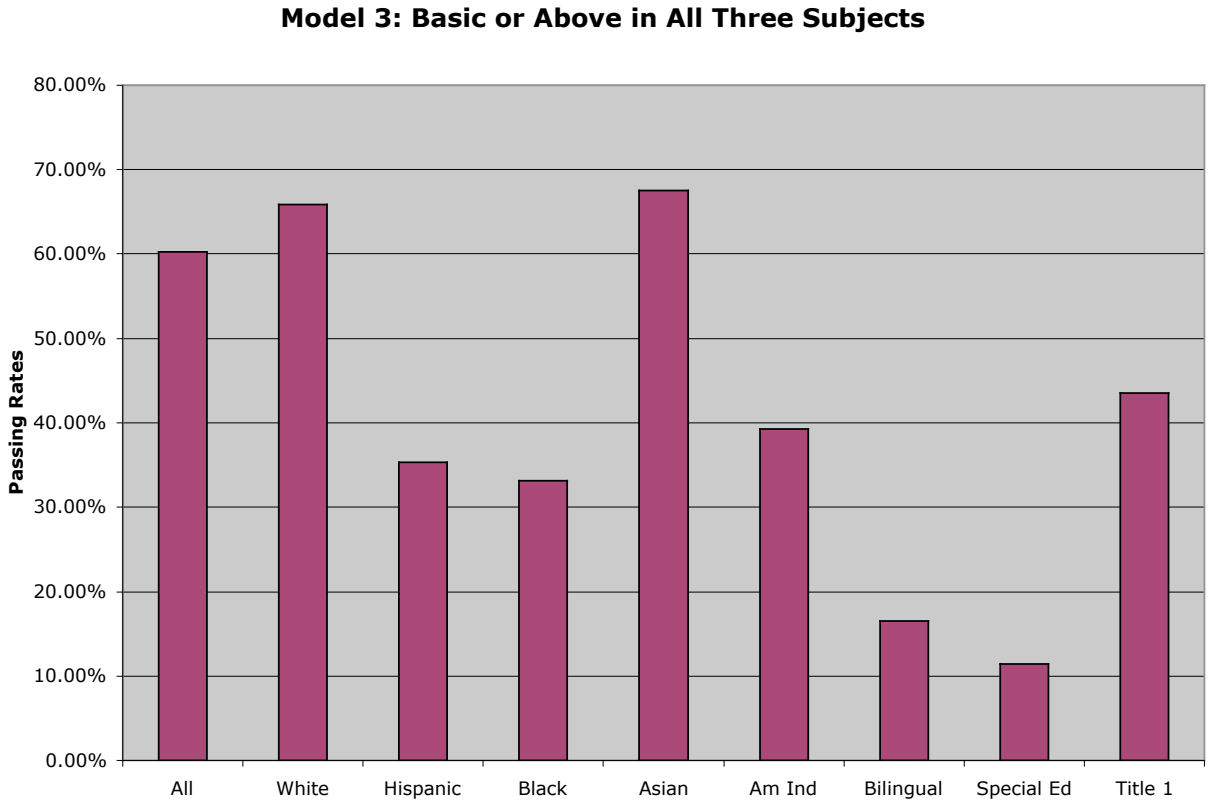
D. Alternative Models of Passing

The Legislature, in setting the standard of passing at the "proficient" level on all subject areas, also directed the A+ Commission to explore alternative models of passing. The A+ Commission narrowed the number of alternative models to three for passing the 10th-grade WASL for the CAA.[9] These three alternative models of passing adjust the standards that students must achieve in order to graduate. Those models having multiple scoring standards are flexible in not specifying which subject-area section must be achieved with any specific standard.

[9] The Washington Legislature enacted Model 1 (proficient or above in all three subject areas) to be the passing standard in 2004. However, the Legislature directed the A+ Commission to consider a variety of scoring models. The A+ Commission analyzed more than a dozen alternative options for graduation standards, but narrowed the options to four at its May 10, 2004 meeting.

Option B (Model 3) would require students to achieve at the "basic" level or above (Level 2, 3, or 4) on all three sections of the WASL. Figure 2 shows the passing rates given this standard.

Figure 2: Option B (Model 3) of Considered Passing Standards

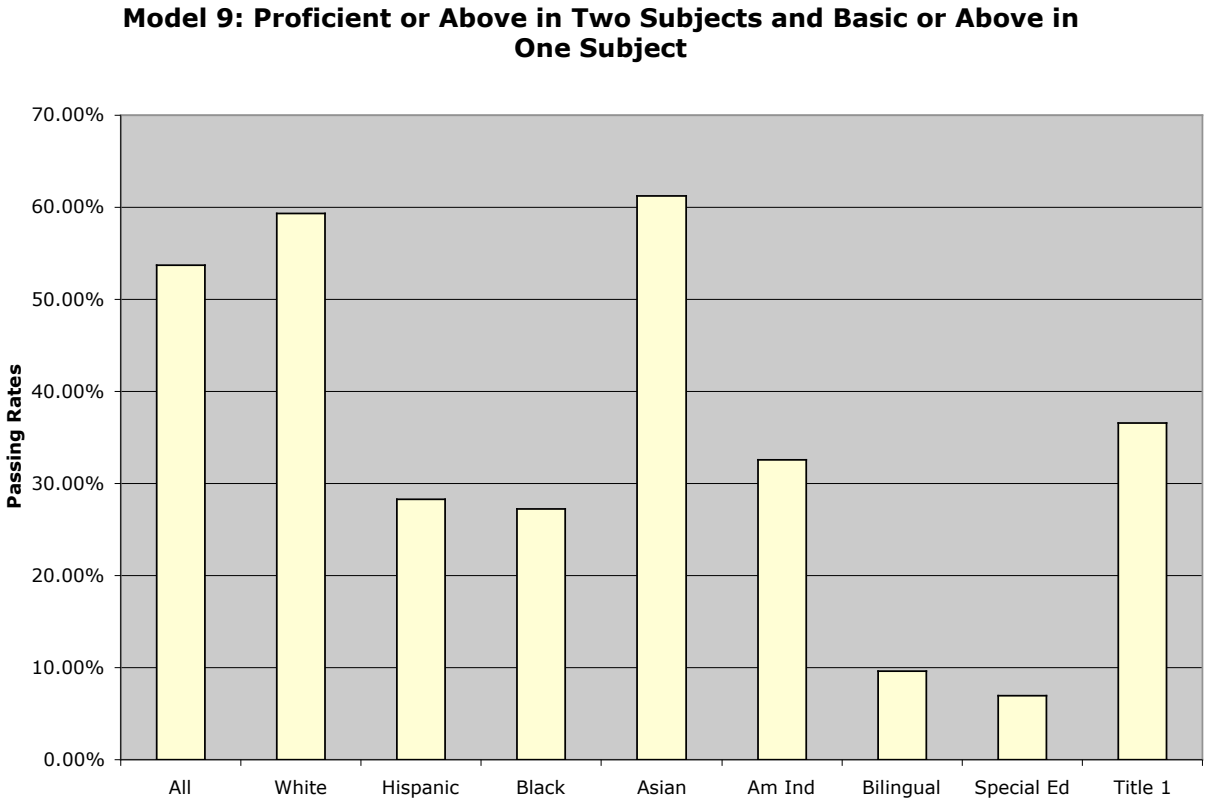


Source: Washington A+ Commission.

Under Option B, 60 percent of all 10th-grade students would score at least "basic" on all three sections of the 2003-04 WASL. The disaggregated passing rates follow the same pattern as in Option A with white and Asian/Pacific Islander students passing at rates higher than the overall average, 66 percent and 67 percent, respectively, and African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students passing at lower rates 33 percent, 35 percent, and 39 percent, respectively.

A third option being considered by the A+ Commission is Option C (Model 9). Option C would require students to score at the "proficient" level or higher (Level 3 or 4) on two of three subject-area sections and at least at the "basic" level (Level 2) on the third section. Figure 3 shows the passing rates given this standard.

Figure 3: Option C (Model 9) of Considered Passing Standards

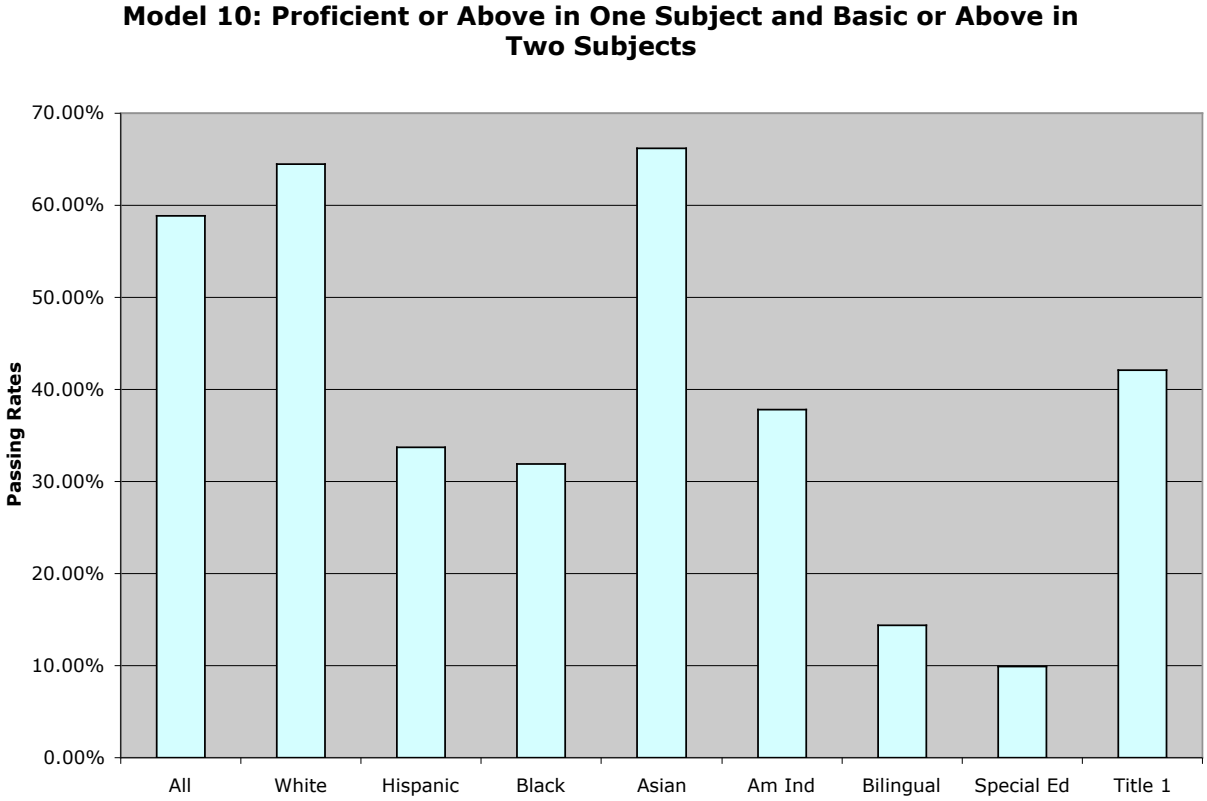


Source: Washington A+ Commission.

Under Option C, 54 percent of all 10th-grade students would score at least "proficient" on two of three subject-area sections and at least "basic" in the third section of the 2003-04 WASL. The disaggregated passing rates follow the same pattern as in Options A and B with white and Asian/Pacific Islander students passing at rates higher than the overall average, 59 percent and 61 percent, respectively, and African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students passing at lower rates 27 percent, 28 percent, and 33 percent, respectively.

The last option being considered by the A+ Commission is Option D (Model 10). Option D would require students to achieve at the "proficient" level or higher (Level 3 or 4) on one subject-area section and at the "basic" level or higher (Level 2, 3, or 4) on the other two sections. Figure 4 shows the passing rates given this standard.

Figure 4: Option D (Model 10) of Considered Passing Standards



Source: Washington A+ Commission.

Under Option D, 59 percent of all 10th-grade students would score at least "proficient" on one of three subject-area sections and at least "basic" in the other two sections of the 2003-04 WASL. The disaggregated passing rates follow the same pattern as in Options A, B, and C with white and Asian/Pacific Islander students passing at rates higher than the overall average, 65 percent and 66 percent, respectively, and African-American, Hispanic, and Native American students passing at lower rates 32 percent, 34 percent, and 38 percent, respectively.

In all four considered options, minority students perform at levels below those of white and Asian/Pacific Islander students. Additionally, in all four scenarios, students identified as "Bilingual" or English Language Learners and those identified as special education had the lowest passing rates of the disaggregated groups. Students eligible for Title I services also had lower-than-average passing rates, ranging from 23 percent in Option A (Model 1) to 44 percent in Option B (Model 3). Interestingly, the results in Option B (at least "basic" in all three subject-area sections) and Option D (at least "proficient" in one subject-area section and at least "basic" in the other two sections) are extremely similar.

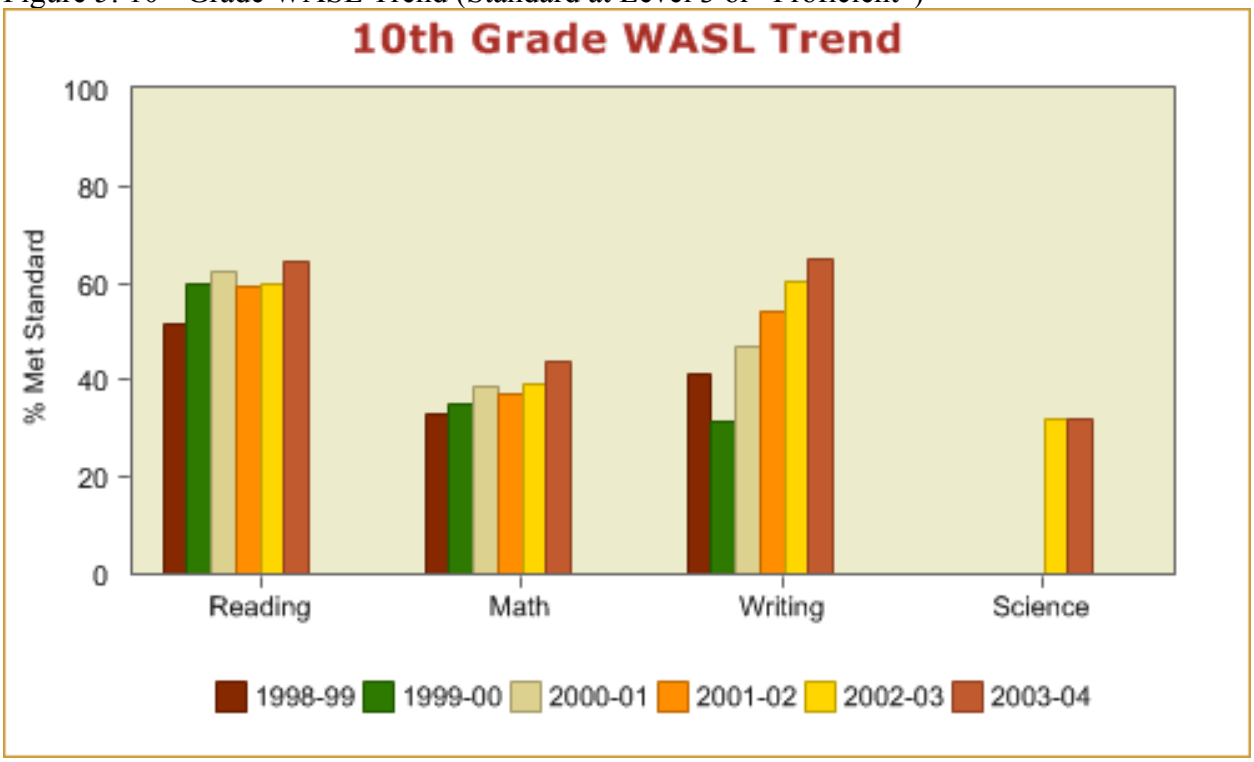
E. WASL Trends

One reason for the low overall passing rates is due to the low passing rates exhibited on the math section of the 10th-grade WASL. In 2003-04, 68.9 percent of the students taking the test scored at the "proficient" level or higher on the reading section, 70.9 percent met the standard in writing, whereas only 46.8 percent of students scored at the "proficient" level or higher on the math

section. These are improvements over 2002-03 results of 64.9 percent, 66.4 percent and 42.5 percent meeting the standard in the three subject areas, respectively.[10] This one-year increase in scores may be attributed to WASL scores being reported on student transcripts for the first time in 2003-04, a result of increased student motivation. However, a one-year increase in passing rates should not be seen as a definitive increase in trends as scores have increased and decreased from year to year. Of note, however, is that a lower proportion of students, overall were classified as "not tested" in 2004 than in 2003, but a larger number of students were categorized as "refused" in 2004 than 2003.

Over time, the proportions of students scoring at the "proficient" level or higher in reading and math have changed little since 1998-99. The proportion of students meeting the standard in writing, however, has increased steadily since 1999-2000. Figure 5 illustrates the trend since 1998-99 in all 10th-grade WASL subject-area sections.

Figure 5: 10th-Grade WASL Trend (Standard at Level 3 or "Proficient")



Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington, http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Reports/WASLcurrent.aspx?schoolID=1&reportlevel=State&year=2000-01&cat=1.

[10] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington, http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Reports/WASLcurrent.aspx?schoolID=1&reportlevel=State&year=2000-01&cat=1. The passage rates reported here are the percent of students meeting the standard (Level 3 or above) excluding those that did not take the test (either because the student was absent, refused to take the test, or some other reason). Including those that did not take the test in the denominator decreases the passing rates.

One reason that passing rates in math may be lower than passing rates in reading and writing as well as being stagnant over time might be attributed to a disconnect between WASL test items and the curriculum standards (EALRs and GLEs). A report to The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in 2002 by SRI International reviewed the WASL math sections for grades 7 and 10. One of the conclusions reported to OSPI was that, though the WASL was well aligned with the standards as a whole, students in the 10th grade had more difficulty answering those items that did not match state standards well.[11] SRI International also noted that, at the time, there was an imbalance of questions in testing the standards. Depending on the level of difficulty of those standards over-represented or under-represented may have an impact on WASL scores at the 10th grade. According to OSPI officials, further study is being pursued regarding the alignment of math standards to the 10th-grade WASL.

G. Lessons From Other States

According to the Center on Education Policy, 20 states will have mandatory exit exams in place for 2004-05.[12] Another five states (including Washington) have current plans to phase in their exit exams by 2009.

1. Initial Pass Rates

The initial pass rates in those states with exit exams in place range from 65 percent to 85 percent. Those states whose exit exams have not yet become conditions for graduation tended to have lower initial pass rates, Washington being the lowest at 34 percent (given Option A, Model 1 standards). The Center on Education Policy report indicated that student motivation might play a significant factor in those initial pass rates. According to a study by Educational Service District 101 in Washington, only 47 percent of 11th graders in the class of 2004 said that they did their best work when they took the WASL in the previous year.[13]

In Massachusetts, for example, proportion of students meeting the exit-exam standards on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) jumped measurably once the prospect of withholding diplomas became real to students in the class of 2003. In 2000, 66 percent of 10th-grade students in Massachusetts (the class of 2002) passed the English/Language Arts section of the MCAS and 55 percent passed the math section of the MCAS. In 2001, 82 percent of 10th-grade students (class of 2003) passed the English/Language Arts section of the MCAS and 75 percent passed the math section on their initial testing.[14] From 1998 to 2000, passing rates on both MCAS sections were fairly constant, similar to the constant scores exhibited in Washington. Clearly, student motivation played a significant factor in the dramatic increase in initial pass rates in Massachusetts.

Similar increases were seen in Texas where the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) became a condition for graduation in 2004. Initial pass rates for all students in 2004 were 85 percent in math and 87 percent in English/Language Arts. Initial pass rates in 2003, the

[11] "A Review of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning in Mathematics: Grades 7 and 10," SRI International, November 30, 2002.
[12] Center on Education Policy (2004).
[13] "Opportunity To Learn in Washington," Educational Service District 101, February 2003.
[14] Results compiled from MCAS results from 1998 to 2004 found at http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/results.html.

year prior to the test becoming a condition for graduation, were 68 percent in math and 69 percent in English/Language Arts. Again, 16 and 18 percentage point gains in a single year might exhibit the effects of strong student motivation on initial pass rates.[15]

Many states, Massachusetts and Texas included, plan to increase the exit-exam standards required for graduation over time as students and educators meet the challenges presented to them successfully. It should be noted that the current Massachusetts standard for passing is at their Level 2, or "Needs Improvement," similar to Washington's "Basic" level. The proportions of students scoring at "Basic" or above in Washington in 2002-03 are similar to Massachusetts initial pass rates in 2000, prior to the MCAS becoming a requirement for a diploma. Given the experiences of exit exams in other states, it would not be unprecedented for Washington to adopt one of the alternative WASL passing standards for graduation as an interim step to adopting tougher standards over time.

2. Cumulative Pass Rates

The 10th-grade WASL is not yet a requirement for graduation; therefore there have been no retakes by 11th-grade and 12th-grade students. Like other states, Washington will allow up to four retakes of those WASL sections not initially passed. Cumulative pass rates tend to rise with time because of test and content familiarity among other reasons. Though Washington's initial pass rates are low in comparison to initial passage rates in other states, the state can expect cumulative pass rates to increase over time.

In states reporting cumulative pass rates to the Center on Education Policy, none reported more than 10 percent of students being denied a diploma for failure to meet exit-exam standards. Additionally, many states, like Washington, provide for one or both of the following: an appeals process if the exit exam is failed or an alternative assessment, particularly for those students identified as English Language Learners or special education.

An important note for Washington policymakers is the discussion surrounding how cumulative passing rates should be computed. Most states compute the cumulative passing rates by dividing the number of students who have passed according to the exit-exam standards by the number of grade 12 students in the state. This may paint a misleading picture in that there is attrition from the 9th grade through the 12th grade, mainly in the form of dropouts. However, as summarized in the Center on Education Policy report, there is little research base to directly link the presence of exit exams to increased incidences of dropping out by students. This will have to be closely studied in Washington, as well as other states, to determine if the presence of the exit exam as a requirement for graduation will significantly alter the pattern of dropping out that already exists in Washington schools.

[15] Center on Education Policy (2004), p. 36.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

Washington's 10th-grade WASL passing rates, no matter how defined, are lower than the passing rates of other states with implemented exit exams and its trend of scores has been stagnant for several years. How much of this can be attributed to student motivation, teacher experience in a standards-based environment, and/or proper test development and alignment cannot be clearly determined.

Assuming the state adopted Option B (Model 3), where students would be required to score at the "Basic" level or above on all three subject-area sections, and experienced a similar increase in initial pass rates as Massachusetts or Texas once the exit exam became a requirement (approximately 15-20 percentage points), this would still leave approximately 15-25 percent of students not fully meeting the WASL passing requirements on their initial attempt.

On the other end of the spectrum of assumptions, assuming the state remained steadfast in its call for high standards for all students and retained Option A (Model 1), where students would be required to score at the "Proficient" level or above on all three subject-area sections, and experienced no increase in initial pass rates once the exit exam became a graduation requirement, approximately 30 percent of Washington students would not pass the reading or writing sections of the WASL and approximately 53 percent of Washington students would not pass the math section of the WASL. In all approximately 61 percent of students would have failed one or more subject-area sections of the WASL in their initial attempt.

This is a very large range of potential initial pass rates. Based on the experiences of other states, MAP is confident that initial pass rates will rise significantly once the WASL officially becomes a requirement for graduation for the class of 2008. Furthermore, MAP is confident that cumulative pass rates will rise as students are allowed up to four retakes prior to the end of their senior year, all the while "banking" their passed sections. However, how significantly initial and cumulative pass rates will increase remains unknown.

For those students who do not pass one or more subject-area sections of the WASL, the extent to which students are provided a full opportunity to learn what they need to learn on the state's exit exam. However, how best to determine if students are provided a full opportunity to learn, as the Center on Education Policy put it, "is not easy to measure."

A. Schedule Adjustment

There are several options available to schools and school districts to adjust the academic schedule to provide a greater number of students a fair opportunity to learn. Within the regular schedule, longer blocks of time for math and reading can be allocated to provide students additional time on task. The typical secondary school period length is 40-50 minutes each, with approximately seven or eight periods. For subjects such as math and English/Language Arts, successful schools with high-needs populations increase the length of these blocks to 70-120 minutes.[16] However, no matter how long the period, the quality of instruction – translating the curriculum standards into the instructional classroom – must be ensured.

[16] "Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons from High-Performing Schools," Karen Hawley Miles and Linda Darling-Hammond, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Spring, 1998), 9-29.

B. Teacher Quality

A growing body of research is starting to show, in addition to the intuitive sense, that high-quality teachers really make a difference in student outcomes. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain were able to demonstrate that high-quality teachers were capable of erasing deficits associated with family socio-economic status, particularly in math.[17] However, quality had little correlation to teacher education (degrees) or experience, two common indicators used to identify teacher quality.

An additional goal of adjusting the normal teaching schedule is to provide teachers with increased planning time, both individually and collaboratively with other teachers. Again, the time alone is not what is important, rather how that time individually and collaboratively is used.

C. Professional Development

Most comprehensive school reform (CSR) models allocate at least three to five days of professional development leading into a newly designed school. Many, if not all, require continuous professional development throughout the course of the school year as well, through dedicated out-of-school workshops and in-school, collaborative planning periods. The emphasis on professional development for the entire staff working towards a clear, coherent set of goals for the entire school is the focus of many CSR models.

In high-performing schools and districts, Iatarola and Fruchter observed that successful districts "created more highly conceptualized professional development strategies and used a more integrated mix of district- and school-initiated efforts."[18]

There are ten characteristics shared by successful professional development programs:[19]

1. Based on theory, research, and best practice.
2. Centered on specific goals for student learning.
3. Focused on promoting effective student assessment.
4. Situated in actual practice.
5. Experiential.
6. Collaborative.
7. Directed by participants' interests, questions, and needs.
8. Integrated to local, regional, and state school improvement programs and goals.
9. Adequately supported by organizational conditions, materials, human resources, and funding.
10. Guided by quality evaluation.

The National Staff Development Council standards for staff development include:

1. Staff development that improves the learning of all students:

[17] "Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement," Steven Rivkin, Eric A. Hanushek, and John F. Kain, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Number 6691, July 1998, revised July 2002.
[18] "District Effectiveness: A Study of Investment Strategies in New York City Public Schools and Districts," Patrice Iatarola and Norm Fruchter, *Educational Policy*, Vol.18 No. 3 (July 2004), 491-512.
[19] "The new structure of school improvement: Inquiring schools and achieving students," Bruce Joyce, Emily Calhoun, and David Hopkins, Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1999.

- Organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district. (Learning Communities)
- Requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement. (Leadership)
- Requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration. (Resources)

2. **Staff development that improves the learning of all students:**
   - Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (Data-Driven)
   - Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (Evaluation)
   - Prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (Research-Based)
   - Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (Design)
   - Applies knowledge about human learning and change. (Learning)
   - Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (Collaboration)
3. **Staff development that improves the learning of all students:**
   - Prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement. (Equity)
   - Deepens educators' content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately. (Quality Teaching)
   - Provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders appropriately. (Family Involvement)

The goal of the National Staff Development Council is to have all teachers in all schools experiencing high-quality professional learning as part of their daily work by 2007.[20]

D. Out-of-School Time

For those students who are unable to receive assistance during the course of the regular school day may still require additional time on task. Several options are available to schools and districts in providing additional time on task through out-of-school time (OST) activities. OST activities include extended-day (before- and after-school) activities, Saturday classes, and summer school.

E. Small Schools

Considerable attention has been given to reforming high schools by making them smaller. The study of the effectiveness of small schools can be broken into several categories: those schools that are already small; those schools that are large that are broken into smaller, autonomous units (schools-within-a-building concept); and those schools that are large that are broken into smaller, semi-autonomous units (schools-within-a-school concept).

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has dedicated considerable resources and funding into the development of small schools as a reform effort. Research tends to put the size of the

[20] Taken from the National Staff Development Council Web site at http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm.

effective high school at enrollment levels between 400 and 900 students with adverse student outcomes occurring at enrollments below and above this range.[21] Husbands and Beese summarize the literature on small schools by stating that reducing school size may be a necessary, but not sufficient means for school improvement.[22]

F. Comprehensive School Reform

According to the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform (NCCSR), comprehensive school reform (CSR) "is grounded in the idea that there is a systematic process to help schools improve. After carefully reflecting on their existing programs, schools engaged in CSR coalesce around a design for change and implement that design to improve students' education. CSR gives educators research-based, replicable strategies for whole-school, rather than piecemeal, change."[23]

More specifically, CSR incorporates reform of curriculum and instruction, professional development, parental involvement, assessment plans, and school management and resource allocation. The reform gained momentum in 1998 when the federal government began funding the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration program. There are dozens of CSR models available, including High Schools That Work, Onward to Excellence, Talent Development High School, Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, and ATLAS that are designed primarily for secondary schools. All CSR models adhere to 11 fundamental components of successful school reform.[24]

G. Supplemental Education Service Providers

Under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) provisions, if a Title I-eligible school fails to make progress for three years, parents have the ability to utilize that child's share of Title I, Part A funding to contract for tutoring services with state-approved supplemental educational service (SES) providers through the school district.

Another form of supplemental educational service provision of remedial services, though they may be approved as SES providers under NCLB provisions, would be to work with community colleges and institutions of higher education to provide remedial education services.

[21] For example, see "High School Size: Which Works Best and For Whom?" V.E. Lee and J.B. Smith, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 19(3), 1997, 205-227. Lee and Smith advocate for high schools between 600 and 900.

[22] "Review of Selected High School Reform Strategies," Jennifer Husbands and Stacy Beese, paper prepared for the Aspen Program on Education, *Workshop on High School Transformation*, July 2001, revised January 2004.

[23] As described on the National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform Web site, http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/about_csr/index.html.

[24] List of the 11 fundamental CSR components can be found at http://www.goodschools.gwu.edu/about_csr/index.html#Eleven.

V. WASHINGTON OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN

Given the discussion of ideas of what constitute fair opportunities for those students unable to pass a high-stakes exit exam such as the one in Washington beginning with the class of 2008, below is a discussion of the relevant opportunities to learn and specific initiatives undertaken by the state, in partnership with federal and local policymakers and funding, to provide a comprehensive set of OTL programs.

A. Schedule Adjustment

According to a 2001 Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) study on educational opportunities in Washington high schools:[25]

- More than 80 percent of high schools reported "some" or "a lot" of change to their 9th- and 10th-grade curriculum to incorporate the EALRs;
- More than 60 percent of high schools reported extensive curriculum changes in English and math;
- Half of the high schools reported creating new courses to assist 9th and 10th-grade students in preparing for the WASL;
- More than 70 percent of high schools reported "some" or "a lot" of use of alternative programs, extended learning, early identification of at-risk students, and in-class assistance for struggling students.

Given the efforts of schools and school districts above to adjust the curriculum, a majority (approximately 60 percent) of surveyed high school juniors felt that the classes they took prepared them for the WASL.[26] The authors reporting the survey results, however, dismiss this results by stating, "It is uncertain, however, whether they would know how what they were taught was connected to the WASL."[27] Obviously there appears to be a disconnect between educator perceptions of how they feel they are changing the curriculum to prepare students for the WASL and how students perceive the ability of the curriculum to prepare them for the WASL.

In 2004, Washington had 99 alternative schools established to serve the needs of those students who were most at risk of failing or dropping out. Most of these alternative schools serve primarily secondary school students, though some extend into the elementary and middle school grades. In looking at student performance by school, these alternative schools were among the lowest-scoring schools in the state.

B. Highly Qualified Teachers

An August 2002 Education Trust report on out-of-field teachers reported that 26 percent of Washington secondary school teachers were teaching in core subject areas without at least a minor in the subject area.[28] However, the situation is worse for those teachers in schools with high concentrations of poverty students and high concentrations of minority students.

[25] "Educational Opportunities in Washington's High Schools Under State Education Reform: *High School Responses to Expectations for Change*, Volume 2, Final Report," Barbara McLain and Madeleine Thompson, Washington State Institute of Public Policy, September 2001.
[26] ESD 101, p.46.
[27] IBID.
[28] "All Talk, No Action: Putting an End to Out-of-Field Teaching," Craig D. Jerald, The Education Trust, August 2002.

Washington schools with high concentrations of poverty students (greater than 50 percent of the student population eligible for the federal free- and reduced-price lunch program) averaged 35 percent of secondary teachers without at least a minor in the subject area field being taught. Similarly, Washington schools with high concentrations of minority students (greater than 50 percent of the student population identified as non-white) averaged 32 percent of secondary teachers without at least a minor in the subject area being taught.

The Education Trust released a follow-up study based on the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements for highly qualified teachers.[29] Washington reported to the federal government that 83 percent of all of its teachers and 88 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools met the NCLB requirements to be considered highly qualified. However, NCLB provisions allow states to develop High Objective Uniform State Standard of Evaluation (HOUSSE) standards for veteran teachers. Available options to states for teachers to demonstrate content knowledge are some combination of experience, college coursework, professional development, or other state-determined measures. Washington does not test subject matter as part of its certification process and has substituted in local performance evaluations as evidence of content knowledge. Though the state is complying with NCLB provisions given the flexibility of the law and regulations afforded to states by opting for some other state-determined measure (local evaluations), there is little guarantee that students in Washington secondary schools are being taught by teachers with a solid foundation of subject-matter expertise.

However, most reports on the subject rely heavily upon traditional measures of teacher quality such as years of education and years of experience. Single-salary pay scales still rely on these two measures as the determining factors in compensating teachers. These two measures have little demonstrated effect on student outcomes. Consistent with the analysis performed by The Education Trust, there is some evidence, as well as common sense, that suggests that a teacher's major or minor in the subject matter being taught, particularly in math and science, do affect how well students are likely to learn.

C. Availability of Remediation/Acceleration Services

Another indicator of students' opportunity to learn the subject matter required on the test is the availability of remediation/acceleration services. Though students may be presented the subject matter during the regular school day, some are unable to fully grasp the subject matter for any number of reasons. Remediation (also known as acceleration) services allow the student who has not fully grasped the subject matter during the regular course scheduling to be brought up to grade level.

Washington has been providing, among many programs for students, assistance to low-performing students through the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) since 1987.[30] Learning Assistance Program allocations in 2003-04 were made up of a K-6 component, a grades 7-9 component, and a grades 10-11 component. In all, $65.8 million was appropriated to LAP for the 2003-04 fiscal year. Allocations, in years past, were allocated to districts based primarily on assessment scores. The allocation formula distributed 92 percent of funds according to

[29] "Telling the Whole Trust (or Not) About Highly Qualified Teachers," The Education Trust, December 2003.
[30] According to the "Organization and Financing of Washington Public Schools," dated February 2004, the state created a statewide remediation assistance program in 1979 aimed at students in grades 2-6.

performance and eight percent according to poverty statistics. Beginning in 2005-06, funds will be allocated to districts based on assessment performance and poverty equally.

Though the program has expanded to include secondary school students, previous studies of how LAP funds were allocated by districts to schools showed that, in combination with Title I funds, 70 percent of LAP and Title I funds were allocated to elementary schools.[31] Schools have been quick to provide LAP funds to elementary schools with the goal of early intervention, particularly in the primary grades of K-3. In fact, the state funding formula puts more emphasis on the early grades in elementary school by providing for at least 20.4 pupils per certificated instructional staff down to 18.5 pupils per staff. Grades 5-12, on the other hand, are funded at a constant rate of 21.7 pupils per certificated staff.

The Washington Legislature, in its 2004-05 supplemental budget, appropriated $300,000 to the Transition Mathematics Project to increase the number of Washington high school graduates ready to tackle college-level math courses. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has invested an additional $400,000 two-year grant to the project. The public-private partnership between the Gates Foundation, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the State Board for Community Colleges (SBCTC), and the Council of Presidents (COP) strives to help students successfully transition from high school math to college-level math.[32] Though the focus of the program appears to create a more seamless articulation of expectations and subject-matter proficiencies between educators in the K-12 and higher education systems, it will, no doubt, create subject-matter goals and expectations in teacher professional development plans.

D. Professional Development

Two learning improvement days (LID) are added to the 180-day school year for certificated instructional staff to provide training time aimed at improving student achievement. Base salaries provided for in the basic education allocation includes the two additional LID days.

The Division of Professional Development is responsible for creating and implementing the statewide professional development plan. The division conducts statewide conferences in January, June, and August of each year to educators. In addition, the division administers the Teacher Assistance/Mentoring Assistance Program (TAP) providing districts with funds to assist beginning teachers. Approximately $2.3 million was allocated to this program in 2003-04. To date, there has not been any documented effectiveness of either of these two programs.

E. Initiative 728: The K-12 Student Achievement Act

Approved by voters in November 2000, Initiative 728, the K-12 Student Achievement Act, dedicated a portion of state revenues through the lottery and state property tax to the Student Achievement Fund. School districts were encouraged to use the funds in one of the following strategies that they felt most appropriate to improve student learning in their district:

1. Major reduction in K-4 class sizes,
2. Class size reduction in grades 5-12, such as small high school writing classes,
3. Extended-learning time opportunities,

[31] "The Learning Assistance Program: Options to Revise the State Funding Formula," Barbara McLain and Marna Miller, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, June 2002.
[32] http://www.sbctc.ctc.edu/newsdocs/05-10-2004_GatesFound.pdf

4. Professional development for educators,
5. Pre-kindergarten support,
6. Facilities improvement or additions to support class size reductions or extended-time opportunities.

In all, $203.1 million was appropriated to I-728 activities in the 2003-04 fiscal year. Allocations are made on a flat per-pupil funding basis, approximately $212 per student in 2003-04.

F. Other Education Reform Initiatives

An additional $36 million was allocated from state general fund revenues to fund education reform programs in the 2003-04 school year. Over $16 million of that, however, is dedicated directly to the development and implementation of the WASL. Other opportunity-to-learn initiatives include the Washington Reading Corps, the Mathematics Helping Corps, Readiness to Learn, and Focused Assistance to Schools. The Washington Reading Corps, however, is limited to initiatives in grades K-6.

The Focused Assistance program, through the A+ Commission, identifies and invites those schools that have not met their annual yearly progress (AYP) goals for two consecutive years to participate in a statewide school-improvement process. A full description of the program can be found on the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) through a two-page memo found at http://www.awsp.org/wpf/updates_Accountability.htm. Key components include the participating school being assigned a school improvement facilitator, the development of school improvement teams, the initiation of an educational audit, the formulation of a school improvement plan according to the state's nine characteristics of high-performing schools, and a two-year performance agreement between the school, the school district, and OSPI.

G. Comprehensive School Reform

The State of Washington received nearly $2.3 million in federal comprehensive school reform (CSR) grant funding in 1998. By 2003, the state received over $4.7 million to support CSR activities.[33] Since 1998, 136 schools have received one or more years of federal CSR funding. Of those 136, 13 schools were high schools serving grades 9-12, another nine schools served students in grades 7-12, and six schools served secondary school students in K-12 grade configurations.[34]

H. Federal Sources

In total, revenues from federal sources accounted for 9.5 percent of general fund revenues for school districts in the 2002-03 school year, a total of $691.5 million. Of particular interest to this study are those funds designated to provide increased opportunities to learn to students. These include programs such as Title I, Part A ($143.0 million), school improvement revenues ($57.3 million) for programs such as Title II, Part B for improving teacher quality, Title II, Part B to assist math and science partnerships, Title V, Part A funds for innovative programs, and Title VI, Part B funds for rural and low-income schools. Another $2.9 million was allocated to Washington through the Eisenhower Professional Development program.

[33] U.S. Department of Education, http://www.ed.gov/programs/compreform/edlite-allyears.html.
[34] http://www.sedl.org/csr/awards.html

Washington currently has 29 approved supplemental educational service providers that parents can contract with through their local district using their share of their school's Title I, Part A funds, if that school is identified as in need of improvement for three consecutive years.

VI. RESEARCH-BASED CONCLUSIONS

Though the concept of ensuring students the full opportunity to learn is the goal of states, school districts, and educators, the body of research supporting many of the OTL initiatives makes coming to any definitive conclusions difficult. The research base for OTL initiatives does not provide any definitive conclusions because of conflicting research outcomes, poor research design (non-experimental or non-quasi-experimental designs), a small research base (small number of studies), or reporting of student outcomes unrelated to the issue at hand, i.e., raising test scores.

A. No Differences Between High-Performing and Low-Performing Schools

Though Miles and Darling-Hammond observed positive student outcomes in high-performing high schools that underwent restructuring efforts, particularly those with longer blocks of instructional time, a McREL study of high-performing, high-needs (HPHN) schools found that high-performing schools and low-performing, high-needs (LPHN) schools in the same districts did not have any distinguishing differences in instructional time allocation, teacher individual and collaborative prep time, professional development, or curriculum initiatives (e.g., Reading Recovery and Guided Reading in their elementary schools).[35] In both studies, the high-performing schools had restructured the schedule to provide longer instructional blocks of time for students in core academic classes (English and math) and to provide for greater collaborative planning time by teachers. However, the fact that low-performing schools in the same districts pursued those same policies indicates that providing these things, alone, will not guarantee improved student outcomes.

Iatarola and Fruchter, while documenting the characteristics of high-performing districts, raise the specter that those observable characteristics of successful districts may be the effects of being a successful district rather than the causes of the districts to be successful.[36]

B. Limited Research Base

There are hundreds of out-of-school-time (OST) programs being implemented in schools and districts around the nation. When exploring the effectiveness of OST programs, most suffer from non-quality research designs. Quality research designs typically involve an experimental or quasi-experimental design. A meta-analysis of OST programs to determine effectiveness produced 371 reports, though only 53 studies met the inclusion criteria of methodological rigor – 47 with reading outcomes and 33 with math outcomes.[37] The meta-analysis reports that math scores for students improved, particularly at the secondary level, though no distinguishing effect

[35] "Opportunity to Learn Policies and Practices in High-Performing, High-Needs Schools and Districts," Robert Reichardt, Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, December 2002.
[36] Iatarola and Fruchter (2004), p.509.
[37] "The Effectiveness of Out-of-School-Time Strategies in assisting Low-Achieving Students in Reading and Mathematics: *A Research Synthesis*," Patricia A. Lauer, et al., Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, updated January 2004.

for reading. However, of the 33 studies with math outcomes, only five studies focused entirely on students in grades 9-12. Only three reading studies served secondary school students exclusively. To generalize the conclusions of OST programs to secondary schools, whether after-school, Saturday classes, or summer school, would be to put great faith in being able to extrapolate results from elementary and middle school programs to the secondary level.

Similarly, there are dozens of comprehensive school reform (CSR) models developed and implemented across the nation. The study by Borman, Hewes, Overman, and Brown is most often cited demonstrating the positive effects of CSR.[38] In their study of the 29 most-widely implemented CSR models, they found that Direct Instruction, School Development Program, and Success for All met the criteria to be considered "strongest body of evidence," that is, these models have sufficiently large numbers of studies that their results can be reasonably generalized to other schools. These three models, however, are almost exclusively designed and implemented in elementary schools.

Models generally implemented at the secondary level, e.g., Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, ATLAS Communities, America's Choice, and the Talent Development High School, were regarded as having research bases either too limited or too weak to make broad, generalized conclusions about their models. The authors point out that the High Schools That Work model has a significant research base with positive results. However, in the one study of the mode against a comparison group, the model produced a negative result.

The authors conclude that the research future is bright for CSR models, but that too few models exist with a solid research base to draw generalized conclusions about expected effects. Additionally, the authors point out that those models where internal and external evaluations were conducted, evaluations from internal sources often showed higher effect sizes than those evaluations conducted external to the developer, a caution of interpretation of any results due to bias.

The pool of literature on the effectiveness of small schools, though continuing to grow, remains shallow. There is little consensus about the ideal high school size, though effective high schools tend to be in the range of 400 to 900 students. Though the research indicates that student outcomes seem to be positive in this range, there is little research indicating if large schools restructured into smaller school environments achieve the same level of positive results. What appears consistent from the small schools literature is that small schools alone will not necessarily bring about improved student improvement. Rather, downsizing schools may create the conditions under which improvement might take place.[39]

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation created the Washington State Achievers High Schools program.[40] In 2001, the foundation awarded five-year grants to 16 Washington high schools serving largely economically disadvantaged student populations. One of the major goals of the

[38] "Comprehensive School Reform and Student Achievement, A Meta-Analysis," Geoffrey D. Borman, Gina M. Hewes, and Shelly Brown, Report No. 59, November 2002.
[39] Husbands and Beece (2004).
[40] "The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Washington State Achievers Program, Year 1 Evaluation Summary," Fouts & Associates, L.L.C., February 1, 2003.

program is to reinvent the high school by developing small learning communities of no more than 400 students. Schools were awarded grants ranging from $180,400 to $1,140,000 depending on school enrollment ($500 per student to support redesign efforts and $100 per student to strengthen college preparedness and awareness in feeder middle schools and junior high schools. Though in the formative evaluation stages, the Achievers program is one of many around the nation that will test the notion of positively affecting student achievement through restructuring schools into smaller learning communities. Interestingly, some of the schools receiving Achievers program grants also received CSR grants to assist them with restructuring. This presents a challenging environment for evaluators, as they will be asked to disentangle the effects of CSR from the Achievers program.

C. Belief In the Market

As states move forward to approve supplemental educational service (SES) providers in accordance with federal NCLB provisions, the basic premise of why SES providers will be pursued in lieu of school staff should be articulated. The belief that educational opportunities should be extended to families of children in low-performing schools is based on the belief that competitive market forces will push schools to improve their educational and instructional practices to avoid the consequences of losing federal Title I funding. There is an additional argument around equity in that low-income families who cannot afford private tutoring should be afforded the same opportunities to pursue alternative learning environments when their local school is failing. Also, as the theory of markets goes, if SES providers continue to fail students, those students can ask their district to contract for services with another SES provider.

This model works well in providing options to students and their families in areas with several SES providers, typically urban and suburban locales. However, tutoring companies such as Kumon Math and Reading Centers or Huntington Learning Centers tend not to be available in more rural, remote locations.[41]

D. Effectiveness of Washington's Learning Assistance Program

Washington has been funding remediation in one form or another since 1979. Since 1987, that program has been the Learning Assistance Program (LAP). Up until the present, LAP funding was primarily allocated according to schools and districts based low student achievement. The new funding formula balances low student achievement and school poverty in the allocation formula. For the most part, LAP and the federal Title I funding have gone together to schools with the same goal of providing opportunities to learn for low-achieving students and students in schools with concentrations of low-income, high-needs children.

However, with over $60 million allocated to schools annually in this program alone, policymakers should be confronted with the fundamental question of, "Does this funding program work?" According to a study 2002 Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) study, the researchers could draw "no definitive conclusions about the effect of LAP and Title I on student test scores" and "could not conclusively show that the amount of a building's LAP and Title I allocation influences average test scores in the building."[42] Though this conclusion was based on elementary school analysis, the conclusion is appropriate given that the bulk of

[41] Both of these companies are approved SES providers in Washington.
[42] McLain and Miller (2002), p. 39-40.

LAP monies went to elementary schools. With the expansion of LAP to secondary school grades, what assurances there to make sure these new funds are used effectively?

VII. WHAT OTHER STATES ARE DOING

Several states have undertaken initiatives aimed directly at secondary schools to provide OTL to students as their states moved forward with their high school exit exams.

Indiana, for instance, created policies to intervene with students who failed the exit exam and those at risk of failing the exam. The state provides $115 per secondary school student to districts to use for OST efforts, individualized tutoring, or other initiatives. Though an early study found that those students who participated in remediation programs showed greater gains in their retake of the test compared to those that did not participate.[43] However, it was not determined what set of initiatives pursued by districts were most effective, after-school initiatives vis-à-vis summer institutes, etc.

California developed its California Immediate Intervention/Underperforming Schools Program (II/USP) in an effort to provide assistance to under-performing schools (elementary, middle, and high). The program targets schools in the lower half of the Academic Performance Index (API) that failed to meet its growth targets. Schools apply to participate, and once chosen, receive a $50,000 planning grant to develop a school improvement plan, then an additional $200 per student for three years. Many schools have used the II/USP in conjunction with their adoption of CSR models. California also has its High Priority Schools Grant Program that targets those schools in the lowest decile of schools. Schools receive up to $400 per student in addition to the II/USP interventions.

According to survey results returned to the Center on Education Policy, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Texas, Utah, and Virginia have computer-based programs to assist students with their exit exams. Florida, which did not answer the question to the Center on Education Policy, has its FCAT Explorer, an online tutorial available to students to learn about and practice the skills tested on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), including exercises for 10th-grade students and teachers.

Virginia created Project Graduation to provide high school students additional resources to pass that state's end-of-course exams. The program funds various initiatives such as three-week summer academies and online tutorial modules. In more extreme cases where there are large numbers of students at risk of not passing the exams, districts can receive a grant to create a case manager position to directly assist at-risk students through the exam process. The projected cost of the pilot program was $400,000 in 2003. Given the success of the initial pilot programs, the state has scaled up the program to serve students statewide. The state plans to pay for it with federal funds made available through NCLB reforms.[44]

[43] "An Investigation of Indiana High School Remediation Programs," Donald Ross Green, Daniel M. Lewis, Dennis Kelley, and Adele Brandstrom, 2000.
[44] "Project Graduation targets SOL exam," *The Washington Times*, June 3, 2003.

Massachusetts has created perhaps the most comprehensive and wide-reaching set of initiatives in response to OTL issues raised as the state moved forward with its high school exit exam. For those high school seniors who have yet to pass the MCAS, the state created its *Alternate Pathways to Success* initiative.[45] Included are One-Stop Career Centers that serve as an information broker to students matching them with academic support service providers, training, and employment options; Innovative Programs grants to provide intensive remediation services through online tutorial services, work and learning models, and community college models; and academic support and community college transition services to provide students opportunities to pursue academic support services through community colleges.

The majority of Innovative Programs grants went to Work and Learning programs that are designed to assist those students who seek to earn money and gain job skills while they continue towards earning a competency determination. This unique public –private partnership has employers subsidizing program costs by paying students stipends.

These Alternate Pathways to Success initiatives amounted to approximately $5 million across two years. These initiatives are part of the state's overall strategy of remediation and in addition to other remediation programs offered through school districts. Remediation funds allocated by the state to districts through MCAS remediation/MCAS Low-Scoring Support grants will amount to approximately $14 million for fiscal year 2005.[46] And, as with other states, the state funds Content Institutes for educators to assist them with deepening their content knowledge and to strengthen their skills base towards student success on the MCAS. These Content Institutes require teachers to commit 45 hours (not all of which is required on site); approximately 1,000 teachers served across 34 institutes per year. These institutes are funded through federal Title II funds and other state sources.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Karen Hawley Miles points out that the basic structure of the school remains relatively unchanged with new resources added around the regular classroom rather than fundamental changes within the classroom itself.[47] Odden and Busch conclude that "the values behind the extra dollars for these services (supporting low-income, ELL, and special education students) should be retained, but the productivity resulting from the expenditure of these dollars needs to rise."[48] Miles and Darling-Hammond, consistent with Odden and Busch, come to the conclusion that it is unlikely that schools can find ways to create more individual time or more shared planning time without prohibitively raising costs unless they rethink the existing organization of

[45] "Pathways to Graduation: Supporting All Students to Mastery, *A Retrospective Look at the Class of 2003* ," The Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, MassINC, Spring 2004.
[46] Conversation with Keith Westrich, Center for School Support Services, Massachusetts Department of Education, August 6, 2004.
[47] "Spending more at the edges: Understanding the growth in public school spending from 1967 to 1991," Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Press, 1997. Similar arguments made in "Where has the money gone? An analysis of school spending in New York," H. Lankford and J.H. Wyckoff, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 17(2), 195-218.
[48] "Financing Schools for High Performance, Strategies for Improving the Use of Educational Resources," Allan Odden and Carolyn Busch, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1998.

resources.[49] How Washington high schools currently use all of their available funding should be examined before adding statewide funding for initiatives with unclear research bases.

Before Washington policymakers make any decisions about developing new initiatives to raise the initial and eventual cumulative pass rates on the 10th-grade WASL, they should ask if all of the existing funding, either through the basic education allocation, the different compensatory education programs, e.g., LAP and Targeted Assistance, and professional development programs are currently effective. There has been some demonstrated success in high schools that have pursued CSR, though the positive effects of CSR are not universal in Washington high schools.

Washington's consistent push for schools to adopt and demonstrate the nine characteristics of high-performing schools should be continued. Conceding that there are no silver bullets to education reform, the nine characteristics provide educators with a consistent template to check their educational and organizational philosophies.

In the absence of effective policy research that can be generalized to larger populations and to state policy, in an environment of uncertainty, the most prudent approach is to move deliberately, but aggressively. Washington policymakers should take inventory of the different OTL initiatives implemented in schools across the state (and with what funds), determine their effectiveness in improving student achievement, and move to change those that are least effective. In those schools with the least effective OTL programs, new programs should be put into place with continuous feedback and to provide opportunities (and the capacity) to refine or change direction when appropriate. Just as students are being held accountable for their performance, schools and school districts should be held accountable for designing and implementing quality instructional programs that provide students with a full opportunity to meet those increasing standards of performance.

Without prescribing any particular program or OTL strategy, given the lack of quality supporting research, the state should move to experiment with a variety of pilot programs with the goal of improving student performance. The risk of doing nothing given the research base is greater than the risk of pursuing a deliberate strategy of creating a policy environment that takes inventory of existing programs, moves to eliminate those that are least effective, creates new programs that have shown promise, but lack the type of research base that allows for generalized conclusions, aggressively evaluates the effectiveness of programs providing continuous feedback to local and state policymakers, and provides the flexibility to change quickly given that feedback. Pilot programs for high school OTL strategies and services incorporate these policy characteristics and may be worthwhile as students progress towards the 2008 date for graduation under these new standards. The Gates Foundation initiatives into funding the restructuring of 16 high schools into smaller learning communities will serve as a pilot project that the state can learn from as well. Massachusetts and Virginia have utilized a variety of pilot programs as they prepare their students for passing exit exams. Again, a critical component to be included in any pilot program is resources dedicated to program evaluation.

In the era of NCLB, Washington should encourage its public education institutions to collaborate and provide students with as many options as possible, including public-public and public-

[49] Miles and Darling-Hammond, 1998.

private partnerships. Currently, four of nine education service districts (ESDs) are currently approved SES providers. No community colleges or four-year institutions are approved SES providers.

As the Learning Assistance Program is expanded to serve a greater number of secondary school students, OSPI must be provided resources necessary to build its capacity to assist schools and districts in the state. As information brokers, evaluators, and program administrators, state officials must have the capacity to determine successful programs and initiatives available to schools and districts and have the ability to weed out unsuccessful programs. Additionally, OSPI must be provided with the resources to follow through with program evaluations and develop the capacity to intervene in those programs that are not effective. An accountability system with no consequences to the schools leaves the undue burden of ineffective programs on its students.

For instance, a promising curriculum program called Cognitive Tutor from Carnegie Learning is focused on providing math remediation and instruction to low-performing students.[50] Implemented in more than 1,500 schools across the nation, it provides instruction in Algebra I and II and Geometry, classes often taken between the 8th and 10th grades. Most of the schools implementing Cognitive Tutor in their classrooms are using the Algebra I curriculum. In speaking with Steve Schneider, director of WestEd's Mathematics, Science, and Technology Program, Carnegie Learning, in partnership with WestEd, is expanding the Cognitive Tutor curriculum to provide an intervention-services model of the Carnegie Learning program. WestEd is one of ten federal regional education laboratories. According to Schneider, the Carnegie Learning intervention-service model would provide services to schools utilizing Title I and II funding. The cost of the program would be approximately $100 per month for each Title I-eligible student served; approximately 40-50 students would be served at each site. Schneider explains that these intervention modules would be available four days per week and would be provided both during the regular school day and in an OST environment. With internal evaluations documenting success in schools and districts across the nation (the Carnegie Learning full-curriculum model), few, if any of their programs have been evaluated using randomized program placement, with only some using a control group for comparative purposes. While the program's evaluation may not stand up to the rigorous standards found on the "What Works Clearinghouse" Web site, this type of curricular or OST program might be worthwhile to pilot.[51] The intervention-services model is being piloted in several schools and, according to Schneider, will include randomized, experimental-design evaluations. WestEd is also an approved supplemental educational service provider in California.

Any pilot programs or initiatives should first target those schools that are the lowest performing. For instance, those schools with the lowest percentages of students passing should be encouraged to demonstrate new OTL strategies. Much like the California II/USP program that identifies those lowest-performing schools in the state and identifies them for program participation, Washington could further refine and develop its Targeted Assistance program.

[50] For full description of Carnegie Learning, see their Web site at http://www.carnegielearning.com/.

[51] The What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) was established in 2002 by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to provide educators, policymakers, researchers, and the public with a central and trusted source of scientific evidence of what works in education. http://www.w-w-c.org/

IX. CONCLUSIONS

Washington is not alone in its continued implementation of a standards-based education with the goal of providing a quality K-12 education to all students in the state. The next phase in this accountability plan is the implementation of a high school exit exam, in this case, passing the 10th-grade WASL. Twenty other states have already implemented exit exams with another nine states (Washington included) currently scheduled to phase in exit exam-requirements by 2009.

As the state moves forward with its exit exam for the class of 2008, the issue of what is considered passing has been set by the Legislature in 2004, though the Legislature directed the A+ Commission to explore alternative models of passing. Currently, passing would be scoring at the "Proficient" level or above (Level 3 or above) on all three subject-area sections of the WASL. Alternative proposals include requiring students to achieve at the "Basic" level or above (Level 2 or above) on all three subject-area sections of the WASL and two proposals with combinations of scores at the "Proficient" and "Basic" levels. If the state were to decide to adopt one of the alternative models of passing, it would not be the only state to lower the standards for passing upon initial implementation as schools and students adjust to the high-stakes standards environment.

As of 2004, only 39 percent of 10th-grade students passed all three sections of the WASL, using the current model of passing. There will likely be a significant increase in initial passing rates in 2006 when the exit exam "goes live" based on student motivation, as evidenced in other states. In 2004, WASL scores began to appear on student transcripts, perhaps a factor in the five percentage-point increase from 2003 scores. Though initial pass rates are of concern, of ultimate concern to policymakers will be the final cumulative pass rates. Again, like many states, Washington will provide up to four retake opportunities to students not passing one or more sections of the WASL in the 10th grade. Evidence in other states shows that cumulative pass rates on the exit exams ultimately deny few students a diploma based on test scores alone. However, how those cumulative pass rates are computed remains controversial.

In the standards-based environment, opportunity-to-learn (OTL) issues arise for educators and policymakers alike. Strategies to improve OTL include curriculum reform, professional development, out-of-school (OST) programs such as after-school, Saturday classes, and summer school, comprehensive school reform (CSR), small schools restructuring, and utilizing supplemental educational service (SES) providers. The State of Washington, through state and federal funds, has done well to provide resources to schools and school districts to pursue several OTL strategies. However, many state and local initiatives have concentrated resources at the elementary school level, e.g., the Learning Assistance Program (LAP).

What becomes disconcerting is the lack of solid, definitive research supporting any given OTL strategy at the secondary level. For instance, much of the recent research on OST programs, for instance, was concentrated at the elementary school level. Though positive in effect size, policymakers should be cautious about generalizing those results to secondary schools.

Furthermore, a body of research continues to build around the notion of reallocating existing resources to expand the opportunities to learn for students. As with the research on small schools

indicates, though these restructuring activities may not, by themselves, result in positive outcomes, they create the conditions where improvement might take place.

What remains certain is that the state must strengthen its capacity to assist schools and school districts as they pursue successful reform strategies to improve student achievement. As information brokers, program evaluators, and consultants to schools, state officials must be able to gather the resources necessary to meet the unique needs of individual schools across the state.

Without credible, generalizable programs available to replicate in Washington, MAP was unable to develop wholesale programmatic recommendations and any resulting costing-out analyses associated with those programs to the A+ Commission. Any costing out of OTL initiatives to the state would be based on little empirical evidence of effectiveness. In the absence of effective policy research that can be generalized to larger populations and to state policy, in an environment of uncertainty, the most prudent approach is to move deliberately with continuous feedback and to provide opportunities (and the capacity) to refine or change direction when appropriate. However, prudent and deliberate action should not be interpreted to mean that Washington policymakers should do nothing (or very little). Quite the opposite, in fact. Without an exit exam, only 66 percent of Washington high school students graduated with a diploma, one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation, a fact that, by itself, should be cause for action.[52]

The state may want to immediately create an inventory of OTL initiatives implemented across the state and with what funds, identify those that are least effective, and move to replace those ineffective programs with new programs that might provide students with a full opportunity to meet the performance standards set by the state. Schools and school districts should be held accountable for the quality of their instructional programs; otherwise, the entire burden of the standards-based education system falls, unfairly, on the students of the state. As an example, the alternative schools in the state are consistently the lowest-performing schools on the 10th-grade WASL. Though it would stand to reason that these schools have been established to serve those students who are most at risk of failure or dropping out and, therefore, would have the lowest achievement coming into these programs, state policymakers should be aware of the value added these alternative schools are providing to the students.

Rather than develop large, wholesale "add-on" programs in an attempt to provide remediation and other OTL strategies at the secondary level, the state may want to pursue smaller pilot programs using existing funding to try and evaluate innovative approaches to address the needs of high schools. Without knowing the effectiveness of existing OTL initiatives, and associated funding, creating a slew of new programs with new funding to address WASL OTL-needs would be as equally irresponsible as doing nothing.

Similar efforts have been pursued in other states with Virginia's Project Graduation and through Massachusetts's Alternate Pathways to Success programs. Resource reallocation, schedule adjustments, OST programs, public-private and public-public partnerships, and professional development consistent with the state's nine characteristics of high-performing schools could all

[52] "Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States," Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, Education Working Paper 3, Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute, September, 2003.

be pursued utilizing existing streams of funding. Once determined to be successful, efforts can be made to bring these pilot programs to scale across the state.

The second part of this final report will explore the OTL initiatives undertaken in Virginia and Massachusetts as well as exploring OTL initiatives undertaken by other schools and school districts to serve secondary school students, such as the Carnegie Learning curriculum model in mathematics. Though little research exists that can be generalized, or the information is still being collected in the program evaluations, the second part of this final report will discuss some of the program outcomes reported with these OTL initiatives. The second report will conclude with a general discussion of costs of these OTL initiatives and how much it would cost the state of Washington should policymakers pursue similarly devised initiatives.

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