



K-12 Accountability plan introduced and heard

E SHB 2261, basic education finance reform legislation adopted last year, included a finding that comprehensive finance reform must be accompanied by a new mechanism for defining relationships and expectations for the state, school districts and schools. With this pronouncement, the bill directed the State Board of Education to continue development of an accountability framework and to develop a proposal and timeline for a formalized comprehensive accountability system targeted to schools and school districts that do not improve through a voluntary support system.

At a special meeting on Jan. 4, the State Board adopted its recommendations for a new performance accountability system and forwarded them to the Legislature and the governor. During the second week of this legislative session bills were introduced to adopt the SBE recommendations. The Senate introduced an “omnibus” education bill, SB 6696, which includes several reforms to enhance Washington’s eligibility for federal Race To The Top (RTTT) funds. The House introduced a package of RTTT bills; the SBE recommendations are the focus of HB 3038. Both bills were heard in their respective house committees during the third week of the session. This issue of IMPACT provides a section by section review of the accountability provisions in these bills.

Section 101: Intent

The first section outlines a finding that it is the state’s responsibility to create a coherent and effective accountability framework for the continuous improvement of all schools and districts. This system must provide an excellent and equitable education for

all students, an aligned federal/state accountability system, and the tools needed for schools and districts to be accountable. These tools include the necessary accounting and data reporting systems, assessment systems to monitor student achievement, and a system of general support, targeted assistance, and if necessary, intervention.

Phase I of the accountability system will recognize schools that have done an exemplary job of raising student achievement and closing the achievement gaps. Phase I will also target the lowest five percent of persistently low-achieving schools to provide federal funds and federal intervention models beginning in 2010 (voluntary) and 2011 (required).

Phase II will implement SBE’s Accountability Index for identification of schools in need of improvement and develop state and local intervention models with state and local funds beginning in 2013. Federal approval of the State Board of Education’s accountability index must be obtained or else the federal guidelines for persistently low-achieving schools will continue to be used.

The stated expectation of this new accountability system is the improvement of student achievement for all students to prepare them for postsecondary education, work, and global citizenship in the twenty-first century.

Section 102: Persistently low-achieving schools

Beginning no later than December 1, 2010, and annually thereafter, OSPI must use federal criteria for school improvement to identify the most persistently low-achieving schools in the state. Schools identified as persistently low-achieving shall be schools that are:

(a) the lowest five percent of Title I schools in one of the stages of federal improvement; or (b) the lowest five percent of high schools that are Title I eligible and in one of the stages of federal improvement.

Criteria adopted by OSPI to determine whether a school is among the lowest-achieving five percent of schools must meet federal guidelines and take into account both the overall academic achievement on state math and reading assessments, and lack of progress on those assessments over time.

Section 103: Required Action Districts

Beginning in January 2011, OSPI shall annually recommend to SBE school districts to be designated as “Required Action Districts.” Required Action Districts must have at least one school identified as persistently low-achieving. Identification of Required Action Districts is subject to the availability of federal school improvement grants. School districts that have volunteered in 2010 or have improved shall not be included in this designation.

OSPI must provide districts with written notice of the recommendation; school districts may request reconsideration of this designation within ten days.

SBE must annually designate those districts recommended by OSPI as Required Action Districts. A district designated as a Required Action District will be required to notify all parents with students in persistently low-achieving schools of the designation.

Section 104: Academic performance audit

OSPI is directed to contract with an external review team to conduct an academic performance audit of Required Action Districts. The review team shall have expertise in comprehensive school and district reform and shall not be from OSPI, SBE, or a school district subject to an audit.

OSPI shall establish audit criteria. The audit shall include, but not be limited to: student demographics,

mobility patterns, school feeder patterns, performance of different student groups on assessments, effective school leadership, strategic allocation of resources, clear and shared focus on student learning, high standards and expectations for all students, high level of collaboration and communication, aligned curriculum, instruction and assessment to state standards, frequency of monitoring learning and teaching, focused professional development, supportive learning environment, high level of family and community involvement, and alternative secondary schools best practices.

Audit findings must be made available to the local school district, its staff, community, and the State Board of Education.

Section 105: Required Action Plan

The local school district superintendent and local board of a Required Action District must develop a Required Action Plan for SBE approval; however, OSPI must review the Required Action Plan to ensure it is consistent with federal guidelines prior to the local superintendent and board submitting the plan to the State Board. The Required Action Plan must be developed in collaboration with administrators, teachers and other staff, parents, unions representing any employees in district, students, and representatives of the local community. OSPI will assist districts as requested in plan development.

The local school board must conduct a public hearing to allow for comment on the proposed Required Action Plan.

The Required Action Plan must include:

- Implementation of one of four federal intervention models (turnaround, restart, closure or transformation). Language is included which prohibits the establishment of a charter school without express legislative authority. The intervention model selected must address the concerns raised in the academic performance audit and be intended to improve student performance to allow a school district to be

removed from the list of districts designated as Required Action Districts within three years of implementation of the plan.

- An application for a federal school improvement grant to OSPI.
- A budget that provides for adequate resources to implement the plan.
- Description of changes in district or school policies and practices to improve student achievement.
- Identification of metrics to be used to assess student achievement.

Parties to any collective bargaining agreement negotiated after the bill takes effect are required to re-open the agreement or negotiate an addendum to make changes necessary to implement a Required Action Plan. If no agreement can be reached between district and employee organizations, the parties must request the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC) to appoint a mediator. If the parties are still unable to reach agreement, PERC must certify disputed issues for a decision by the Superior Court. The process and timeline for Superior Court orders are specified in the bill.

If the issue goes to court, each party must file a proposal to be implemented in a final Required Action Plan. The court must select the proposal that best responds to issues raised in the district's performance audit and allows for the award of a federal school improvement grant.

Bill language specifies that each party will bear its own costs for mediation or courts.

Section 106: SBE approval

SBE shall approve a local district's Required Action Plan if it meets the requirements identified in Section 105. Any modifications or addendums to collective bargaining agreements may only take effect after SBE approves of the plan. The SBE must accept for inclusion any court-ordered proposal. If SBE rejects the plan, it must notify

the district school board and superintendent with an explicit rationale for why the plan was not approved. The district will then have an opportunity to revise the plan.

If federal funds are not available, the plan is not required to be implemented until funding becomes available. Otherwise, the Required Action Plan must be implemented in the immediate school year following the district's designation as a Required Action District.

Section 107: Redirecting of Title I funds

SBE may dictate that OSPI redirect a district's Title I funds based on the academic performance audit findings if a school district has not submitted a Required Action Plan for approval or the final plan submitted has not received approval by SBE.

Section 108: Implementation of Required Action Plan

Required Action Districts must provide regular updates to OSPI on their progress in meeting student achievement goals set forth in the Required Action Plan. OSPI must provide technical assistance and financial resources to the district as needed.

Section 109: Biannual reports

OSPI must provide a biannual report to SBE regarding the progress made by all Required Action Districts. OSPI must recommend to SBE that a district be released from the Required Action District designation after a district: implements a Required Action Plan for three years; has made progress in reading and mathematics on the state assessment over the past three consecutive years; and no longer has a school identified as persistently low-achieving.

The SBE will determine whether or not a district should be removed from required action or remain in required action.

continued

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Kevin Laverty
President

Debbie Long
Legislative Committee Chair

Harry Frost
Interim Executive Director

Dan Steele
Director of Governmental Relations

If you need this publication in an alternative format, please contact the WSSDA office.

**Washington State
School Directors' Association**
221 College Street NE
Olympia, WA 98516
360.493.9231
800.562.8927
mail@wssda.org

Legislative Hotline: 800.562.6000

Section 110: Continuous improvement recognition

SBE and OSPI shall annually recognize schools for exemplary student performance as measured on the SBE accountability index.

Section 111: Definitions

The final accountability section includes a series of definitions.

Editor's Note: Thank you to SBE and legislative staff for assistance with this summary.



Reminder: There is still time to register for the 2010 WSSDA/WASA Legislative Conference

February 7 – 8, 2010
Olympia Red Lion and the State Capitol

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