



# School Directors Brainstorm Ideas on Improving Key Transition Points in the P-20 Education System

Washington State School Directors' Association

June 2011

## **School Directors Brainstorm Ideas on Improving Key Transition Points in the P-20 System**

### **Introduction:**

In March 2011, WSSDA extended an invitation to school directors to attend a brainstorming session to generate ideas for improving educational transitions. The idea for the group was prompted by a meeting between WSSDA leadership and Gov. Chris Gregoire. The Governor asked for suggestions on ways to work towards a “seamless” education structure for Washington’s P-20 system.

Two brainstorming sessions were held in Renton and Yakima in late March. Directors were asked to consider programs and practices that were working well in their districts and that could be scaled up around the state. They were encouraged to think about what might be possible, disregarding budget constraints and currently existing policies.

From these two brainstorm sessions, WSSDA utilized a technology application called *Ideascale* that allowed participants to list an idea title and describe the idea for viewers to either agree or disagree with, and to post comments. Over 56 directors participated in *Ideascale*.

WSSDA staff then provided additional research, compiling a report highlighting educational trends related to each theme, both in Washington and around the country, and providing links to scholarly research and current policy initiatives of interest.

The themes coalesce around a few common goals: improve student achievement, particularly with regard to high school graduation rates and the percentage of students attending college, and find ways to target instruction to improve outcomes for students who struggle in traditional classrooms. Research also revealed the importance of developing a focused and coordinated approach to early childhood education in order to improve Kindergarten readiness, and highlighted innovative programs integrating technology and online learning formats into conventional classrooms.

### **Results:**

School Directors identified seven ideas on how to improve the transition points in the state’s education system.

1. **Transition Idea:** Support early pre-school learning efforts and engage the larger community in early learning practices and methods.
2. **Transition Idea:** Early college planning and providing information to families should start in sixth grade.

3. **Transition Idea**: Effective transitions are built on early assessment and intervention, including differentiated instruction, personalized education and response to intervention.
4. **Transition Idea**: Use online and blended courses to both improve student learning and reduce costs.
5. **Transition Idea**: Provide targeted interventions for eighth graders at risk of dropping out in high school; i.e. extended day, summer school, Saturday school, AVID.
6. **Transition Idea**: Restructure the school year and open up the “boxed in” system of grades/age bound classrooms.
7. **Transition Idea**: Create closer ties to post-secondary systems and create seamless entrance policies, work on testing requirements and prep students for success.

**Transition Idea 1: Support early learning and pre-school efforts by engaging the larger community in early learning practices and methods.**

**Issue: How do school districts ensure that all Kindergarten students enter school ready to learn?**

**Research:**

A growing body of research confirms the crucial role that early childhood development plays in a student's future success. Positive interactions with supportive parents and caregivers are crucial in creating socially and emotionally healthy children and adults. The earliest disparities in development occur around nine months of age, and this "preparation gap" turns into an achievement gap when children arrive at kindergarten unprepared to succeed. Studies show that children who know the alphabet when they enter kindergarten are 20 times more likely to be able to read aloud by the end of kindergarten, and that students who are behind in first grade are likely to remain behind in fourth grade. Given the importance of early learning on later academic success, it is alarming that Washington teachers report that less than half of incoming students are kindergarten ready, and that this number drops to 25% in high poverty areas.

In contrast to the longstanding commitment to public funding of K-12 education, there has historically not been a major public investment in an overarching system of early childhood education in this country. While a few public programs fund early learning directly (Headstart and, in Washington, ECEAP), parents are usually left to fend for themselves in obtaining child care, and the average cost of a year of child care is more than a year's worth of tuition at the University of Washington. Economists have described the current market-driven child care economy as "underdeveloped" and "grossly underfunded" -- characterized by high costs, few economies of scale and insufficient consumer choice. On the other hand, some have noted that well-focused investments in early childhood education yield high rates of public, as well as private, returns. Some studies suggest that investment in early learning leads to a 12% rate of return, far higher rate than most public works projects, and results in better educated workers and less crime.

Calls for reform of the early childhood education system include increased public funding of early learning, innovative public-private partnerships and the creation of state-wide agencies responsible for coordinating programs aimed at improving early learning and kindergarten readiness. In Washington, this increased interest in early learning led to the creation of the Department of Early Learning in 2006, the first cabinet level agency of its kind in the nation. Also created in 2006 was Thrive by Five Washington, a public-private partnership led by education, government and business leaders working to make sure families can find safe and high-quality child care. Thrive by Five also works to make available to all families easy-to-use information and resources about young children's healthy development. Among Thrive by Five's projects:

- The Culture of Literacy Initiative, which funded four early learning coalitions serving at-risk populations in support of young children's literacy development. The project aimed to increase parent's knowledge that learning starts at infancy, and support children's access to age appropriate books.
- The Thrive Demonstration Communities--local partnerships designed to serve as models for how a community-wide approach to early learning can improve the development of all children from

birth to age 5 and their readiness to enter school. Demonstration communities include home visitation for expectant families, play-and-learn groups for toddlers, resources to support language development and literacy and a kindergarten transition program.

- The Nurturing Families--helping parents understand how brain development and social-emotional growth affect their children's school readiness by strengthening the capacity of providers, educators and community-based organizations to offer home visiting services and by providing guidance, instruction and resources to parent educators.

Thrive by Five's efforts are supported by the work of other community organizations to engage parents and the business community in the importance of early childhood education. Examples include:

- Reach Out and Read-- a nonprofit organization that promotes early literacy and school readiness in pediatric exam rooms nationwide by giving new books to children and advice to parents about the importance of reading aloud. The program begins at the 6-month checkup and continues through age 5, with a special emphasis on children growing up in low-income communities.
- Success by Six--an early childhood initiative of the United Way that supports parent and caregiver education by providing reading and learning materials that parents can incorporate into everyday moments. Success by Six also promotes community awareness and support of early learning to the business community.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

1.1 The K-12 community already has a great deal of activity and expertise in the early learning arena, so incorporating the department of early learning into the existing K-12 structure would be no problem. Example: Teachers are prepared for early childhood education as one endorsement covering the Birth thru 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. Example: districts already have initiatives to help community members prepare their children for kindergarten.

1.2 A great example of engaging the medical community in early literacy/parent support efforts is Reach Out and Read. This organization provides books to primary care providers which are used to assess child development at well-child checks. It is a great tool for physicians and each child takes home a developmentally appropriate book from her check-up! As an Early Head Start, Infant/Toddler Specialist, I can attest that most parents are eager for good information and ideas to support early learning. Engaging the broader community increases opportunities to support that effort.

1.3 Primary doctors and providers should be our best advocates for presenting age and developmentally appropriate instructional information to parents – much like a prescription! Young parents WANT to do what is best, but are frequently unaware. Some providers are good about giving parents material and instruction, most are not. It would be terrific if; a) there were an established birth to age 5 curriculum for parents; and b) that medical providers would be reimbursed for time instructing parents. Families are typically very good about regular appointments for health issues – it is a potential point of service that has been generally ignored.

1.4 Linking and hosting pre-schools in school districts by renting space to them; e.g. Naches School District and Richland School District.

1.5 School districts can partner early (from birth) with families to provide parent support and training. Start early with parents and childcare providers like Norway’s program. 0-2 years, brain development focus; 2-4 years dual language opportunity.

Resources:

Reach Out and Read. Policy Statement

<http://www.reachoutandread.org/FileRepository/PolicyCaseForROR.pdf>

Success by Six. “Early childhood development directly affects economic vitality.”

[http://www.unitedway-thurston.org/media/UWWA\\_EconVitality\\_E.pdf](http://www.unitedway-thurston.org/media/UWWA_EconVitality_E.pdf)

Art Rolnick and Rob Grunewald. (2003) “Early Childhood Development: Economic Development with a High Public Return.”

[http://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications\\_papers/studies/earlychild/abc-part2.pdf](http://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications_papers/studies/earlychild/abc-part2.pdf)

Louise Stoney, Anne Mitchell, and Mildred E Warner (2006) “Smarter Reform: Moving Beyond Single-Program Solutions to an Early Care and Education System”

<http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/node/33406>

Department of Early Learning. Washington State Birth to Three Plan (December 2010)

<http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/research/docs/Birthto3Plan.pdf>

## **Transition Idea 2: Early College Planning should start in 6<sup>th</sup> grade**

**Issue: How can outreach efforts at the middle school level help increase the number of students attending college, particularly among minority, low-income and first generation college students?**

### **Research Summary:**

Research indicates that 80% of eighth graders express their intention to attend college, but only 47% of high school graduates enroll in college. This gap between aspirations and outcomes can be attributed in part to a lack of early planning, which leaves many students unprepared and unqualified to apply for and attend college. Students whose parents did not attend college themselves will be particularly reliant on schools for college preparation information. The Department of Education recommends that college planning begin in the sixth grade. Schools can play a key role in early preparation for postsecondary education by fostering academic achievement, supporting parent involvement, and providing college and career planning information. In particular, research suggests that schools may assist students by:

- As early as 8<sup>th</sup> grade, planning informational meetings where parents can learn about postsecondary planning. Schools should involve parents in course selection and provide information about college saving and financial aid options.
- Creating specific courses that focus on college preparation and planning.
- Partnering with local colleges and community organizations to sponsor pre-college programs to foster postsecondary goals as early as middle school.
- Encouraging students to take challenging curriculum of math and science courses, including algebra and geometry in eighth and ninth grade. Particularly among minority groups, those students who take higher-level math courses are significantly more likely to attend college.
- Using results for standardized assessments to help students identify strengths and weaknesses and integrate these results into postsecondary planning.
- Emphasizing that high school graduation requirements create a floor, not a ceiling, for Achievement and that colleges will in many cases require more coursework than what is needed to graduate high school. High school college preparatory curricula should be aligned with college admissions requirements so that students are less likely to need remedial work in college.
- Provide adequate counseling services. Some school counselors are not involved in college planning discussions until twelfth grade—too late to help many students achieve their goals. Maintaining a workable counselor to student ratio would allow counselors to be more directly involved in academic planning. In addition, a system such as *Navigation 101*, currently implemented in many Washington schools, that pairs students with teachers 2-3 times per month to discuss post high-school plans and college readiness, will help lighten the burden on school counselors and give students another resource for making informed choices about their postsecondary options.

### **Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:**

2.1 Many districts have had good success through participation in the AVID program (Advancement via Individual determination) <http://www.avid.org>) Although AVID serves all students, it focuses on the least served students in the academic middle. The formula is simple—raise expectations of students and, with the AVID support system in place; they will rise to the

challenge. What differentiates AVID from other education reform programs is its astounding success rate. Since 1990, more than 85,500 AVID students have graduated from high school and planned to attend college. Of the 22,210 AVID 2010 seniors who reported their plans, 91.3% intend to attend a postsecondary institution; 58.3% in four-year institutions and 33% in two-year institutions.

2.2 Increase guidance and support for students by increasing counseling services offered in K-12. Create a “system wide” mentor program for each student to support and increase success rate. In the context of total career planning guidance, we need to acknowledge that more counselors are needed throughout K-12. At the high school level, this need is underscored by the workload impact that Running Start has had on counselors and their ability to provide equitable counseling and advising support to all students, whether or not enrolled in post-secondary dual credit courses. As progress is made toward a seamless education system it is important that regardless of how courses are delivered; i.e. distance learning, computers; post-secondary options such as Running Start and College in the High School, issues of course quality, comparability and continuity are addressed. We believe these issues are most appropriately addressed through counseling and advising. To assure agreement and alignment, in-service training should be offered jointly to high school and college counselors to facilitate seamless advising of students.

Sources:

George Wimberly and Richard J Noeth. “College Readiness Begins in Middle School” ACT Policy Report. <http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/CollegeReadiness.pdf>

U.S. Department of Education. “What is Think College Early?”  
<http://www2.ed.gov/students/prep/college/thinkcollege/early/aboutus/edlite-whatistce.html>

*Alberto Cabrera and Erin Ward Bibo. “Starting Early, Staying on Track: A Chronological Review of Critical Steps Along the Path to College.”* <http://www.ets.org/c/15481/videos.html>

Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Navigation 101 Frequently Asked Questions. <http://www.k12.wa.us/navigation101/FAQs.aspx>



**Transition Idea 3: Effective transitions are built on early assessment and intervention, including differentiated instruction, personalized education and Response to Intervention.**

**Issue: How can early intervention through early assessment lead to increased student performance? How can differentiated instruction and personalized education be used to motivate student-centered learning and improve educational outcomes? How can a Response to Intervention (RTI) method be used to document and provide corrective interventions?**

**Research Summary:**

### **3.1 Differentiated Instruction (DI) Research**

Differentiated instruction is an instructional theory that teachers can use to structure the learning environment to address the variety of learning styles, interests, and abilities found within a classroom.

DI is based upon the belief that students learn best when they are pushed slightly beyond the point where they can work without assistance. This point might differ significantly for students who are working below grade level, as compared to those who are gifted in a given area. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all instructional approach, teachers in a DI classroom match tasks, activities, and assessments with their students' interests, abilities, and learning preferences. Teachers are encouraged to get to know their students in order to better connect classroom learning to their lives outside of school. Teachers don't develop a separate lesson plan for each student, but instead provide several learning options that are most appropriate to the range of student interests and skill levels.

DI begins with pre-assessment; teachers use test scores, results of learning inventory surveys and other data to assess the range of readiness levels, interests and learning profiles within a general education classroom. To begin with, teachers may select or two broad concepts or skills that lend themselves to being taught at different degrees of complexity. Instruction can be differentiated based:

- the **content** of instruction. Students can be differentiated based on full or partial mastery of the subject matter, even as all students work towards the same standards and objectives.
- the instructional **processes** and techniques used. Varying the process of how classroom material is learned allows students to absorb information in the manner that most suits their learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic). While group work is a common DI technique, students should have the option of working independently, if this most suits them in mastering the task.
- the **products** or performances created by students to demonstrate their learning. A teacher can provide alternative methods for students to show that they have learned the material, based on their interests, strengths and learning preferences.

Research suggests that DI programs require the support of all stakeholders (teachers, principals, board members, district trainers) in order to flourish, and that positive results from DI can take several years to appear. Teachers implementing DI require consistent and comprehensive professional development. However, teachers who have successfully integrated DI report higher levels of professional satisfaction and a small but growing body of research suggests positive student outcomes including increased test scores and better engagement of both gifted and learning disabled students under a DI approach.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

3.1 If teachers could differentiate, differentiation would not be on the list. There is a lot of talk about personalized instruction, which sounds very attractive. However, unless school is structured very differently this will not happen. We cannot have personalized instruction and the factory model. There are more changes needed in how students are organized, how often students sit in a classroom with a teacher, the role of non-teachers, mentors and volunteers, and what students learn that would make it personalized. If we go with computer assisted instruction models, there will be no stage for the sage.”

Resources:

Carol Ann Tomlinson, Kay Brimijoin and Lane Narvaez. *Differentiated School: Making Revolutionary Changes in Teaching and Learning*. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/105005.aspx>

Tracy A. Huebner. “Differentiated Learning” *Educational Leadership*. February 2010.  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb10/vol67/num05/Differentiated-Learning.aspx>

Pearl Subban. “Differentiated Instruction: A Research Basis.” *International Education Journal*. 2006. 7(7)  
[http://www.weac.org/Home/Parents\\_Community/differ.aspx](http://www.weac.org/Home/Parents_Community/differ.aspx)

**3.2 Personalized Education Research**

Personalized Education is a student-centered approach that incorporates technology to empower students to take charge of their own learning. Like a differentiated instruction model, personalized education is tailored to a student’s learning styles, interests, skill levels, and goals. Learning is mastery-based and allows students to progress through material at their own pace—moving quickly through already mastered concepts, but taking time to secure a strong foundation before moving on to higher levels of a subject. Personalized education is designed to be dynamic and forward looking. Given the current exponential rate of technological change, students must learn more than specific concepts, they must “learn how to learn” and be flexible and adaptive enough to critically evaluate and apply new concepts and new technologies. Students are imagined as creative, life-long learners who take an active role in their own education. Teachers are mentors, not simply purveyors of knowledge, who offer guidance and feedback, acknowledging the diversity of student goals, needs and learning styles.

An example of a program using a personalized education model is the School of One program in New York City Public Schools. A full time in-school math program, School of One serves approximately 1500 students and targets lessons based on modality in one large learning space that includes: large group instruction, small group instruction, small group collaboration, online tutoring, virtual instruction, and independent practice. Technology is used to tailor instruction to each student; a learning algorithm assesses student progress and alters the modality of learning if the student does not demonstrate comprehension. The program has won numerous grants and will be expanding to four new schools for the 2012-2013 year.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

3.2 - I agree with the idea of personalized instruction for every student. Accountability legislation has already brought us much closer to this, as disaggregated student subgroups are tracked in much more detail and more closely, to the point where principals can identify individual students in need of assistance based on their student achievement. Personalized instruction is also a very positive area of potential offered by some computer assisted instruction models.”

Resources:

“Preparing Students for the Future: Creating Personalized Education Opportunities” *Southeast Education Network Magazine*. March 2010.  
<http://www.seenmagazine.us/Sections/ArticleDetail/tabid/79/smId/403/ArticleID/569/reftab/78/t/Preparing-Students-For-The-Future/Default.aspx>

“Changing Systems to Personalize Learning” The Education Alliance at Brown University.  
[http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/changing\\_systems/introduction/introduction.pdf](http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/changing_systems/introduction/introduction.pdf)

School of One. [http://schoolofone.org/resources/so1\\_onepage\\_overview.pdf](http://schoolofone.org/resources/so1_onepage_overview.pdf)

### **3.3 Response to Intervention Research**

RTI integrates assessment and intervention within a school-wide, multi-level prevention system to maximize student achievement and reduce behavior problems. When a student struggles, a RTI approach asks how instructional methods can be adjusted to meet a student’s unique needs. While RTI methods vary slightly, generally schools use brief (5-10 minute) assessments to screen for students who are at risk for poor performance, provide evidence based interventions, and modify the nature and intensity of those interventions based on a student’s responsiveness.

Interventions are pitched at three levels: the primary level will compose a majority (roughly 80%) of a school’s students, will be conducted in a general education classroom and will include differentiated instructional practices that are aligned with state and district standards. In the secondary level, instruction will be supplemental, immediate, delivered in a small group setting within a general education setting, and will be targeted at those students identified in the screening as in need of specialized attention in a particular area (reading, writing, math, or behavior). Tertiary level instruction is reserved for students who have not responded to lower levels of intervention, and will be intensive and supplemental and delivered individually or in a small group setting. Students who do not respond to tertiary interventions will be referred for special education testing.

At the secondary and tertiary levels, progress monitoring and diagnostic tools are deployed to measure the effectiveness of interventions. Interventions can be modified based on student responsiveness by altering frequency, duration, group size or instructor. Data is used to evaluate the adequacy of the core curriculum and instructional practices, and to establish routines and procedures for making decisions and assessing student progress (Data Based Decision Making).

Full implementation of RTI is a multi-year process and involves a long term commitment of resources. However, once fully implemented, RTI has the potential to lead to improved student learning outcomes, especially in early reading, more accurate identification of students with learning disabilities (LD), and reduced and more reliable special education referrals. RTI has shown particular potential in

distinguishing LD students from low achievers, and in correcting the over-diagnosis of LD in minority students.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

3.3 - Establishing a baseline data point for every student is important to track growth on an individual basis. When teachers collaborate to support individual students and establish positive teacher-student relationships, students can improve their academic achievement. RTI is a good system that helps teachers document and provide corrective interventions to increase student performance. RTI is a statewide framework to increase student achievement. .

Resources:

Buffum, Mattos and Weber. "The Why Behind RTI" *Educational Leadership*. October 2010  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct10/vol68/num02/The-Why-Behind-RTI.aspx>

*National Center on Response to Intervention*: <http://www.rti4success.org/>

VanDerHeyden and Jimerson "Using Response-to-Intervention to Enhance Outcomes for Children" *The California School Psychologist* Vol. 10, pp.21-32 (2005).  
[http://www.caspsurveys.org/new/pdfs/JRNLv\\_021.pdf](http://www.caspsurveys.org/new/pdfs/JRNLv_021.pdf)

**Transition Idea 4: Use online and blended courses to both improve student learning and reduce cost.**

**Issue: How can online learning serve more students and decrease drop-out rate?**

**Research Summary:**

The North American Council for Online Learning estimated that there were roughly 1,000,000 enrollments in online courses in the United States in 2010, with about 70 percent of these enrollments at the high school level. This is 22 times the number of online course enrollments that were estimated in 2000, and research indicates the trend towards greater and more diverse online course offerings will only continue. School districts indicate that they perceive online learning as an important way to: offer courses not otherwise available at the school, meet the needs of specific groups of students, offer advanced placement or college-level courses, reduce scheduling conflicts, and permit students who failed a course to retake it for credit. Districts may develop their own courses, or contract with vendors or postsecondary institutions. In addition to fully utilize online courses, schools may choose to offer blended courses that incorporate both face-to-face and online learning opportunities. The strategy of blending online learning with school-based instruction can help accommodate students' diverse learning styles.

Studies have consistently shown that online learning in K-12 leads to no significant difference in student performance relative to face-to-face courses, and can improve performance in some areas. Online learning can also improve efficiency by reducing the cost of instructional materials, and better utilizing teacher time. Teachers in small rural and low-income districts especially see online learning as a way to diversify course offerings and reduce teaching costs for hard to find subjects such as science and math.

In higher education, where online courses are common and data more abundant, one study showed an average savings of 40% when switching from traditional to online or blended courses. The key is to standardize teacher practices while individualizing student learning. Rather than imagining each course as a "one-off" course development can be streamlined using interactive web-based materials and course management software. Examples of more efficient course management and delivery options may include:

- Using support staff to handle routine tasks and supervision so that teachers are free to focus on actual teaching
- Replacing lecture time with individual or small group activities and providing centralized on-demand help so students stay engaged
- Using web-based technologies for rote or repetitive tasks (e.g. grammar drills in foreign language courses) and reserving in-class time activities that require face to face interaction
- Using frequent low-stakes assessments to gauge student progress and tailoring personalized learning plans using software designed for the task
- Using online pre-tests to identify areas of confusion and reduce class time spent on topics the students clearly understand
- Providing online tutorials that link to tests so that students get immediate support on difficult problems
- Developing server-based testing systems with large banks of questions and automatic grading and record keeping

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

4.1 I think a hybrid of on-line and teacher led education will improve student achievement and through efficiencies reduce our costs.

4.2 While I believe that on-line learning is a great opportunity for students, I am concerned about infrastructure in schools and the home. I think we need to be very careful diving into this type of learning as an answer to money issues. My district has experienced a lot of problems with technology, and I am sure many other districts and homes have the same problems.

4.3 This is one way to get the best value for our education dollars. It also gives a way to measure subject mastery as the student moves through the course of instruction. It also allows the teacher to identify which students need personal intervention while allowing the advanced learner to maximize their learning time.

4.4 This approach will invigorate students and their parents because we will be able to keep education more relevant or at least I hope so. I would rather spend money on technology than buildings and land, because I believe it will pay bigger dividends for our students. At some point in the future we will no longer be able to afford the brick and mortar system as we know it. This approach would be a great transition to the next system.

Resources:

Carol Twigg. "Improving Learning and Reducing Costs: New Models for Online Learning"  
<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm0352.pdf>

The Sloan Consortium. "K-12 Online Learning: a Survey of U.S. School District Administrators."  
[http://sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/K-12\\_Online\\_Learning\\_1.pdf](http://sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/K-12_Online_Learning_1.pdf)

U.S. Department of Education. "Evaluation of Evidence Based Practices in Online Learning"  
<http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf>

Clayton M. Christensen and Michael B. Horn "How Do We Transform Our Schools" *Education Next*.  
(Summer 2008) <http://educationnext.org/how-do-we-transform-our-schools/>

**Transition Idea 5: Provide targeted interventions for eighth graders at risk of dropping out of high school.**

**Issue: How can schools prevent drop outs in high school?**

**Research Summary:**

A U.S. Department of Education study found that eighth graders who were identified as having multiple risk factors for dropping out of high school were 30% less likely to graduate on time, compared to students with no risk factors. Research suggests that “at-risk” eighth grade students are those who: live in single-parent homes, are low-income, have an older sibling who dropped out, have parents that did not finish high school, are of limited English proficiency and/or are at home without adult supervision more than three hours per day. Eighth graders with multiple risk factors are significantly more likely to underperform in high school and drop out at a higher rate. High school dropouts earn less than their peers who graduate and strain the economy through decreased tax revenue and increased social service costs.

School transitions are especially difficult times for students and have been associated with decreased self-esteem, extracurricular involvement and grade point average. Particularly in the shift to high school, academic and social demands increase significantly, usually in disproportion to the support adolescents receive in making this shift. The stresses on students are especially pronounced when they fail to advance along with their peers, with one survey showing that students rank “being kept in the same grade next year” as the most worrisome event in their lives, behind only “losing my mother or father” and “going blind.”

However, grade retention or “holding back” students has been the main alternative attempted by several large urban school districts, particularly New York and Chicago, to avoid “social promotion,” the practice of advancing a student to the next grade level to keep them with their peers, despite their low achievement. Generally, students who cannot prove basic competency in math and reading (usually measured by statewide assessments) are required to attend summer school; if their progress is not satisfactory they will have to repeat the previous grade. Retention is expensive; in Chicago, every additional year a student is retained costs the district \$8,400. More significantly, some research indicates that retained students do not achieve any better than students that are not retained, and are actually more likely to drop out than their equally low-achieving peers.

Summer school has been advocated as a way to get at-risk students over the “promotion gate” and provide remediation in basic skills so that these students can advance in grade level and stay on track for on-time graduation. Research suggests that the summer slide, the erosion of learning that occurs when students are away from school for an extended time period, hits under-achieving and low-income students hardest, so that the gap between successful and unsuccessful students actually widens during the summer.

Summer school can be a key feature of accountability programs designed to help struggling students and end social promotion, but to be effective summer school programs must be of high-quality. Attributes of a successful summer program include:

- High quality teachers. Summer programs should pay teachers at a rate comparable to what they make during the school year, so that an adequate pool of candidates exists. Teachers should be

provided with opportunities for training so that they are well-prepared for the special mission of summer programs.

- Adequate and reliable funding. When the availability of summer school waxes and wanes with funding cycles students suffer, especially when avoiding retention is linked to success in summer school, in which case basic fairness issues arise. Families should not be required to pay for summer school, as they are likely to be the families least able to afford to do so.
- Focus on reading and math. These subjects are central to success in high school, and the summer slide affects these two skills most severely. While incorporating other subject areas, teachers can use summer school as a professional development exercise to build fundamental competencies in reading and math.
- Innovation and creativity. One of the most important features of summer school is its reduced class sizes. Teachers can take advantage of the increased time with students to tailor programs to suit a student's individual needs.
- Integrating summer school into the regular school year curriculum. Summer school should be treated as fundamental part of the school's responsibilities to students, not as an optional add-on. Teachers can use strategies tried during the year to better tailor summer-time interventions.
- Research and evaluation. The program design should incorporate systemic evaluation so that schools know what is working and what isn't.
- Consider ninth-grade tutoring to shore up skills learned over the summer and provide at-risk students with extra support to weather the personal and academic challenges of high school.
- Consider partnering with local community colleges and technical universities to help summer school students refine their career and postsecondary goals. Take students to campus; offer scholarships opportunities to students who successfully complete high school.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

5.1 Provide jump start support for eighth graders who are most likely to fail in high school. Students are identified and a support system in summer school is provided. Homework skills and study skills are taught during this summer session. Curriculum is focused on how to succeed in high school. Central Valley has seen the failure rate of these students fall to zero for freshmen and sophomores (as far as students in these programs have gone.)

5.2 Create "specific" classrooms or centers that take in the students that need to work at their own pace.

5.3 Create transitional classrooms/centers through a screening process that allows for those students not meeting end course/or grade assessment to attend transitional support centers until they can pass.

Sources:

David Denton. "Summer School: Unfulfilled Promises" Southern Regional Education Board [http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICEstSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED467662&ERICEstSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED467662](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICEstSearch_SearchValue_0=ED467662&ERICEstSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED467662)

Donald Moore. "Comment: the Chicago Grade Retention Program." Designs for Change. [http://www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/newdata\\_sep00.pdf](http://www.designsforchange.org/pdfs/newdata_sep00.pdf)



Cheryl L. Somers, Delila Owens, Monte Piliawasky. “A Study of High School Dropout Prevention and At-Risk Ninth Graders’ Role Models and Motivations for School Completion”

<http://futurescholars.rutgers.edu/FutureScholars/Images/A%20study%20of%20High%20School%20Dropout%20Prevention.pdf>

U.S Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. “At Risk Eighth-Graders Four Years Later” <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs95/95736.pdf>

**Transition Idea 6: Restructure the school year and open up the “boxed in” system of grades/age bound classrooms.**

**Issue: How can schools provide the accelerated learning and appropriate school environment to really close the achievement gap?**

**Year Round Education.**

The conventional U.S. school schedule, based on a nine month academic calendar and seven-hour school days, is a relic of an agricultural era when children worked on farms after school and during the summer. In an era when both parents frequently work outside the home, and in a time when the global economy is demanding more advanced skills from U.S. students, this traditional school calendar no longer seems as appropriate to the needs of students and their families. Increasingly, schools are turning to year round education (YRE) and other alternative calendars to increase student achievement and address the needs of at-risk students.

YRE generally eliminates the traditional long summer vacation and replaces it with shorter two-to-three week breaks. Some schools maintain the standard 180 day school year, but others increase the amount of time students are in school by adding extra days or including focused remedial work for some students. YRE can be one track or multitasking; in a multitasking system, classroom schedules are staggered so that some students and their teachers are always on break. This schedule is very helpful to districts that are experiencing an in-flux of students and are struggling with facility overcrowding. The majority of YRE students are in primary and middle schools, since high schools students often have summer jobs or extracurricular activities that require long summer breaks. Education groups estimate that by 2012, more than five million students, or roughly 10% of all children enrolled in U.S. public schools, could be attending school year-round.

One of the most common cited benefits of YRE is the opportunity to avoid the summer slide—the loss of learning that occurs when students are away from school for extended periods of time over the summer. Teachers report that every fall it can take up to six weeks to re-learn material from the previous year, and some research suggests this factor hits economically disadvantaged children the hardest. While children from families with incomes in the top third keep gaining in academic achievement over the summer, students in the bottom third sink, returning to school less skilled in math and reading than they were when they left. YRE also allows for intersession enrichment and remedial programs; these programs give students a chance to expand their interests outside conventional academic pursuits, and allow students who are struggling some breathing room to catch up.

Research on YRE and academic achievement is mixed. Some larger studies have found no statistically significant improvement in YRE student achievement as compared to students operating on the traditional calendar. However, several other studies show modest gains among YRE students, and indicate that YRE is particularly beneficial to low-income students. Students, teachers and parents involved in YRE also report positive experiences, and indicate that the disruptions involved in the move away from the traditional calendar (family vacations, provisions

for child care, etc...) were not as substantial as they had expected. Studies report especially strong outcomes when YRE is supplemented with intersession enrichment and remedial programs, indicating that the opportunity to stage these periodic targeted interventions may be the real benefit to abandoning the traditional calendar in favor of shorter and more frequent breaks.

Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

6.1 Offer year round schools—four quarters. Starts at four years old, continues until 19 years old. It is not about 180 days! Students are offered 64 quarters and progress at their own pace. System is student focused, driven by student’s progress and ability to pass through the quarters. Some weeks are designated as “non-official quarters” but teachers work the entire year. All academic offerings are offered all 64 quarters. Create a system with intrinsically motivated learners (versus compliance-based and extrinsically motivated methods) because they can progress when they want to and/or are ready to learn). All Children will be able to learn to the best of their ability—this should be the REAL goal.

Resources:

Educational Leadership. Year-Round Schooling. (April 2010)

[http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational\\_leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Year-Round\\_Schooling.aspx](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/apr10/vol67/num07/Year-Round_Schooling.aspx)

Bradley McMillen. A Statewide Evaluation of Academic Achievement in Year Round Schools. (1995)

[http://interact.uoregon.edu/pdf/edld/comps/quant\\_article4.pdf](http://interact.uoregon.edu/pdf/edld/comps/quant_article4.pdf)

MSNBC. “Year-Round school gains ground around U.S”. 10/27/2010

[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39748458/ns/us\\_news-life/t/year-round-school-gains-ground-around-us/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/39748458/ns/us_news-life/t/year-round-school-gains-ground-around-us/)

Elisabeth Palmer and Amy Bemis. “Year-Round Education.” (1999)

<http://www.cehd.umn.edu/carei/reports/docs/year-round.pdf>

Ruy Teixeira. The Century Foundation. “All-Day, All-Year Schools” (2004) <http://tcf.org/media-center/2000/pr77>

**Multiage/Nongraded courses.** Historically in America, in the age of one and two room schoolhouses, multiage classrooms were a practical necessity. In many parts of the world, multiage classrooms are still the norm and they continue to be common in small, isolated rural districts in this country. The current system of graded, age-segregated classrooms was the product of mid-nineteenth century education reforms that sought to make classrooms more structured and efficient, along the model of an industrial factory. Since the 1960s, however, many educational reformers have argued that grouping children by age, and assuming that this will produce a homogeneous cohort of students, ignores the great variability of intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of students even within one grade level.

Multiage classrooms are those where children of two or more grade levels learn together, with an emphasis on individual progress through a developmentally appropriate curriculum. Using a

child-centered approach, these classrooms seek to “optimize what can be learned when children of different—as well as same—ages and abilities have frequent opportunities to interact.”<sup>1</sup> Students generally stay in the same classroom with the same teacher for more than one year. Research on academic achievement in these classrooms is mixed, but generally has shown that students learn equally well in multiage classrooms as compared to traditional age-segregated classrooms.

Taking it a step further than the multiage model, nongraded schools do not use grade-level distinctions for students or classes. Progress is measured with respect to tasks completed and skills mastered, not according to grades or other ratings systems. Classes are often team-taught, and students are regrouped frequently according to the task and relative to a student’s needs and interests. Progress is self-paced, and students remain active participants in their own learning. The assessment of students is holistic and individualized, and the progress timeline for each student is unique. A survey of 57 studies of academic achievement in nongraded classrooms revealed that students do better (58%) or as well as (33%) their peers in traditional classrooms.

Frequently cited benefits of multi-aged and nongraded classrooms include:

- *Reduced anxiety.* Students return from holidays and breaks to the same teacher and the same classroom and don’t need to adjust to new surroundings. Research suggests that multiage classrooms do better at creating a family-like atmosphere that reduces social isolation and encourages intellectual risk taking.
- *Teacher consistency.* With more than one year to get to know a student, teachers can better identify learning and behavior issues and target instruction to a student’s needs.
- *Cross age-interactions.* Younger and less-skilled students benefit, especially in language acquisition skills, from the challenge of interacting with more advanced children, and older children benefit from taking on a tutor role with respect to their younger peers.
- *Self-confidence.* Age-segregated classrooms can be especially frustrating for students who differ from the norm, and either struggle to keep up or grow bored because they have already mastered the material. Multi-age and nongraded classrooms encompass greater diversity and allow children to self-pace. Research shows that students in multiage classrooms demonstrate more positive attitudes toward school, greater self-esteem, better leadership skills, and fewer aggressive behaviors as compared to students in age-segregated classrooms. Research on nongraded schools indicates that traditional at-risk groups, including boys, minority and low-income students report greater academic achievement and better attitudes towards school when placed in nongraded classrooms.

#### Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session:

6.2 Children learn at different rates. Therefore, subject mastery should be the bench mark of preparing our students for their life after public/formal education. Creating lifelong learners is our desire but P20 should adopt the position to move each child as far along the path as can be accomplished in the time allotted or funded by the tax payers. The best product for the best price equals the best value.

Resources:

Educational Leadership. "The Benefits of Nongraded Schools" (October 1992)  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct92/vol50/num02/The-Benefits-of-Nongraded-Schools.aspx>

Susan Kinsey. *Multiage Grouping and Academic Achievement*. (2001)  
<http://ceep.crc.illinois.edu/ecearchive/digests/2001/kinsey01.pdf>

"Nongraded Schools-Brief Definition, Development of graded education, Search for other models, Research Findings" <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2297/Nongraded-Schools.html>

David Pratt. *On the Merits of Multiage Classrooms*. (1986)  
<http://php.scripts.psu.edu/dept/jrre/articles/v3,n3,p111-115,Pratt.pdf>

Ruiting Song, Terry Spradlin and Jonathan Plucker. *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiage Classrooms in the Era of NCLB Accountability*. (2009)  
<http://www.ecs.org/html/Document.asp?chouseid=7951>

"Nongraded Schools-Brief Definition, Development of graded education, Search for other models, Research Findings" <http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2297/Nongraded-Schools.html>

**Transition Idea 7: Create closer ties to post-secondary systems and create seamless entrance policies, work on testing requirements and prep students for success.**

**Issue: What can K-12 schools do to ensure students can pass the college entrance exams?**

**Research Summary:**

At the National Education Summit on High Schools in 2005, governors from 45 states sat down with business leaders and education stakeholders to develop a plan to get more students to graduate from high school ready to tackle the demands of college and work in an increasingly competitive global economy. The American Diploma Project Network was designed to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, assessments, graduation requirements and accountability systems so that all students graduate from high school ready for college and careers. Currently, 35 states, including Washington, together educating 85% of the nation's public school students, are members of the Network.

Key features of a program of career and college readiness include:

**Standards.** Academic content standards communicate to teachers, parents and students the knowledge and skills students are expected to master in each grade and subject. Rigorous standards, used to guide curriculum, instruction and assessment, best prepare students to be successful after high school, by giving them the skills they need to succeed in first year college courses and/or the training they need to obtain good entry level jobs with clear pathways for advancement.

Standards should be aligned with the expectations of postsecondary institutions in the state and the needs of business communities. 45 states have currently adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in math and language arts developed by Achieve and designed for career and college readiness; Washington State has provisionally adopted the CCSS, and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is developing plans to implement these standards in Washington schools.

**Graduation Requirements.** One important way for states to implement rigorous academic content standards is to align graduation requirements with these standards. Research suggests that for students to be ready to succeed in college and careers they need to have undertaken a challenging course of study in math and language arts, including math through an Algebra II course (or equivalent) and four years of English. Seven states mandate a college and career ready curriculum in order to graduate; several other states automatically enroll students in such a program, but allow students to opt-out if their parents sign a waiver. To monitor the success of a college and career ready curriculum, states are encouraged to maintain data reflecting the type of coursework students are pursuing and the relationship to post-high school outcomes.

**Assessment systems.** Many required high school assessments measure knowledge acquired in early high school or middle school and don't assess advanced high school content that will be the basis of college and career readiness. To better link high school training with college level expectations, fourteen states currently administer an assessment in high school that postsecondary institutions use to make decisions about college readiness. Five states use their own self-developed assessment and nine require all students to take a national college admissions exam (ACT or SAT). Alaska uses an assessment called WorkKeys that measures skills employers cite as essential, including applied mathematics, reading for information and locating information. Alaska gives employers the option to specify what level of mastery they require

of job applicants. Washington does not currently require a high school assessment that is used to make postsecondary placement decisions.

**P-20 data systems.** A longitudinal P-20 data system is designed to use unique student identifiers to track students over the course of their educational lives to provide meaningful indicators of career and college readiness. Particularly important is the ability to match student records at the K-12 and postsecondary levels so states can gather and analyze data to improve the readiness of high school graduates. Currently 22 states, including Washington, have operational P-20 longitudinal data systems.

#### Comments from WSSDA brainstorming session

- 7.1 We should make arrangements with the various colleges, universities, community colleges, and trade schools to give the school districts data regarding our students attending the institution; thereby providing a kind of “quality control” on the job we are doing to prepare students for the next level.
- 7.2 To ease the transition to post high school options, the SBE, HEC, OSPI, Early Learning, etc., should be required to work together and to come to an agreement about what should be learned by the time a student graduates from high school to provide a seamless K-20 transition opportunity. To keep the transition alive, the above needs to include community colleges, four-year universities, career and tech groups, employer groups, et. al.
- 7.3 Extended high school with no penalties by NCLB until student is 19 to 21 years old – Let students have extended time to graduate.
- 7.4 Lack of content mastery and grade creep are adding to the issue of college remediation; so, grades need to correlate with AP, IB, SAT, ACT, Cambridge, and PSAT. This will help reduce the need for remedial college classes.
- 7.5 Create and fund a flexible K-14 system to accommodate students’ (dreams and hopes to skills) i.e.; help administer college success test/college predictor to give students an option builder early on. This includes opportunities to get education paid for (K-14). If students are successful in K-12 and score well, they can get a scholarship to pay for community college

#### Resources:

Achieve. “Closing the Expectations Gap 2011”  
<http://www.achieve.org/ClosingtheExpectationsGap2011>

ACT. The Condition of College and Career Readiness Class of 2010, Washington.  
[http://www.act.org/news/data/10/pdf/readiness/CCCR\\_Washington.pdf?utm\\_campaign=cccr10&utm\\_source=state\\_reports&utm\\_medium=web](http://www.act.org/news/data/10/pdf/readiness/CCCR_Washington.pdf?utm_campaign=cccr10&utm_source=state_reports&utm_medium=web)

Washington Education Research Association. “Washington’s Longitudinal Data Systems P-20” (December 2009). [http://www.erd.wa.gov/presentations/pdf/20091209\\_wera.pdf](http://www.erd.wa.gov/presentations/pdf/20091209_wera.pdf)

Washington Education Research Association. “Washington State’s P-20 Data System: Organization, Justification, Purpose, Privacy and Confidentiality.” (March 2010)  
[http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Washington\\_ERDC.pdf](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/Washington_ERDC.pdf)

---

<sup>i</sup> Katz, Evangelou and Hartman (1990). *The case for mixed age grouping in early childhood education*.