Date: Thursday, January 15, 2015  
To: Larry Nyland, Superintendent  
From: Michael F. Tolley, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning  
Re: Friday Memo for January 16, 2015

**DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: Department of Curriculum & Instruction:**

District receives two-year waiver of new credit requirements:

The Washington State Board of Education on January 8th approved the district’s request for a two-year waiver of the State’s new 24-credit graduation requirement.

The State requirement would increase the number of course credits needed for graduation from 20 to 24 credits. It was due to take effect with the graduating class of 2019, the current eighth graders who would be going into ninth grade in the 2015-16 school year. Seattle Public Schools’ students currently are required to earn 21 credits.

The district applied for the waiver because the updated 24-credit requirement creates challenges for Seattle Public Schools. Most high schools offer a six-period school day, meaning over four years, students with typical schedules may earn a maximum of 24 credits. While many of our students do earn 24 credits, the new code leaves no room to recover credit for students who may fail a course.

With the approved waiver, the 24-credit requirement will now take effect for students entering ninth grade in the 2017-18 school year, the graduating class of 2021. This extra time affords the district an opportunity to rethink its systems for providing credits, which may include revisions to course offerings or schedules.

To that end, the district will form a task force of parents, teachers, students, administrators and other stakeholders to research and analyze options that might be best for our students. The task force will be asked to make a recommendation regarding high school schedules, graduation policy and credit-hour requirements. A call for task force volunteers will go out the week of January 20th, with a February 20th deadline to submit names. The Office of College & Career Readiness will continue to update the community on district progress around this important issue.

Another Math in Focus Parent Night scheduled:

Families districtwide have been notified this week through email, the homepage and social media about the upcoming Math in Focus Parent Night, scheduled for 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, January 22nd, at Stevens Elementary School and Olympic View Elementary School. The hour-long sessions are open to all families.

A trainer representing the Math in Focus publisher will provide insight on the “bar modeling” concept – a basic component of the Singapore-based Math in Focus texts. The trainer also will
review tips for helping students with homework and will walk parents through the concrete-pictorial-abstract progression concept within the texts. The Math in Focus Parent Nights are designed to support the June, 2014 elementary Math adoption.

Smarter Balanced assessment updates:

District assessment coordinators have been working with schools to prepare for the upcoming state-mandated Smarter Balanced assessments that replace the Measurements of Student Progress and High School Proficiency Exams this Spring. All students in grades 3-8 and 11 are required to take the Smarter Balanced assessments in English Language Arts and Math during the testing window from March to May. The State is now also requiring students in grade 10 to take only the ELA portion of the 11th grade test as a graduation requirement.

Among the preparations occurring on the district level:

- Additional devices such as laptops and keyboards for tablets are being delivered to schools based on need to accommodate the online, computer-adaptive assessments. The devices provide greater flexibility to minimize the effect of test scheduling on teaching, and they can be used beyond testing for a variety of 21st century instruction.
- The district has purchased Typing Agent, an online keyboarding program, for elementary and middle school students. Teachers have been provided with logins and have been encouraged to integrate practice opportunities when possible for students who need it. Keyboarding proficiency also enhances students’ technology skills beyond the state tests.
- Assessment Development Manager, Shawn Cook, has been leading multiple after-school trainings each month, since October, at the John Stanford Center for teachers and principals, and the district has produced a Smarter Balanced preparation guide as well as talking points for teachers.
- An internal (MySPS) web page is available for any district staff with a login, containing a wealth of information, links and resources for teachers and principals – including practice tests and sample schedules.
- A dedicated email address SBACadmin@seattleschools.org has been created to respond to questions.
- The weekly Principal Communicator now contains a special Smarter Balanced header for weekly updates on the tests for all principals.
- The district has produced a number of resources for our families, including several one-page informational flyers and an external web page linked from our homepage. A brief Smarter Balanced-focused video for families is in the works. Attached is a document provided to principals at the January 13th District Leadership Team meeting that reviews the available and pending communications resources.
- The district is working with building-level test coordinators on scheduling, accommodations and other logistical issues.

Third-grade conference requirement:

Principals have been informed about the new State law requiring principals to conference with the families of third-graders who do not meet standard on the English Language Arts portion of
the Smarter Balanced assessment. The third-grade conferences are required by the end of the school year, so the testing window for third-grade English Language Arts is open from (March 10-April 23) to allow time for score reporting. Smarter Balanced estimates scores will arrive within three weeks of students taking the test. In 2014-15, the third-grade conferences are required for students earning a score of “1” on the assessments; in 2015-16, they will be required for students earning a “1” or “2.” Third-graders with Individualized Education Plans in Reading/Language Arts are exempt from these conferences because those students are already receiving support. We will contact all families of third-graders in February to inform them of this requirement.

Curriculum & Instruction will provide further Smarter Balanced updates as we move closer to the testing window.

Attachment: Smarter Balanced Communications Resources