Understanding the Funding of Special Education in Our Public Schools

Adequate funding for K-12 educational programs in Washington State has been a challenge for school districts for a number of years. A growing concern to many public schools is the level of funding provided by the state for special education instructional programs and related services. The Washington State Constitution establishes a paramount duty of the state to fully fund the basic education program, including special education. However, there is a growing cost to districts over and above state and federal revenues which must be made up from our local property tax levy. The costs associated with special education continue to grow year after year with local levy expenditures to support special education projected to exceed six million dollars in the current school year. The shortfall in funding from the state is due to a simplistic funding formula which does not address the complex issues surrounding the provision of special education.

Basic Funding Formula

In Washington, all students enrolled K-12 in public schools are general education students first, generating a Basic Education Allocation (BEA) which is approximately $4,293 per student on a statewide average. For those students who qualify for special education, an additional state Excess Cost Allocation is available for up to 12.7% of the district total enrollment. The Excess Cost Allocation is funded at 93.09% of the district’s unenhanced BEA times the special education headcount average for the year. This formula cap negatively impacts many districts in two areas:

- School districts who legitimately identify and serve students above the cap do not receive excess cost funding for those students from the state.
- Many districts are penalized under the current formula because it does not take into consideration that some districts have higher numbers of high cost students than in other school districts.

Simply put, the state has chosen a funding mechanism that is designed along the line of “one size fits all.” This approach has never been a particularly effective way to meet children’s physical or educational needs. It also has had the effect of significantly limiting the amount of funding available from the state, and increasing what local school districts must come up with to meet identified student needs.

How does the current state funding formula impact schools?

Spokane is a good example of how the current state funding formula for special education falls short in meeting the state’s paramount duty to fund special education. There
are several reasons why Spokane exceeds the cap for funding and is significantly impacted by larger than expected numbers of high cost students.

**It’s a numbers game**

The general education enrollment in Spokane has decreased over the last 5 years while the special education enrollment has increased. At the end of the 2004-05 school year — of the district’s 29,056 annual average full-time equivalent resident students enrolled in Spokane — 4,137 students qualified for special education services, or 14.2% of our enrollment. The number of students (1.5% above the cap) we are not allowed to count for Excess Cost funding purposes is 447 students. The funding shortfall from the state for enrollment over the cap is $1,845,663 under this “single formula” funding approach.

**It’s also the type of student we are serving**

In addition to 447 students for whom we are unable to claim excess funding from the state (over the cap), there are a significant number of high cost students in Spokane. These costs far exceed the combined state and federal revenue sources needed to provide identified services.

Without a funding mechanism that takes into consideration the numbers of students legitimately served by the district as well as differentiated funding which recognizes the high costs associated with a growing number of students, many other districts will be forced to increase the amount of local funding to meet special education and related service needs of our students.

**Safety Net Isn’t the Answer**

To augment the basic funding mechanism of a simple 12.7% cap, the state implemented a Safety Net Application Process in 1995. Although I support the concept of a safety net process to provide for unanticipated costs to school districts, such as a court ordered placement, it should not be used to supplant the need to develop a comprehensive funding model for the state. The safety net system currently in place has many flaws that only recently are starting to be addressed. The removal of a local maintenance of effort requirement on the application will open the door for districts that previously have not been able to access safety net funding. Furthermore, the increase in the state allocation for special education this legislative session was a step in the right direction in recognizing the need to increase funding for special education. Unfortunately, the increased funding is to be distributed through the Safety Net Application Process rather than distributed to school districts where a more positive funding impact would have been felt immediately.

A major flaw in our state’s safety net system is that it only allows school districts to apply for what is defined as a high cost student. It does not allow school districts to apply for funding for students above the cap. The high cost student threshold amount has been significantly increased from approximately $14,000 to $21,000 this year, which in effect limits which high cost students qualify for reimbursement. The impact of this change to Spokane is that of the 20 high cost students funded in 2004-05 at $209,047 only 13 students would qualify using the new

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When All Really Means All

EDUCATING EVERY CHILD

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Acronym key
In this issue, we’re providing a key to often-used acronyms to avoid duplication.

NCLB: No Child Left Behind
OSPI: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction
WASL: Washington Assessment of Student Learning
I think every educator gets a certain tug each fall as the school year begins anew. It is a feeling of hope and anticipation, of wonderment and curiosity. Whether or not it is some part of the genetic makeup that calls us to education, it is a powerful mix of emotions.

I watch the children in the neighborhoods around my home and workplace waiting for their buses each morning and marvel at their potential, wondering what their day will be like. The theme of this issue of *Curriculum in Context*, “When All Really Means All: Educating Every Child,” was selected to explore the concept of “all”—a concept that is often expressed, but one that may not be equally valued. As I look at the faces of the children waiting for the bus, I wonder which of these children will be made to feel they are not part of the system, and which will be rewarded for being able to adapt and manage effectively.

Many of us have read Jim Collins’ book, *Good to Great*, where he describes a principle distinguishing good corporations from great corporations as the ability to get “the right people on the bus.” Looking at these children, I am struck that these are the right people on the bus. As educators entrusted with their care and well-being, our job is to teach them all well. We do not sort which children we want to teach and which children we will leave behind; we strive to make a difference for every child.

As each of the articles in this issue shows, educators in our state are making tremendous strides toward creating systems that value each child for the individual he or she is. The articles help us understand the customs and traditions of our Muslim students, as well as positive solutions to helping developmentally challenged students transition to life beyond high school. The features also illustrate the difficulties of state funding formulas for Special Education, and the hope of programs that work with collaborative teams of families and educators to develop educational plans for our most significantly disabled students. You will read about research on the changing family structure as well as research on a project working with inner city students and their attitudes about college.

Each of these articles helps us see how across the state we are working to ensure that all really does mean all, and that all children have a rich and varied school experience.

In addition to our regular feature, A Teacher’s Voice, we are excited to showcase the voice of a student in our new feature, A Student’s Voice. As we consider the issues around curriculum and supervision, we believe it is important to understand the perspectives of the people whose education we are entrusted to provide. This will become a regular feature of our journal and another resource to help us as we each strive to make a difference for every child in our state.

*Deborah Gonzalez and Greg Fritzberg are co-editors of Curriculum in Context.*
A Teacher’s Voice

BY TANDY SCHAFER

ENERGY. ANTICIPATION.

Excitement. All of these are emotions teachers experience prior to the opening of a new school year. One might think, though, that after fifteen openings my eyes would not still pop open at 2:00 a.m. the night before school starts, with flutters of nervousness running rampant throughout my entire body. As I lay there in the darkness, I ponder all I’ve done to prepare for the start of this new school year and ask myself, “Am I truly ready?”

I recall the professional growth opportunities that have really shaped my teaching. I think about Socratic Seminar, and how, through the process of dialoging about challenging text, my students will come away with deeper understanding. I will remember to share the following motto with my students: Individually we are smart. Collectively we are brilliant. I will be eager to continue the learning from Kelly Gallagher, an exceptional teacher in the Anaheim School District and the author of Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4-12 (2004), who shared reading strategies that enable students to understand text at a deeper level. I will strive, everyday, to hold my students accountable for their learning. Finally, I think about the daily lessons I will write. Because my students deserve the best teaching possible, every day they will have multiple opportunities to think, talk, read, and write.

Next, my mind shifts into thinking about my classroom and my students. My room is colorful with artwork, inspirational quotes, and a tremendous amount of pictures from previous students...the kids enjoy these the most. The desks are clean, the room is arranged in a style that encourages collaborative work, and copies are made of the syllabus and classroom rules. But syllabi and rules will come later because the most important thing is establishing relationships. I am a better teacher when I can get to know my students on a more personal level. Therefore, I have my music selected to create a comfortable environment and will greet each and every student as they enter my classroom for the first time.

Every year, during open house, I share with the parents that I am blessed. I love my job! For me, it’s all about the kids. This year I have all seniors. It is my responsibility to help them make good choices, become responsible citizens, strengthen their reading and writing skills, and to give them all the extra attention, encouragement, and kindness they deserve. It is this passion that allows me the peace of mind to know that I am ready for the first day of school, and I drift back to sleep.

In the morning, when my students are settled, I share with them a quote from Abigail Adams: Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence. Then, one of the boys in front of the class asks, “What is ardor?” I tell him that this is a great question and I ask my students to turn to their neighbor to see if, collectively, they can help one another come up with a working definition. A minute passes and then it is a foreign exchange student that pulls out his electronic dictionary and eagerly yells, “Passion!” He is right. It is about passion and we are already learning. The journey is only beginning, but it is definitely a good one.

Tandy Schafer teaches English at Enumclaw High School.
As we have moved through the past decade of education reform, I have come to a conclusion about the necessary components of top-down change. This conclusion comes from my own personal observations, readings, conversations, and learning. Three fundamental and interdependent change factors must be present for top-down education reform to be successful. The three basic factors are 1) clear goals and expectations; 2) financial and technical support; and 3) school improvement progress, or evidence of positive impact on learning. The degree to which the factors are congruent or synchronized with each other can serve as an estimate of the probability that the reform effort will be achieved. The extent to which the factors are mutually supportive can also provide a rough measure of the stress and pressure the groups and individuals within a system will be subject to during the reform.

The following is a simple model of how these change factors are interrelated to illustrate my thinking on this. To visualize this model, think of these factors as three separate arrows on a sheet of paper. The model is dynamic so the arrows, or vectors, change in length over time, indicating changes in magnitudes of the constructs they each represent. They can also change direction, representing shifts in assumptions, philosophies, and provisions related to the constructs. This model predicts successful education reform if two conditions occur. First, the change vectors must be aimed so that they will intersect at one point. Second, the rate of growth of the vectors must be such that they will eventually converge at the point of intersection within a defined period of time.

At the beginning of a major reform effort, one might expect the vectors
would be some distance apart and that the arrows would be pointing toward a common area but not necessarily in exactly the same direction. The challenge for accomplishing reform is inversely proportional to the degree to which the vectors are aligned and how closely the vectors are oriented. The people on the front lines who are expected to implement the reform face serious challenges and are subject to tremendous pressure when the vectors are not aimed properly or do not grow responsively with the needs of the system. The attitudes, beliefs, philosophies, and assumptions of the people involved influence the length and the direction of the vector. The hypothetical reform system depicted in Diagram 2 is an example of one that has a high probability of failure unless corrections can be made in time and weak factors can be strengthened.

I find this model useful in examining education reform efforts in Washington State. The major reform mandate that governs our school improvement efforts is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Legislators and other decision makers at the state and federal level are responsible for, to use terms of this essay, the direction and growth rates of the vectors dealing with goals and expectations and financial and technical support. Frontline educators and administrators are responsible for the changes in the school improvement vector.

Let’s look at the school improvement vector in regard to No Child Left Behind and high achievement standards for all students. Washington public educators have established a “strong pattern of positive change at elementary, middle and high schools across the state” (OSPI[1], 2005). This strong pattern of change can be represented in our model by extending the school improvement vector toward the general vicinity of the goals and expectations vector. This
progress is good and it warrants celebration. But even with all the
progress that is being made, 185
Washington public schools, up from
156 last year, are now in some
phase of improvement status. OSPI
states that “[t]he primary reason
for the jump is an increase in this
year’s reading and math achieve-
ment targets, which went up signif-
icantly in grades 4, 7 and 10”
(OSPI[2], 2005). Student achieve-
ment and school performance are
getting better but the expectations
are increasing as well. This brings
me to the remaining two change
vectors regarding NCLB.

An unnerving aspect of NCLB
expectations and support is that
they often seem to be beyond our
sphere of control or influence. To
add to the stress, the expectations
for student performance have not
yet been adequately refined and the
financial support we are receiving
to retool our system is insufficient.
If these factors remain static, the
change model predicts serious trou-
bles because not only will the vectors
not intersect in a common point,
they will not even touch.

However, there is evidence that
the NCLB reform system in our
state is to some extent self-correct-
ing. By now you have heard of the
change that involves a develop-
tally appropriate assessment sys-
tem that will allow two percent of
the tested population to be evalu-
ated using instruments that are
more geared to students’ levels of
development and IEP goals. There
have also been changes regarding
English language learners, as well.
These adjustments afford us addi-
tional flexibility in how and when
we attain student performance
goals. These changes would be rep-
resented in the change model by
turning the expectation arrow a lit-
tle toward and a little closer to the
school improvement vector.

The shortest vector in my repre-
sentation of the Washington State
NCLB model represents the finan-
cial and technical support ele-
ments of the reform. This aspect of
state reform accounts for much of
our grief related to the improve-
ment effort. We are expected to do
things on a large scale that have
never been done before. We are
going to need concerted efforts in
helping educate and retool our
learning systems to know what we
need to do and how we can best do
it. We need to increase access to
the profound information that is
necessary to continually increase
student achievement.

The price tag for achieving the
student outcomes mandated by
NCLB is significantly higher than
what we receive for this work. My
vector model predicts that NCLB
efforts will suffer if the magnitude
of the support arrow does not dra-
matically increase. The shortened
length of this particular vector
reflects the pressure felt by stake-
holders around the insufficient
resources to accomplish the task
before them. The districts filing suit
against the state legislature and the
increasing numbers of districts fil-
ing an amicus brief exemplify the
increased pressure felt.

All models have their limitations.
I know there are other, more sophis-
ticated ways of accurately modeling
organizational change and improve-
ment. However, the model I shared
with you in this article helps to
communicate, visually, the major
factors in education reform and
their relationships to each other. If
we keep track of how the vectors
change over time, we can get a
rough visual estimate of the proba-
bility of successful school reform.
The model can also provide a means
of identifying priorities. For exam-
ple, a short arrow that remains that
way over time represents a factor
that will be problematic and could
be a reason that the reform will not
be accomplished.

The vector model analysis of
Washington state’s implementation
of NCLB illustrates for me three
important points: 1) frontline educa-
tors should continue to be chal-
enged to make progress on their
improvement goals and be recog-
nized for their good work; 2) ac-
chievement standards and time-
lines should continue to be refined;
and 3) schools and districts need
support that is proportional to the
magnitude of the job that is
expected of them. If the three fac-
tors listed above can be realized,
then the reform will probably be
accomplished and we will be able to
survive the challenging task.

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In Good Faith
Strategies for Accommodating Muslim Students in our Public Schools

BY FARA NIZAMANI

“I always sit alone in the cafeteria. The girls here don’t want to be friends because they think I’m strange, but I’m not really. It’s just that I don’t talk about boys and partying all the time. One day I was so lonely that I started to cry right in the middle of the lunchroom. I pretended like I was coughing and then ran to the restroom so no one would see. I stayed in the stall for almost 30 minutes until it was time for my next class. If it weren’t for my parents, I would have quit school a long time ago.” (Asma*, 14)

“I feel so left out sometimes. I can’t go to a lot of the activities that the school sponsors because it’s stuff like dances and trips to the water parks. Don’t teachers and principals have any imagination? Can’t they think of any activities that EVERYONE can go to?” (Muhammed*, 12)

The words of these two students typify the frustrating experiences many of our students face every day. Although Islam is one of the fastest-growing religions in the United States, and its adherents, known as Muslims, number approximately six million in our country and one billion worldwide, our Muslim students are challenged in ways hardly recognized by their peers or the education community. Muslims comprise one of the most diverse minorities in America, and Muslims from every corner of the earth share a common religious culture that is sometimes at odds with the traditional American educational system. Though well-meaning, school employees may inadvertently say and do things that are inappropriate at best and extremely offensive at worst. Educators should be aware of the concerns of their Muslim families and employ strategies to more fully include these students in the education community.

Basic knowledge of the foundations of Islam, commonly known as the five pillars, is central to understanding both what motivates Muslim students and how to accommodate their special needs. These five pillars are:

• **Shahada** – belief in one God and in His messengers
• **Salat** – prayer five times per day at appointed times
• **Saum** – fasting during the month of Ramadan
• **Zakat** – charity to those in need
• **Hajj** – pilgrimage to Mecca for those who are able

The *shahada* is the Islamic belief that there is only one God, and that the messengers were sent to set a good example for people to follow. One aspect of the examples, or *sunnah*, set by the messengers...
that may require accommodation is religious attire. The Islamic faith requires its adherents to dress modestly at all times and avoid showing or drawing attention to their bodies, especially in mixed-gender settings. Muslim girls and women will frequently wear a scarf and loose-fitting clothing, rather than short or form-fitting skirts and dresses; boys and men often wear a cap; and both males and females may not wear clothing that has artwork depicting living creatures. Many Muslim parents may refuse to allow their children to participate in coed physical education classes, especially if changing clothes is a requirement. Asking a Muslim to dress in Western-style clothing or to remove headgear is inappropriate.

Daily prayers are another area which will often require schools to accommodate their Muslim students. Prayer times are calculated according to the position of the sun during the day, and these times vary according to the length of the day, the time of the year and the geographical location. Muslims must pray at least five times every day, at specific times, and missing a prayer is considered to be a serious offense. Before any prayer, Muslims must first perform the ritual cleansing, called wudu, so access to a well-maintained restroom is essential, especially for girls, since they are required to remove their scarves in order to complete the wudu. The place for prayer should be a clean, safe, quiet area that allows the person to kneel without hindrance (bathrooms, crowded hallways and noisy cafeterias would be unacceptable). Breaks should be provided to allow enough time for students to com-
plete the required prayers, including the required Friday congregational prayers at midday.

Fasting, or sawm, during the month of Ramadan is frequently a difficult time for many Muslim students. The Islamic calendar follows the lunar cycles and so comes at different times each year. For example, in 2004, Ramadan began in the middle of October and ended in the middle of November, while in 2005, Ramadan will begin in early October and end in early November, depending on when the crescent moon is sighted. This month is a time of fasting and prayer for Muslims. They are forbidden to eat, chew or drink anything from dawn until sunset and must spend extra time in prayer and contemplation. During this month, some Muslim students may appear tired, and work may not meet previous standards due to fatigue and time spent in prayer. Allow students to take their lunch break away from the cafeteria, and if necessary, provide a short period to break the fast by eating and saying a short prayer. Try to avoid last-minute assignments that may interfere with the required prayer/reflection time, especially during the last 10 days of Ramadan and the subsequent three-day celebration called Eid al-Fitr. Parents of Muslim students may be unable to attend evening events such as Back to School Night if the event is scheduled during Ramadan.

The hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, is a once in a lifetime requirement of all Muslims who are financially able to make the journey. Like Ramadan, the hajj comes at different times during the year, and it is often the most intense spiritual experience of most Muslims’ lives. Although the hajj itself lasts only about ten days, the preparation takes much longer and may include the following: physical conditioning for the rigorous walking between holy sites; asking forgiveness and making amends to those you may have offended; and repaying of any debts. Upon return from the hajj, the hajji, or pilgrim, is expected to receive numerous visitors who offer their congratulations. Asking students to take school work with them to the hajj is inappropriate, so if your Muslim students indicate that they will be going to the hajj, allow them plenty of time to make up work or offer alternate assignments that can be done after returning.

One final aspect of Islam that is puzzling to many non-Muslims is the prohibition of close personal contact between unrelated members of the opposite gender. Many Muslims refrain from intentional direct physical contact with the opposite sex, they may refuse to shake hands with or sit very close to opposite genders, and some may even refuse to call or communicate with other students after school. Educators should allow students to adjust their personal seating arrangements as needed to provide the necessary level of comfort and be sensitive to students’ concerns about working on school assignments with opposite genders outside of the classroom setting.

In conclusion, there is a desperate need for communication between Muslims and non-Muslims in the educational community in order to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding that prevents true acceptance. Being open to new ideas and ways of thinking remains at the very heart of every educational institution’s mission, and with a little accommodation, our schools can take a leadership role in the inclusion of this significant minority in mainstream society.

The following resource list will help provide additional information for educators interested in meeting the needs of their Muslim students.

Resources for Educators

Online:

AWAIR: Arab World and Islamic Resources and School Services represents the long-term efforts by Audrey Shabbas and colleagues who share commitment to quality materials and services for educators teaching about the Arab World and about Islam at the pre-college level. http://www.awaironline.org

The Council on Islamic Education (CIE), founded in 1990, is a national, non-profit research institute and resource organization based in Fountain Valley, California. CIE is formally comprised of Muslim academic scholars of religion, history, political science, cultural studies, communications, education, and other fields, along with a full-time professional staff with expertise on matters related to U.S. education, civics, politics, the media, faith communities and other components of American society and the institutional system. http://www.cie.org

Islamic Networks Group (ING) is a non-profit, educational organization founded in 1988, based in the San Francisco Bay Area. ING delivers presentations relating to Islam and the Muslim world. http://www.ing.org

About Islam and Muslims. The aim of this webpage is to provide accurate information about Islamic beliefs, history and civilization for Muslims and Non-Muslims. This site is geared towards friends of other faiths. http://www.ummah.org.uk/what-is-islam/

Books/Articles:

All-American Yemeni Girls by Loukia Sarroub. This ethnography is an important and timely addition to our understanding of how immigrant and American-born Muslim girls are adapting to life and schooling in the US, and how our schools are struggling to address their needs. Although very narrow in its exclusive focus on one group of Yemeni girls, this book can give the educator a valuable look at the thoughts and attitudes of both Muslim students and their families.

“Suffer the Little Muslims” By Cristi Hegranes. Originally published by SF Weekly 2005-08-17. A look at the appalling discrimination against Middle Eastern students countenanced by Bay Area public schools.

Fara Nizamani is a Senior Faculty at City University in Bellevue, WA.

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The Beaver Doesn’t Live Here Anymore
Responding to the Needs of the Changing Family

BY CHARLES E. WHEATON AND TAVIS M. PETERSON

The evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: the family is a child’s first and most influential teacher not only during school years but also through life. NCLB provides a stimulating opportunity for schools to evaluate the way we work with these influential teachers.

The programs schools offer must recognize, respect, and accept the value of all families regardless of structure, income, educational level, or cultural backgrounds. Schools and the people who work in them should never assume families don’t care about their children. None get up in the morning and purposefully send their child to school to be disruptive or unsuccessful. We must not assume there are prescribed roles or activities that families or educators are expected to perform. There are many paths to the same goal. Therefore, strong leadership and support must be provided to increase meaningful family involvement.

It is no surprise that those students who are most successful in school have the most family involvement with the school. Even though staff thinks they welcome all families, there is evidence that, knowingly or not, educators recognize only a narrow band of acceptable family behaviors that are more in tune with the traditional family structure. Teachers naturally show preference to families who defer to them and accept their opinions about their children. However, continual changes in the family structure and the perception that families are less supportive of student learning and classroom behavioral standards challenge educators to examine their attitudes and expectations of many of today’s families. For effective educational processes to occur in the classrooms, family assistance in partnership with educators is needed, but can educators even recognize the family and understand how to relate to them?

Whether we agree with the changes in our society or not does not matter. To not leave any child behind, we must be sensitive to the organization and functioning of the various family structures from which our children come to us. We support families when we meet families where they are and when we attempt to understand their perspectives, desires, and needs. Children of non-traditional families often find themselves living in overlapping households having to adjust to different routines, rituals, and expectations. The effect of some of these situations generates questions and confusion for educational staff. Where are homework assignments? Why are students continually arriving late to school or not
arriving to school at all? Who allows them to dress or eat as they do? Unless we are the guardians of these youngsters, we don’t know the answers or the reasons. So, how do we enforce common standards for these students?

Today’s changing wave of the traditional family structure has penetrated all boundaries of race, ethnicity, and income level. In a quest for protection, stability, belonging, and order, fatherless youths often turn to gangs as a pseudo-family structure. Recently, in a brief commentary from the June 2005 issue of the “Kappan,” Bobby Ann Starnes brings to the readers’ attention some unfounded and unfair judgments regarding family living conditions and family structures.

During the last 50 years, modifications and alterations in marriage and family behavior have redefined the American family. Families of today are often inhibited from participating in schools because of their feelings of inadequacy. Social capital or a family’s sense of effectiveness in their interactions with the school is not necessarily consistent among all groups. Some families feel they lack social capital, or more simply, the ability to communicate with our schools. Moreover, the response they often receive warrants this perception. Social capital includes the friendships, professional circles, clubs, neighborhoods, churches and alumni networks where you provide and receive support of the group or a fellow member. White, middle class families are more comfortable with school staff because they share common social networks. They understand and use the same vocabulary as educators and have the overall feeling that they are treated as equals.

Family involvement in school is frequently influenced by one’s own experiences in or with school. These experiences might include academic and social successes; cultural, racial, socio-economic status; and feelings of acceptance. Time commitments and the many other burdens of family responsibilities may also limit a family’s involvement with school. Consider this. The family meal—an American custom practiced for hundreds of years—may within our lifetimes enter the nation’s endangered practices list. The fraction of married Americans who definitely say “our whole family usually eats dinner together” has declined a third, from about 50 percent to 34 percent in just the last twenty years. We fail as educators when we form conclusions about what families should be doing and how they should contribute to their child’s education.

In college preparation classes and in educational research literature, there is an ever-increasing emphasis for all teachers to create culturally responsive classrooms. Linda Darling-Hammond, Arthur Wise, and Paul Klein have stated, “If all children (students at every level) are to be effectively taught, educators must be prepared to address the substantial diversity in experiences that children bring with them to school—the wide range of languages, cultures, exceptionalities, learning styles, talents, and intelligences that require an equally wide and varied repertoire of teaching strategies.”

Although it was not specifically mentioned in this brief quote, our culturally responsive classrooms must also include the ever-changing complexion and composition of our families. Bedden, Futrell, and Gomez state, “As we calculate our success as a nation, that calculation will be increasingly contingent on both the success of our efforts to make America more inclusive and our ability to ensure that every American is treated with respect, is guaranteed social justice, and is provided an educational foundation through which to contribute to and benefit from our democratic society.” It is not the role of educators to “fix the family” but rather to view differences as strengths and commit to promoting and celebrating successes.

According to Sander and Putnam, a 10 percent increase in parental participation in school would increase academic achievement far more than a 10 percent increase in school spending. Studies have found that our nation’s family participation in schools has decreased. Some of the reasons cited include: the decline of the nuclear family, television watching, urban sprawl and the way this has made our personal schedules more complex, and the increase of two-career couples. Nevertheless, it is not likely achievable or desirable to turn the clock back to the 1950s by
asking women to shut off their TVs on their way back to the kitchen. Society has changed markedly over the last three decades—socially, technologically, and economically—and thus we need to be forward-looking if we are to effectively educate today’s young people.

Our challenge is to become aware of the changes to family structures and be accepting and sensitive to those students whose families have adopted a less traditional family structure. If we are to provide equitable educational opportunities to all students, we must seek a working knowledge and understanding of the many contemporary permutations of today’s families. According to the Federal Interagency Forum on Children and Family Statistics, since 1980 there has been a 9% decrease in the number of children who live with two married parents. The percentage in 1980 was 77% while in 2004, the figure dropped to 68%. Elena Bastida reports, “Family roles are no longer defined by a larger societal system but rather are more individualized. During the past 25 years, family arrangements have changed.” Familial stability is becoming a rare structure. Students spend significant amounts of time without any supervision. Many low-economic status students work at nearly fulltime jobs to support siblings. Federal poverty figures indicate that 18%, or 13 million, children lived in poverty in the United States in 2003.

Today’s family forms a much more decentralized network of relationships than the patriarchal model of the 1960’s. There is less of an orderly autocratic chain of command. Allegiances, to some extent, are as closely or more tied to peer groups than to family. Some indications of this are apparent in that students have more spending money and more control in how they will spend it. Technological advances, which include not only television, but also the internet, cell phones, and video games have also had a huge influence on family life. Technology has changed life significantly even as we knew it as few as 20 years ago. Not only do families share fewer meals together, they don’t even sit down together to watch TV. Some members of the family may be off playing video games while others are surfing the net. Too often, these media forms and devices have become caregivers for children and they are offered with little or no supervision. Richard Louv has a new label to describe these students. Students who spend too much time indoors surfing the net or playing video games may be bestowed with the latest label, “nature-deficit-disorder.”

The impact of parental loss, most often the absence of fathers, is also a continual challenge for our students. Sexual activity among older students has reached a crisis stage. These older students referred to are often as young as eleven or twelve years of age and some of our students share multiple unstable families as they have experienced multiple divorces. More and more, grandparents are also becoming primary caregivers for grandchildren.

Adding to the challenges that educators face is the increase in mobility among our students. Resident mobility is more the norm than the exception. 48.2% of the families in Washington State live in a different residence than they did in 1995 and 20.7% of these residences are located in a different county. The number of immigrant families who have migrated to the United States to find work exacerbates this need for kinship support. Mexican women, new to the U.S., report reliance on kin, not just for receiving information about jobs and salaries, but also as sources of emotional, economic, and social support.

These structures are becoming so prevalent we can no longer refer to these families as dysfunctional or these students as “at-risk.” Labeling them merely gives us excuses to allow our students to achieve less than their personal best. Musician Marian Anderson offers a very poignant quote about how we think of others that are different from us: “As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there to hold the person down, so it means you cannot soar as you otherwise might.” In spite of these changes in family structures, these families are still clearly teaching their children skills of immense variety and power.

The shifts in family types and values are likely to continue with future generations, since children are apt to follow in the footsteps of those who have raised them. Although our high rate of divorces and non-marital births and pre-marital sexual activity have stabilized, they are still very high. Births to unmarried women accounted for 33% of all births in 1994 (not widowed or divorced women, but women who were never married). Single parent households increased from 13% in 1970 to 31% in 1996. The traditional definition of “family” has changed. “Family” might be more accurately defined as Schwartz and Scott have defined it, as any relatively stable group of people who are related to one another through blood, marriage, or
adoption, or who simply live together and provide one another with economic and emotional support. This, of course, is not the legal definition, but may be more descriptive of the families we encounter each day. “Family” might also be described as a group of people who simply define themselves as family based on feelings of love, respect, commitment, responsibility, and identification with one another. It is defined by how and where the child obtains food, shelter, love, safety, guidance, and other necessary resources.

Family researcher, Stephanie Coontz, warns against placing value judgments on non-traditional families, saying, “No particular family form guarantees success, and no particular form is doomed to fail. How a family functions on the inside is more important than how it looks from the outside.” Counselor and professor Linda Rubenowitz adds, “I like to think of family in terms of intangibles such as commitment, mutual support, personal growth, and health.”

Coontz goes on to affirm, “The biggest problem is not that our families have changed too much, but that our institutions have changed too little.” And what institution has the greatest impact on children but our school systems? Educators must honor all family arrangements by adopting a code of etiquette that fosters dignified and respectful interactions and communications with all of our families. Each family must be seen as unique and different from all other families.

An educator of today must move beyond the student as a single focus and include the student’s family structure in regards to relationship building and interaction patterns. This is not to say that the individual child should be overlooked, but more so, that the student and family are a package deal. This task may appear daunting to educators who are faced with a pervasively reluctant or adversarial parental population. Furthermore, many educators are unsure of the best way to include parents/families in their child’s education. However, Marzano produces empirical hope when he contends research has shown effective schools can overcome virulent student backgrounds.

One example of a parent involvement model is called the School Development Program. The cynosure of this program is that the parent is the child’s first teacher. Comer reports that the experience of the School Development Program shows that parental involvement benefits not only students and schools, but also parents themselves. This finding highlights the societal view on which educators should focus.

So, if parents/families are to be involved in a constructive way, what specific techniques for involving families have been shown to be effective? According to research by Marzano and others, three areas that are frequently addressed in literature include communication, participation, and governance.

Focusing on these three areas of interaction between schools and family/community can lead the search for best practices of effectively involving the “whole student.”

Most educators and community members would agree that communication between the two entities is vital for sustainable educational
success. However, what type of communication is most important for a positive effect? Reynolds and Teddlie explain that parental involvement in such areas as criticism of the school or visits to the school to complain are likely to generate negative effectiveness at the school level. Therefore, schools must initiate constructive and positive avenues for communication. Leaders must be constantly aware that many individuals/groups involved with a school can establish a power base that can have a substantial impact on instruction, climate, and learning.

Family participation should be focused on creating a variety of supports for students to promote their educational success and lifelong opportunities. Family participation could look very different between schools and grade levels. Christenson states there are different ways to conceptualize such involvement in education. However, schools are encouraged to develop models that work from time allotments, funding, resources, and responsibilities. Research clearly suggests that schools, students, and parents benefit from parent participation in their child’s education. The benefits for parents include a more positive attitude about the value of education, improved self-perceptions, and greater social networks.

The challenge is getting all staff members to believe in their individual and collective ability and their ability to work in concert with the families in their school. Families should be empowered to do what they can, when they can, where they can, and how they can. Staff members in successful learning communities are working to gain and build mutual understanding and empathy for ALL families. For several years, Union Gap has tried to lead our schools by modeling the message of this quote: “Our task is to provide an education for the kind of kids we have, not the kind we used to have, or want to have, or the kids that exist in our dreams.” For many of our teachers (myself included) and other educational staff, we still relate to the common nuclear family of the 1960’s and 70’s. Instead of penalizing students and families for lack of compliance, staff in high performing schools are working together with families to help them overcome problems and barriers. The programs these schools offer have shown that they recognize, respect, and accept the value of all families regardless of structure, income, educational level, or cultural background. We support families to enhance learning at home when we find a way to affirm all parents’ participation. The “Beaver” may not live here anymore but we can make the changes in schools that will help all of our current and future students.

References

Charles E. Wheaton is currently superintendent in the Union Gap School District.

Tavis M. Peterson, M.Ed. is a school counselor/athletic director in the Union Gap School District.
Money Matters
Our State Should Provide Adequate Funding of Special Education Programs

BY TOM SEIGEL AND JANET BARRY

Our jobs are intense. Often times, we find the best way to lift ourselves out of endless tasks and daunting schedules is to visit classrooms and watch some of our wonderful teachers carry out the mission of educating children. It’s incredibly inspiring to visit a special education classroom and observe teachers, instructional assistants, and specialists provide individualized services to students who benefit the most from such attention.

Indeed, special education programs help many students with disabilities learn and achieve meaningful educational benefits. These programs provide assessment of needs and services, which are then individually tailored to meet each student’s situation.

But we all know there’s something wrong with this current picture. While special education programs are both worthwhile and inspiring, the individually tailored services they provide are costly. Even though state and federal governments require that we provide special education programs, the state of Washington has failed to meet its constitutional obligation to provide full funding of these programs. The state continues to fail to meet its funding obligations even though the courts established the state’s obligation in this regard back in the 1980s.

Growth in the Funding Gap

Nevertheless, while the requirements of special education programs have increased, our state has allowed the funding shortfall in these programs to grow, and it has grown rapidly. The growth in the funding gap is not surprising since the costs of providing these programs have jumped as more and more students are diagnosed with disabilities and the related legal requirements have increased. Experts agree that such costs will climb even further because of “No Child Left Behind” mandates and the 2004 reauthorization of the federal special education law, both of which require that students in special education programs achieve higher levels of progress. These expectations will create increasing pressure for district resources as the expectations continue to increase.

The funding shortfall has reached at least $108 million per year statewide and it is increasing. This calculation is according to annual “F-196” financial statements, which the state requires each school district to prepare and file with the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). However, this data does not include a number of
other costs incurred by districts when serving students in special education. These costs are charged to general education accounts instead and include the cost of utilities, custodial and maintenance services, as well as general administration. When these other real costs are considered, the shortfall in special education funding is much higher. In 2004, the Washington Association of Administrators and OSPI jointly commissioned a study of these costs. The study estimated the shortfall in special education funding to have been more than $180 million during the 2002-03 school year. (http://www.wasa-oly.org/asfp.htm)

School districts have been forced to fill the funding gap by shifting significant local levy dollars to help pay for special education programs. In turn, this means those local levy dollars are not available for their intended purpose — providing enrichment programs such as arts and music, which benefit all students. Our courts have also said that it is illegal for the state to force districts to use local funding for basic education programs like special education. But, that is precisely the situation the state has created. This is not sustainable.


We’re not asking that the funding problem be solved by cutting back on special education programs. On the contrary, we are deeply committed to these programs. Instead, we seek to persuade or compel the state to provide adequate funding of these special education programs.

What can other districts do?

After much consideration, we have taken a dramatic step to help solve this problem. The Alliance has sued the state in an effort to have the courts declare that the funding shortfall exists and the current level of state funding of special education does not meet the requirements of our constitution. The lawsuit is scheduled to go to trial in October 2006. We’re also working hard in Olympia. The Alliance has worked with the Legislature during the 2004 and 2005 sessions to make legislators aware of this funding crisis and urge them to help solve it. Alliance members will continue to work with the Governor and the Legislature in an attempt to solve the funding crisis without the need for a trial.

The state's lawyers have told the court that most school districts do not support the Alliance’s efforts. We believe that is not true. It is important for the court to understand that many districts support increased funding of special education programs. We ask that districts help us solve this funding problem by demonstrating their high level of support. This can be done several ways. First, your district’s school board can adopt a resolution expressing support for the Alliance. Second, your school board can authorize use of your school district’s name in a “friend of the court” brief, making clear its support for the Alliance’s position.

The time for action to solve this funding crisis is now. We urge you to show your support.

Tom Seigel is the superintendent of Bethel School District.

Janet Barry is the superintendent of Issaquah School District.
Developmentally challenged high school students and their families need assistance in making a smooth transition from school to their communities upon leaving the public school system. At West Seattle High School, the Special Education department is helping them make that transition.

“It has been an exciting challenge to develop an educational program for the developmentally challenged students at West Seattle High School. Our primary goal is to prepare students to become as independent as possible and to help them prepare to participate fully in all aspects of life.” (Pat Shipman)

According to Wehman and Revell (1997), “Transition for any student with a disability involves several key components, including (1) an appropriate school program; (2) formalized plans involving parents and the entire array of community agencies that are responsible for providing services; and (3) multiple quality options for gainful employment and meaningful post-school education and community living” (p. 67).

The Seattle School District’s Special Education Transition Programs include four major components. The first is a vocational assessment, exploration, and training component. This provides opportunity for the students to learn about gainful employment available while learning important social interaction skills. The second component is recreation and community access. This helps students apply the social interaction skills they learn in community settings, while allowing them to enjoy access to community programs. The parent/family education and training component ensures a systemic approach to providing families with information and education to help them understand how to support appropriate transitions for their children. The final component of the Seattle School District’s Special Education Transition Programs includes linkages with adult services.

Vocational Assessment, Exploration, and Training

A primary focus of the West Seattle High School transition program is to prepare students for employment after they leave school. Students and their parents or other family members meet annually with the designated Special Education teacher to formulate each student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). When all parties agree, a student is placed in the transition program.

For the 2005-2006 school year, I have eleven students ages 17 to 21 volunteering at the Veterans Affairs
Puget Sound Health Care System (VA) in Seattle. My goal is to help my students develop work skills and work-related social skills that will transfer to gainful employment after they leave school and the transition program. Students at the VA are currently performing work-related activities that include filing and maintaining patients' medical records, escorting patients throughout the hospital, delivering patients' documents and specimens to the lab, and working in the cafeterias. The students also assist at the coffee stand, greet the public, and collect paper and cans for recycling.

My Educational Assistant, John Krause, and I supervise our students' performance, together with their on-site supervisors. We use the Functional Vocational Evaluation created by the transition teachers in the Seattle School District to evaluate students' interest in vocational tasks performed at the training site, work performance, level of supervision needed, accommodations provided, and community related social skills. This evaluation helps us understand how to work with the students to help them meet their educational goals.

Recreation and Community Access

An important aspect of the transition program is teaching students how to access community resources. This includes transit training on regular Metro buses to increase their familiarity with public transportation and their confidence in applying the social skills we work on in the program. It is also important for students to develop healthy eating and exercise habits to maintain a healthy lifestyle once they leave high school. Twice weekly my students and I go to the West Seattle YMCA for an exercise program, including swimming and using the exercise equipment.

Building on the research of effective transition programs, our staff believes it is important for our students to interact with the public and to practice appropriate social skills in actual community settings. To accomplish this goal of the program, the staff and I take our students to a variety of recreation and leisure activities, including Seattle International Children's Festival, Seattle Aquarium, Pacific Science Center, Puyallup Fair, Port of Seattle Harbor Boat Cruise, West Seattle Bowl, Seattle IMAX Dome Theater, Museum of Flight, Woodland Park Zoo, Museum of Glass, Experience Music Project, and community restaurants.

Parent/Family Education and Training

Parents and other family members need as much information and expertise as possible regarding issues related to transition. I assist parents and other family members by providing written materials and awareness of training programs, as well as collaborating with a number of community agencies. Parents and other family members typically ask for a variety of assistance and supports. These can include guardianship issues, gainful employment after high school, social security benefits, temporary assistance with parenting responsibilities, and living arrangements. Working with the families helps ensure the goals of the program are long-lasting and that students have a network of support as they transition from high school.

Linkages with Adult Services

A vital feature of the transition program is the facilitation of linkages between students and their families to community services. I routinely refer students and their families to a variety of community agencies for many kinds of assistance. This may include short-term assistance; preparing for, getting, and keeping a job; and life-long support for employment, housing, everyday activities, and relationships. By linking with community partners to provide access to adult services, we also support students’ training and practice in securing the resources to meet their needs and advocating for themselves in socially appropriate ways. These linkages help insure students and families are familiar with resources they can access to ensure the students are able to participate fully in all aspects of life after they leave the program.

Entrance Procedures

Kohler (1998) organized research literature on model projects and exemplary transition programs into a taxonomy of relevant practices. She found that student participation
in planning, especially in the IEP process, is essential to ensure post-school goals will be valued and attainable. Wehmeyer (1996) believes that self-advocacy is an important skill for students with disabilities to acquire. Hamill and Everington (2002) maintain that people with disabilities must learn to speak for themselves and to participate in their curriculum and life planning.

The transition program is designed to help students gain important vocational skills, but also stresses the importance of self-advocacy and engagement in the development of each student's learning goals. As part of the entrance procedures, students participate in their own IEP conferences to develop specific goals. During the annual IEP conference, WSHS students help develop specific goals for the following year. For students placed in the transition program, the following goals are typical:

- regular attendance and punctuality;
- appropriate dress and grooming;
- following instructions and accepting constructive criticism;
- completing assigned tasks at an acceptable rate;
- transitioning independently from one task to another;
- showing respect for co-workers, supervisors, and community members;
- communicating wants, needs and interests in an appropriate manner;
- actively participating in meetings such as their annual IEP conference;
- ordering and eating lunch in an appropriate manner;
- being willing to experiment and take reasonable risks.

Benefits to Students and Community

In addition to learning the performance goals listed above, students gain self-confidence and self-esteem. Students who exhibit inappropriate social behaviors at school, such as loud talking and name-calling, learn at the job site to speak in an appropriate and professional manner. Students who eat with their fingers, talk with their mouths full and forget to use a napkin, must learn to use utensils, talk appropriately and use a napkin when eating in the VA Cafeteria and in community restaurants. Students who might typically experience difficulty following directions at school learn the importance of following directions on the job. In keeping with the Washington State Learning Goals, this program emphasizes Goal 4 by teaching students the importance of work and how performance, effort and decisions directly affect future job opportunities.

The benefits of the program are not limited to transition students. Employers benefit from students' work. At the VA, when students are on vacation, the paper and can recycling "piles up," and supervisors are glad to see the students return. Supervisors build strong personal relationships with students, and they enjoy students' youthful energy and enthusiasm. Community members learn that people with developmental challenges have the same wants and needs as they have, and learn not to be afraid to interact with them.

Conclusion

The West Seattle High School Special Education Transition Program's primary goals emphasize preparing students to become as independent as possible and helping them participate fully in all aspects of life. Using research to understand the components of successful transition programs, we have built a systemic program utilizing district and community resources to include appropriate school programs and individual education plans that support the family and the student in their advocacy for their rights. The program's emphasis on application of skills learned in real world settings provides valuable learning to the students, but a great benefit to the community partners as well. The combination of all the program components helps ensure the long term success of the students in living productively as independent citizens who can access all aspects of public life.

References

From Despair to Hope
Collaborating to Meet the Needs of Children with Significant Disabilities

BY TERRI THURSTON

“I came to this week-long training thinking there was nothing else we could do for my daughter. Now I can’t wait to go home and try all the ideas and suggestions I learned this week”.
– parent of a child with significant disabilities

“I really never understood why it was so important to bring a team together before.”
– veteran special education teacher

“Meeting the family, the student, and the school team made the written evidence process clearer. It was nice to meet the family. Walking through the communication assessment tools with this student was great – it helped to define what was actual data and what could have been incorrectly inferred.”
– speech and language pathologist

Each of these comments tells a story of the power of collaborative teaming in designing programs to meet the needs of children with significant disabilities. The insights and learnings these comments illustrate are threaded throughout this article. These comments were taken from participants at the Combined Summer Institute in Special Education held each year. This institute is one week of intensive training in July.

Six years ago, our state’s needs projects for autism and sensory disabilities collaborated to offer in-depth training in autism, deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired, deaf and blind, and children with significant disabilities. The result has been outstanding! This article focuses on one of the institute strands, working with students with significant disabilities. To begin, let’s consider the sample profile of a child with significant disabilities.

Sample Profile of a Child with Significant Disabilities:
• Child, aged birth to 21, who is: nonverbal; nonambulatory; possible vision and/or hearing loss; health/medical concerns, i.e., tube feeding, inhalers, toileting, etc.; sensitive to light or touch; and/or hitting, kicking or biting.

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Children with developmental disabilities exist in all of our schools and are the most challenging to provide an appropriate educational program. Parents, teachers and related services staff are often frustrated with programs that have “not worked” and feel they have “tried everything” without success. Frequently, the educational staff and family members have attempted “plans and programs” in isolation without the input from all members of the IEP team. This piecemeal approach is usually only margin-
ally successful and is specific to the service provider. When the specific provider moves out of the child’s program, then the plan/approach ends. Clearly, in serving the needs of children with significant disabilities, the whole team needs to plan, work and train collaboratively to provide the most effective and successful program for the student. Each student is unique and possesses a set of skills that educational staff and families must learn to “see” and experience together in order to successfully meet the needs of the student. This in-depth approach ensures continuity and consistency in delivery to support the student in the best possible manner.

Two years ago the planning committee for the significant disabilities strand of the conference decided to use a case study model to demonstrate the special education process from identification to program implementation and evaluation with “real live” students. The planning committee identified students with significant disabilities at each of 4 levels – preschool, elementary, middle school, and high school transition. The school district/building staff was contacted and parent/staff permission granted for the student and his or her team to be videotaped in a variety of settings. The videotapes are used in the trainings to focus on each step of the special education process by modeling collaborative teaming in problem-solving. Facilitators who are experts in their area provide information to participants and model collaboration techniques in how to problem-solve the best way to serve children with significant disabilities. The student’s IEP team and the family are strongly urged to be at the training to share information regarding the student. Using this case study approach with video and “live” models allows every participant in the training to become part of the problem-solving team. This model also allows the student’s IEP team, the family, and the student to be active participants in the special education process.

Recognizing each student as unique and worthy of collaborative assistance establishes a framework that successfully addresses the needs of students.

“For severely involved students, one of the ways to measure cognition is to observe the student solve problems.”
– researched-based suggestion from facilitator

“I learned about “Wait Time” and how to focus on what a child possesses skill-wise, not what he can’t do.”
– special education teacher

I am confident and clear now about how to collaborate with our IEP team to make a functionally useful IEP! This is huge!
– special education teacher

The facilitators for the significant disabilities sessions assisted the participants by guiding them through methods for setting up situations for the student to have to solve a problem.

What is it the student enjoys or likes? What does he or she dislike? How can you set up an environment where the student makes a choice?

Participants observed and assisted the facilitating team and the student’s team in completing functional assessments (i.e., McGill Action Plans (MAPs), Communication Matrix, and the Pediatric Evaluation of Disability Inventory (PEDI)). Following the assessments, the facilitating team and student’s team looked at how the assessment information is used in the development of goals and objectives connected to the Washington EALRs and EALR extensions. Daily schedules were considered in terms of how to weave these goals and objectives throughout the day and through each service provider’s time with the student. This means all service providers are consistent in communication and learning routines.

Data collection was considered thoroughly. In looking at what constitutes evidence of learning and ways to collect data quickly and easily, all participants gained shared knowledge and ideas to use in their own cases. Throughout this process the participants were provided opportunities to reflect on and “practice” this knowledge with a student with whom they work. The participants then developed an action plan for returning to their school district to share and implement what they learned with their own students.

For years I have heard about the special education “PROCESS,” but now I have a model for how it’s supposed to work!
– special education teacher
The combined expertise of the facilitators/consultants and the participants from a variety of backgrounds was powerful! Truly, the week-long training modeled the collaborative teaming so important to envisioning the possibilities for our students with special needs.

We began this discussion by pointing out that children with significant disabilities are the most challenging to provide an appropriate educational program. The frustrations of parents, teachers, and related services staff are often the result of a piecemeal approach that is usually only marginally successful and is specific to the service provider. Recognizing each student as unique and worthy of collaborative assistance establishes a framework that successfully addresses the needs of students. The gains seen in the students’ growth and the confidence of the parents help us understand how this approach provides invaluable insights for the classroom and beyond.

I will close with this comment from a parent whose son was chosen for a case study review, which illustrates the empowerment the approach has provided:

“I am so impressed by the efforts of my school district team to take the time to find solutions and ideas to help my son be successful. This has been the best week of my life with my son. I know things will be better in the future; I have hope!”

Terri Thurston serves as the Washington Sensory Disabilities Services project manager/director at the North Central Educational Service District.
The National Board Certification Process
Making an Impact in Washington State

BY FOSTER WALSH AND NANCY PLACE

Washington State K-12 education is experiencing a boom in the number of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). Thanks largely to coordinated efforts by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Washington Education Association, Washington State colleges and universities, and generous grants from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Stuart Foundation, Washington Mutual and State Farm, the number of these nationally recognized accomplished teachers has increased substantially in the past 5 years. Washington State had only 69 National Board teachers NBCTs in 2000. There are now 581 NBCTs Nationally Certified Teachers in our state with 611 candidates currently awaiting notification in November 2005.

As a credit to Washington’s support system, teachers passed with one of highest certification rates in the nation, approximately 50%. The National Board recently recognized Washington as a model state in recruitment, retention and support of candidates.

The National Board Certification process was originally proposed and created in 1987 to recognize accomplished teaching and provide a new career ladder for professional educators. With over 40,000 nationally certified teachers in every state the National Board “has steadily grown in political influence, financial strength, and professional respectability. It is poised to assume national responsibility for certifying accomplished teachers” (Johnson, 2001, p. 394). In order to achieve National Board Certification, teachers must have successfully completed a rigorous process of analyzing their instruction, writing extensive written commentaries and responding to a series of computerized prompts. Emerging research suggests that the National Board process successfully identifies accomplished teachers while at the same time providing an opportunity for exemplary powerful professional development.

Identification of Accomplished Teaching
Recent studies (Cavalluzzo, 2004; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004; Vandevoort, L., Amrein-Beardsley, A. & Berliner, D. (2004).) statistically support the notion that students in classrooms taught by NBCTs achieve at higher levels than students in classrooms not taught by these teachers. Cavalluzzo (2004) found evidence of increased achievement and an effective indicator of teacher quality when she examined the association between National Board Certification and student gains in ninth and tenth grade mathematics. Using value-added models,
Goldhaber and Anthony (2004) studied examined teachers in North Carolina and found that National Board Certified Teachers were more effective at raising student achievement, although teacher effectiveness varied by grade level and student type. After analyzing data from four years of Stanford achievement tests from the classrooms of 35 elementary teachers, Vandevoort, Amrein-Beardsley and Berliner (2004) discovered that the students of nationally-board certified teachers surpassed students in the classrooms of non-board certified teachers.

An Exemplary Potential for Powerful Professional Development Opportunity

In 2001 fully 91% of board certified teachers self-reported that the exercises and assessments that are part of the board-certification process helped to make them more effective teachers for their students (NBPTS, 2001). Indeed, the certification process itself is described by many teachers as “the most powerful professional development experience of their careers” (NBPTS, 2004a). Personal statements by teachers (Bohen, 2001; Childres-Burpo, 2002; Heller & Gordon, 2002; Mosely & Rains, 2002; Wiebke, 2000) and surveys (Chittenden & Jones, 1997; Tracz et al., 1995) further support this contention.

The National Board certification process has many of the hallmarks of quality professional development recognized by researchers in the field. Portfolio instructions emphasize content knowledge, active learning and coherence (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Suk Yoon, 2001); reflection on practice (Dewey, 1904; Schon, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996); and the use of assessment for both monitoring student learning and providing feedback to teachers (Elmore, 2002). Teachers learn more when they reflect on artifacts of practice like student work and video tapes, such as required in the portfolio, (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Himley, 1991; Richardson, 1994). Reflection on artifacts is particularly effective when it occurs in collaboration with other teachers, as in the cohort model that has been a feature of the National Board work in this state (Elmore, 2002; Himley, 1991; McDonald, 2002; Richardson, 1994; Wagner, 1996).

Empirical studies documenting the effectiveness of the National Board certification process for teacher professional development are now underway. Although Goldhaber and Anthony (2004) found that teacher efficacy declined somewhat during the actual year of candidacy, early results were mixed (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004), recent studies suggest that the process does promote teacher learning. For example, one of the essential components of the National Board (NB) certification process requires candidates to submit and analyze student work products that represent their practice. Walsh and Ferguson’s (2003) six-month series of interviews with eight National Board candidates from Washington State support the notion that the process of determining which student work product to submit as certification evidence enhanced teacher understanding of the purpose and importance of using student work to evaluate teaching and plan for future instruction. A study of eight National Board teacher candidates (Place & Coskie, 2005) suggests that candidates developed new frameworks for thinking about their practice as a result of their participation in the NB National Board portfolio process. In particular, close observation of children and their literacy work seems to have resulted in some teachers’ having a deeper understanding of individual students, which resulted in higher expectations and differentiated instruction.

Voices from the Field in Washington State

While there is still research to be done in the area of teacher learning in relationship to the National Board process, comments from Washington State NBCTs poignantly substantiate the Some of the most poignant remarks about the effectiveness of the National Board process for promoting teacher learning come from Washington State participants.. In a study funded by the Washington State Initiative for National Board Certification, Heller and Gordon (2002) interviewed eleven recently certified Washington State teachers about their experiences of the certification process. According to these teachers, seeking national certification had a profound effect on them, affecting what content was selected and how it was taught, what they noticed and thought about in the classroom and how they evaluated their students’ work. The following are comments by four teachers in relation to categories of learning that were threads throughout the interviews—using standards, changes in assessment practices, learning about students, and improving instruction. These comments provide a window into the ways in which the National Board experience translated into classroom practice for these teachers.

Using Standards

“When I read the standards, I was like, “This is the teacher that I’m striving to be.”…It’s so wonderful to see something like that put
into words… I really related to the standards. When I saw the standards, it was like, “I do that.” “I do that.” And there were some things, “I really want to do that!” or “I should be doing that.” The standards are what sold me on it. The things that I was doing, it made me feel good, …and the other things, it was like, “Well I could improve in this”…So it helped me to really look at my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher, and from there to grow” (Early Childhood Teacher, p. 16).

Changes in Assessment Practices
“ I remember my first draft of my assessment essay was all about tests—my definition of assessments was tests. That was very embarrassing for me...And you know, you show it to other people and later I realized how stupid I was about what an assessment is, and how really you’re assessing every day—and eventually I caught on to that” (Middle School Science Teacher, p. 8).

Learning about Students
“ The National Board process encourages teachers to know students deeply, on multiple levels...Doing that well requires constant reflection, because students are changing. Otherwise I would just walk in the morning, there would be 20 little people, I wouldn’t know where they were coming from individually...I would teach a lesson and wouldn’t really care about the evidence on whether or not it was effective. I would teach it, , and wouldn’t really care about evidence on whether or not it was effective. I would teach it, hoped it worked, move on. Being reflective requires you to keep constant data reflecting on their [students’] growth,...and as you do that, the lessons evolve into new things that are appropriate for each individual student” (Early Childhood Teacher, p. 14).

Improving Instruction
“ I became a lot more aware of student interactions, and my interaction with students...As a teacher you don’t always get a good perspective on what happens. —you see things from up front...One of the things that I was initially very disappointed about was—I think I knew this, but I don’t think that the full weight of it came forward until I watched the videotapes—that only a limited number of students were participating, and there were always certain students that don’t participate. So I tried out other ways of encouraging participation as well as creating spaces for groups of students to share, whether it’s in pairs, dyads, group discussion before larger group, classroom discussion...” (Early Adolescent Science Teacher, p. 9).

National Board Certified Teachers
NBCTs (NBCTs) as District and School Leaders
As accomplished and articulate teachers, National Board Certified Teachers NBCTs are have become a strong leadership resource for Washington State schools and districts. Although support of the National Board process and recognition of NBCTs varies widely across Washington school districts, NBCTs are assuming statewide leadership roles: chairs of district committees, facilitators for those seeking certification, clinical faculty at state colleges, leadership grant recipients, mentors for new teachers’ seeking Professional Certificates, planners and presenters at state leadership conferences and members of college and university PEABs. Professional Advisory Boards. The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) and the Washington Education Association (WEA) provide opportunities for NBCTs to learn public speaking skills, to join state and local policy making committees and to become advocates for accomplished teaching. Additionally, CSTP provides opportunities for NBCTs to meet together to network, to facilitate sustained, job-embedded professional development in their schools and consider ways public policy can be positively influenced by NBCTs. Although some NBCTs have left the classroom to serve as administrators, staff developers or college faculty, the vast majority remain in the classroom eager to pursue their goal of making a difference in the lives of the children they have committed to serve.

References
Due to extensive references and space limitations in this issue, please email the authors for further information about the literature cited.
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RETURNING TO HIGH SCHOOL for my senior year, I am about to battle the most debilitating virus known to students. This disease strikes randomly, reducing even the most dedicated students to indifferent pupils. The disease: senioritis.

Despite the infectious nature of this virus, I am determined that it will not affect me. My experience this summer is the antidote that may shield me. I spent the first month of my vacation working as a teaching assistant at Wenatchee School District’s summer school. This job proved worthwhile, not only because it paid more than minimum wage, but also because it illustrated the value of education and the importance of motivation.

Working with summer school English students emphasized the importance of caring about education. It was a lack of willpower, not brainpower, which trapped most of these students in summer school. Observing the consequences of poor motivation strengthened my determination not to let myself fall into a situation where my education is compromised.

Procrastination also adopted new meaning this summer. Previously, I thought procrastination was something that teens were famous for, leading to sleepless nights, but nothing serious. During my work with summer school, I watched students procrastinate on assignments to the point that, though they attended every school day, they were unable to complete the work and receive credit for the class. Not receiving these credits affects their chances of graduating—an outcome which, to me, dooms them to a life of monotonous, meaningless jobs.

I was shocked by the nonchalant manner in which these students accepted the news that they failed the class. Perhaps they were inspired by the website www.despair.com and accepted this explanation of their chosen path in life, “It could be that the purpose of your life is to serve as a warning to others.” I intend to take advantage of this warning to renew my determination to finish high school strongly. I want an array of careers to choose from, rather than letting a poor education limit me. I may end up with what others believe to be a monotonous, meaningless job, but at least I will have chosen it.

Allison Dappen is a senior at Wenatchee High School. She has co written several articles for Arches Magazine and plans on attending a private liberal arts college after graduation.
threshold amount, and it is estimated we would only receive $80,000 from safety net to support the expenses incurred due to our high cost students.

**The Bottom Line**

We have a simplistic one-size-fits-all basic allocation formula for special education that does not take into consideration the numbers of students served, nor the complexity of their needs. We have an artificial cap that significantly limits state funding. We have a Safety Net Process that provides a minimal level of funding for high cost students, does not provide for students above the cap, nor for demographic factors that impact some districts to a greater degree than others. And we have a significant expenditure of local mill levy dollars that increase annually to cover the shortfall in funding from the state.

The impact of the state’s current special education funding mechanism adversely affects many districts. The unfunded state share of mandatory special education services is projected to be over $6 million dollars this year. While doing all we can to meet the mandates of state and federal law, special education staffing levels are still below national averages. Continued reduction in staffing and services will, in time, deteriorate instructional and support services that will take years to repair.

The bottom line is that quality special education programs and services are a significant and increasing cost in school districts across the state and nation. However, the cost of not providing children with high quality, effective instructional programs and related services pales when compared to the cost of the human potential lost as well as long term impact on publicly funded support in the future.

**Standards Based Funding Concept**

Funding special education is arguably one of the most complex issues facing public education today and cannot be addressed with the simple funding model currently being used in Washington. I believe that the state needs to move toward a “standards” based approach to funding special education services which would include the following characteristics:

- Funding is provided for each student that qualifies for special education. Eliminate the cap.
- Assessment should drive the level of services a student requires, based on a set of service delivery standards established by the state with input from school districts.
- A student in Walla Walla who diagnostically looks the same as a student in Spokane would generate the same level of service and corresponding state funding. The funding would be adjusted to align with the district mix factor.
- Districts must provide at least the same level of services indicated through the assessment process. If they provide less service than indicated the funding would be adjusted down. If the district chooses to provide more service than indicated, they would pay for the additional costs incurred out of district funds.

This approach would require we do the hard work as a state to establish service delivery standards, but it would provide legislators with a way to accurately project service costs and ensure equitable distribution of funds based on demonstrated student need.

*Mike Ainsworth is Executive Director for Student Support Services in Spokane School District.*
THE GIFTED STUDENT, the special education student, the average student, and every learning variable in between; these are the challenges educators face each day. Reaching every child is a challenge. What does it look like each day when schools meet this challenge?

In this issue of *Curriculum in Context* you will find creative, practical strategies from practitioners in the field on how to ensure that our efforts to reach all students results in really meeting each student’s needs.

You will find it means changing daily practice, adopting strategies that help us address unique learner needs such as flexible student grouping for instruction, teacher collaboration for planning and instruction, and the use of assessment to inform teaching. It also means frequent student feedback on learning, lesson planning around clearly identified outcomes, analysis of student work, and strategies that include a pyramid of interventions to support students who are not learning.

WSASCD is committed to helping you successfully meet the challenges of educating every child. I hope you are booked now to attend our Nov. 3-5 annual conference, “All Roads Lead to Instruction. This is just one of the opportunities available to support your continuing professional development. Highlights include keynote presenter, Peter Johnston, author of *Choice Words* as well as several nationally and internationally known educational experts who will share promising practices to meet a range of learner needs. These presenters include: Stephanie Harvey, sharing reading comprehension strategies; Jo Guzman, with practical strategies for ESL students; J. Richard Gentry, on the science of spelling; and Debbie Miller, with strategies to take comprehension instruction to the next level. Jane Bailey shares assessment strategies for secondary classrooms, while Connie Hoffman and Nancy Skerritt share their model for making professional practice public. We are also pleased to have Chris Tovani, author of *I Read It But I Didn’t Get It*, and two of the authors of *Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning*, Amy Colton and Georgea Langer, sharing their expertise at our Saturday Institutes.

As each of us works to meet the specific needs of our students, WSASCD wants to be there to provide the resources, support, and networks to help you meet these challenges. I’ll look forward to seeing you at the conference and at other WSASCD events this year. Be sure to visit http://www.wsascd.org to stay informed of the many programs and services available.

_Janel Keating is principal at Mountain Meadow Elementary in the White River School District and is current president of WSASCD._
ARE YOU OR YOUR COLLEAGUES serving K–12 students in creative ways? Can you shed light on legislative trends that might benefit educators across the state? Can you illustrate recent educational research claims through stories from schools and classrooms on the front lines? If so, consider taking some time to clearly and persuasively contribute to the intellectual life of the WSASCD community. Please email a 50–100 word preview of your contribution to gregf@spu.edu and we will promptly send a Submission Guidelines form for your 1000–2500 word article. If you have any questions, please email Co-editor Greg Fritzberg at the above address or call (206) 281-2363.

Submission Deadline
Spring/Summer 2006 — February 1, 2006
Fall/Winter 2006–07 — August 1, 2006