

APPENDIX D

What Experience Tells Us . . .

Part I. General

The discussion and conclusions in this report on the seven (7) legislatively identified goals suggest areas that could be considered for future studies. The staff continues to gather research and analyze information in these areas of unique opportunity and challenge. Based on observations, surveys, research and experience, the OSPI staff grouped into four categories additional areas that could be studied:

Category #1 Student Achievement

- With teachers...insist on a fair and effective teacher accountability system or abandon the effort.
- Increase alignment between elementary and secondary teachers to build on student learning and increase the rigor of secondary schools.
- Compare the achievement of sixth-graders in self-contained classrooms in elementary schools in which there is more instructional time for content specific reading to the achievement of those same students in the subsequent years in secondary schools.
- Increase differentiated instruction in high schools where there is often the one-size-fits-all approach and departmentalization.
- Increase the consistency district-wide on interventions that accelerate student learning.
- Find ways to decrease bureaucracy, distractions, and transitions that impede instructional time.
- Align primary literacy programs to the comprehension standards.
- Increase the rigor and relevance of the twelfth grade course of study.
- Study the purpose and use of space in secondary schools.
- Encourage meaningful independent student work during which teachers coach, mentor, and model.
- Identify ways to eliminate the use of tracking students in high schools.

- Increase the time that high school students have accessibility to school libraries in which to do active research.
- Analyze the state's use of Response to Intervention (RtI) for students with disabilities in terms of number of students identified with learning disabilities and inclusion into classrooms.
- Design how to meaningfully link student achievement and school performance to accreditation.

Category #2 Communication

- Prepare and implement a statistically valid survey of parent and community attitudes
- Identify goals, activities, and funds with which all educational agencies can align.
- Align funding directly with support for student learning.

Category #3 Accountability

- Build state and district assessments to measure students' essential learning and not subset skills.
- Identify ways that increase student accountability for performance on assessments.
- Identify effective measures to verify growth in summer school.
- Develop appropriate consequences for low-performing schools instead of increased funding which could reinforce low performance.
- Build valid and reliable formative assessments to measure reading across all content areas.

Category #4 Professional Development

- Create focus groups around the state to study essential values to be inculcated within Wyoming education and derive measures appropriate to those values.
- Develop meaningful and fair teacher evaluations on more than student performance on standardized tests.
- Develop feedback from the annual October 15th Report.

- Study ways that districts can focus on developing teacher experts rather than purchasing “teacher-proof” programs which reduce teacher agility.
- Evaluate the use of technology in the classroom to assure it supports research-based effective teaching methodologies.
- Identify high performing characteristics in schools and use them to build capacity at both the micro and macro levels.
- Analyze how building teacher professionalism can increase local control.
- Study how the use of turnaround teachers and research based staffing can increase student achievement.

Future work should be designed around the *values* to be served by education and how those values can be articulated in the design of future study. Policy makers can then decide how to use the results from future research toward accomplishing the goals and objectives developed from Wyoming values.

Part II. Case studies

During the numerous visits to Wyoming schools, the OSPI staff gathered information on best practices. The following are two case studies. The first is a superior performing school and the second is a superior performing district.

Lessons from Oregon Trail Elementary School

An observation of Oregon Trail school in Natrona County, perennially the high performing elementary in that district and often in the state, reveals the following attributes as reported by the school staff.

- Few district interferences
- Full-staff decision making on building issues
- Open data review teacher by teacher for accountability and discussion
- Teacher autonomy on issues related to classroom teaching

Lessons Sheridan County School District #2

The district that consistently outscores all others in third grade reading as measured by PAWS is Sheridan #2, a district of 1,113 kindergarten through third graders housed in six neighborhood K-5 elementary schools. The average enrollment of Sheridan elementary schools is 310 students. The third grade reading scores grew in 2010-11 from 75.59% advanced/proficient to 86.76% in 2011-2012. In 2012-2013, third graders scored 84.49%. The third grade PAWS scores for special education students in reading and math is also high at 62%, which is close to the state average for non-IEP students at 65%.

2008-2009	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	Special Ed
69%	75.59%	86.76%	84.49%	62%

Sheridan #2's theory underpinning literacy instruction is the same from the classroom to the interventions, including special education. The theory emanates from Marie Clay, international reading researcher and expert, who created teacher training programs called Reading Recovery, named in What Works Clearinghouse as the only program with scientific evidence to work. The district also uses Math Recovery. The bang for the buck in Sheridan #2 comes from teacher training in reading and math rather than from purchasing scripted curricular materials.

The literacy curriculum at Sheridan #2 is based on the standards and shaped by the Balanced Literacy Framework. The assessments are based on Reading Recovery using Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks and running records. First grade students in need of intensive intervention receive one-on-one tutoring by a reading expert trained in Reading Recovery. Other students in need of intervention receive small group instruction based on the precepts of Reading Recovery. There is no scripted commercial core program. Instead, the teachers match reading materials with each child's ability. Sheridan #2 teachers receive intensive and consistent training in teaching reading.

This district uses the professional learning community model wherein teachers meet weekly to study together through book groups, to plan, and to gauge student progress through student work, offering interventions and enrichments to those students who need them.

Leaders are well-trained in teacher staff developments, they coach students, and they work and observe in classrooms.

The keystone capacities of this district's success with K-3 students are:

- teacher expertise through training in reading and math,
- a common framework,
- high expectations for all,
- intense focus on achievement and success,
- active leadership,
- and practical, implemented collaboration.

Part III. TEACHER VOICES

Thirty-three district Teachers of the Year for 2014 spoke about their idealism and the practical realities of the classrooms and students they serve. Their words echo the parent and community comments in the survey conducted by the OSPI, and they speak with wisdom, offering insight into the heart of teachers for all stakeholders to see:

They believe their service preserves the democracy and betters the world:

*Sheridan #2 alternative school teacher, Mick Wiest, talks about education in our democracy. "I am thankful that I live in the greatest democracy the world has known. Democracies, however, are not self-perpetuating. They can only exist as long as their citizens are educated well enough to govern themselves with wisdom. I know of few causes that are more significant than the education of every person in this great state and nation."

*Carbon #2 Encampment School English teacher, Leslie McLinskey, an educator for 11 years says, "I watched one of my seniors walk across the stage at graduation and become the first person in his family to earn a high school diploma. Even though it may sound cliché and overly idealistic, I do feel that I am helping to save the world, one student at a time."

*Sweetwater #2 first grade teacher, Denise Shears, an educator for over 32 years, believes teaching changes the world by touching "touching each of our student's lives."

*Big Horn #2 music teacher, Chauna Bischoff, believes, "Teaching is one of the most important responsibilities in today's society. The future of our nation depends on our children's ability to succeed."

*Laramie #2 sixth grade teacher, Lisa Gilbert, a teacher for 22 years, says, “Teachers hold the future of our country in our hands, for we are shaping and influencing today’s youth.”

They believe in engaging students in deep thinking:

*Uinta # 1 Davis Middle School teacher, Vicki Johnson, says, “An educator’s purpose is to engage students in such a way that they are encouraged to ponder facts and ideas so they can shape their own thoughts.”

*Platte #1 teacher, Catherine Metcalf, a teacher for 30 years, believes in “taking the time to observe, listen and question children for their ideas and encourage problem solving.”

They are passionate about their profession:

*Campbell County art teacher, Paul Waldum, a teacher for 30 years has, in the words of one colleague, “more enthusiasm and energy than any teacher I know.”

*Sublette #1 math teacher, Steve Miller, says, “Sincere education professionals are truly passionate about helping children become life-long learners and critical thinkers, making them globally competitive for future career paths that will rely on technology and other intellectually challenging skills.”

They help students in future careers:

*Big Horn #3 mathematics teacher, Hanson Jordan, says, “The young people that pass through our doors are our future leaders. They deserve nothing less than our best.”

They believe in teacher accountability:

*Teton #1 elementary teacher, Buffy Allen, on the subject of teacher accountability, says, “I think people need to be careful not to confuse accountability with uniformity in teaching. Too much emphasis on fidelity...often limits the creativity and craft of exceptional teachers. Teachers need to teach the way that is effective for their group of students at that given time.”

*Big Horn #4 third grade teacher, Leanna Morton, says that “accountability goes beyond test scores. Pure and simple integrity is doing the right thing at the right time in the right place.”

*Park #6 third grade teacher, Teresa Decker, says, “Our nation needs to come together with one voice saying education is about the whole child. Students need to be informed and productive citizens once they graduate from the public school system. This cannot be measured with test scores alone. Conversations need to be ongoing on how to improve accountability.”

*Johnson #1 English teacher Michael Scarlett, an educator for 22 years, says, “The bottom line, for me is that positive relationships with kids leading to student success should always be the focal point of accountability in the teaching profession.”

*Hot Springs County science teacher, London Jenks, says, “The true successes and failures of educators cannot be fully recognized with short-term measures. Accountability should be approached in the same way quality educators approach their students--with a strong confidence in their ability to improve and grow and tireless support.”

*Niobrara #1 teacher, Teresa Tucker, an educator for 32 years, says, “Evaluation is one tool for accountability. Evaluations need to be continuous via principal walk-throughs, student surveys and our own reflection,” she says.

They believe in learning from one another:

*Converse #1 rural school teacher, Jessica McGuire, says, “I would like to promote a balance between the pressure to improve and the support to do so. By valuing those who are already doing great work, we can promote educational champions and move others forward.”

*Carbon #1 teacher, Marlana Shellito, says, “Perhaps the answer to this dilemma isn’t holding bait over a teacher’s head, but instead, collaborating with highly successful schools.”

They believe in adapting to every child every year:

*Big Horn #1 mathematics teacher, Lee Zimmer, says, “There is one constant in education and that is change. We get new students every year, we have kids moving in and out of our classes in the year, schedules change from year to year and there are daily interruptions. Teaching partners change, administration changes, technology changes, society changes, curriculum changes and instructional strategies change. It is important that as teachers, we have core fundamental beliefs that we know are best for our students.”

*Lincoln #2 math teacher, Robert Erickson, a teacher for 16 years, says “Teachers need to have the freedom to try different strategies in an attempt to reach students. Strategies change. It is important that as teachers, we have core fundamental beliefs that we know are best for our students.”

They believe in rigor and support for students:

*Sweetwater #1 mathematics teacher, Julie Weir, a teacher for 27 years, says, “I love teaching and I believe that it is one of the most important yet difficult professions. My philosophy is to push kids to be better than they think they can be and help them gain the confidence through knowledge to achieve.”

*Park #16 teacher, Linda Neuenschwander, says, “Each new school year I eagerly anticipate sparking the joy of math in my students. When one of them gets a glimpse of math’s beauty, I’m motivated to continue to teach. My greatest accomplishments are when my students succeed.”

*Big Horn #1 teacher, John Samuels, “I believe the purpose of the English educator is twofold: to broaden each of our student’s understanding of what it means to be human, and help them learn how to effectively share their experiences and ideas. Our first charge could not be more critical in today’s world.”

*Converse #2 educator, Arlene Jackson, an educator for 31 years, believes that the most important skill a student must acquire is to read and understand. “Students who read for understanding have the tool to access knowledge. If students can read and access information, they can be successful contributing members of society.”

They believe in the community:

*Washakie #1 teacher Barbara Sinclair, a teacher for 24 years, “It seems that educators have become an easy target for criticism in the United States today. I, however, am extremely proud to be a teacher. I see teachers every day who are changing their students’ lives both academically and socially. My message is one of encouragement to my fellow teachers, persuading the public to respect this great profession.”

*Weston #7 teacher, Deanne Gould, an educator for 35 years, believes that it takes a community to raise a child. “To teachers I would say, never give up on a child. To the general public I would say, “If we all work together, we can build a better future for not only our community, but for our country.”

They believe in caring for students:

Uinta #4 teacher, Marissa Cook, has earned the respect of her students with her kindness, love and dedication.

*Natrona #1 teacher, Christopher Dresang, says, “My dream is for students to want to come to school, because they have a desire to learn and they see people who care about them.”

*Fremont #21 teacher, Michael Read, says, “My primary goal is to have the students develop a strong sense of community within the school.”

*Fremont #2 teacher, Malia Qureshi, an educator for 36 years, says, “We became teachers because we wanted to make a difference in children’s lives. This is not a responsibility we take lightly. Teaching is an act of love,” she says.

*Goshen mathematics teacher, Mary Werner, says, “I am dedicated to this profession and the students I love and believe in. With devotion and cooperation, we truly are on the verge of greatness.”

*Washakie #2 teacher, Kathleen Hampton, a teacher for 23 years, says, “My greatest contribution to education has been my investment of time, energy and love for my students.”