

Date: Thursday, May 29, 2015
To: Larry Nyland, Superintendent
From: Michael F. Tolley, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
Re: Friday Memo for May 28, 2015

DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING:

Department of Special Education:

Movement from the Revised Comprehensive Corrective Action Plan (RC-CAP) to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Implementation Testing:

- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was introduced to the School Board on May 20th. If accepted on June 3rd, the MOU would replace the RC-CAP and related reporting. The final RC-CAP activities for Quarter 4 continue to be monitored and reported until further notice.
- Organizational Climate surveys related to the RC-CAP are currently being drafted and vetted, to be disseminated in June 2015. These surveys are intended to determine if the Special Education Department has noticed an improvement in systems and support during this school year and how this has impacted special education in schools, as well as to collect data on perceptions around job performance and satisfaction.
- Timeliness data for Individual Education Plan (IEP's) and evaluations will continue to occur each month at this time. April data is currently under review and validation for publishing to appropriate audiences on or before May 29th.

Continued Work to Improve Special Education Service Delivery for Students:

- Collaboration with the Department of Technology Services (DoTS) continues in order to improve accuracy and quality of the Special Education Discipline Reporting.
- Planning continues with University of Washington (UW) around professional learning and development for school leaders, which will occur this summer. Both UW and SPS are excited to lift off this multi-year joint endeavor to increase the knowledge of SPS school leaders on current practices within the Special Education Department. This professional learning and development collaboration is part of the 3 year plan developed as an activity for the RC-CAP, but extends past the RC-CAP work into a much more proactive, thoughtful approach to how special education services are delivered in schools.

Department of Native American Education Services:

Program Update:

During the 2013-2014 school year, there was only an after-school program at South Shore K-8 School which we ended due to low Native American student enrollment at South Shore K-8. The South Shore K-8 administration stated that they wanted to use the Native American after school activities room for an additional ELL classroom. Most of the students attending this South Shore K-8 after school were being transported from John Muir Elementary School and a few from

Hawthorne Elementary School. We were forced to move the after school program to another school due to transportation cuts during the 2014-2015 school year. The decision was made along with our City of Seattle grant monitor to move the program to John Muir Elementary School for the 2014-2015 school year (the City of Seattle grant pays for all of the Native American after school programs). Since we opened the after school program at John Muir Elementary School, there has consistently been 7-9 students attending the after school program. We went from having one after school program during the 2013-2014 school year, to seven Native American after school programs during the 2014-2015 school year throughout the five Regions. This was a very monumental move for our district as we were only reaching 10-25 Native American students weekly, district wide last year, and have more than quadrupled that amount this school year.

Challenges:

- Transportation: Because our Native American families live all around the five Regions, it's very challenging to get as many students as we'd like to have attend our after school programs. This is the reason we moved our program from South Shore K-8 to John Muir Elementary School, as most of our students attending South Shore K-8 after school program last year, were being transported from John Muir Elementary School. After the transportation cuts and recommendations from the City of Seattle to serve more children where they live, we moved the program to John Muir Elementary School.
- We are mitigating the lack of after school programs at South Shore K-8 by providing a consulting teacher who supports the Native American students at the school. The consulting teacher is Vicky Segundo and her position is supported through Title I funds. Vicki Segundo works closely with our South Shore K-8 students, and provides them with one-on-one academic support in the classroom. All of the Huchoosedah staff works in specific Regions in the district offering this type of supports to our students who need additional academic support.

Communications:

At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, families, students, and teachers were informed about the Native American after-school program moving to John Muir Elementary School, so they could make for their students to attend the John Muir Elementary School after school program. We will let them know again about the site location change at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year and put the information in the Newsletter. The families are updated regularly about the after-school programs via the Newsletter and by the Huchoosedah staff.

Cultural Events:

- The City of Seattle, which pays for all of our after school programs, requires the district to have Native American cultural events and to go on cultural field trips to strengthen our students' identity, safety and sense of belonging. We had a Huchoosedah Holiday dinner at Daybreak Star in December 2014. We were able to provide a nice holiday dinner, have a Native Santa who took pictures with our students. We were able to handout 1,000 toys

from Toys for Tots, to our Native American students and we had the Red Eagle Soaring perform, Haida Laas dance group, and story tellers.

- We started a monthly Culture Night at STEM K-5 at Boren, which we have been fortunate enough to hold every month with huge support from the principal, Ben Ostrom.
- The Muckleshoot Canoe Family take the after school students out on the cedar strip canoe and prepare lunch for the students, teach them tribal history, and allow them to paddle twice in April and May.
- There will be an end of the year graduation ceremony for all Native American students (PreK-12 grades) at Daybreak Star on June 10, 2015. Several college graduates attended the ceremony last school year.
- We will honor our students with Louie Gong necklaces, prints, and also honor all the teachers who worked with Huchoosedah.

Native American Academic Support and Mentoring Program:

- We presented the proposed budget to cover the costs of a certificated teacher, an Instructional Assistant, and materials for this program during the Service Based Budget.
- We have been working with other district's that offer a similar program to develop the job descriptions and begin drafting the curriculum for this class.
- We have also identified the high school with the largest number of Native American students and will engage in further conversations with the principal of this school.
- We are in the process of drafting an implementation plan for this program.

Celebrating Success:

We have been gradually moving forward with hiring staff and staff development. We were able to secure a third certificated teacher to work in the Northeast and Northwest Regions in which she created two additional after school programs at Greenwood and Sandpoint Elementary Schools based on the needs that were identified during one of the school visits to support Native American students. We have also hired a full-time paraprofessional to work as a secondary liaison in grades 6-12, throughout the district. The paraprofessional will work with middle and high school Native American students to ensure they are on track for graduation.

Below is a list of the current sites for the Native American after-school programs for the 2014-2015 school year:

- John Muir Elementary School
- Highland Park Elementary School
- Licton Springs K-8 School

- Greenwood Elementary School
- Broadview Thomson K-8 School
- Sandpoint Elementary School
- Whitman Middle School

Department of Curriculum & Instruction:

Amplify mClass Beacon Assessments and MAP K-2: Answers to Questions Requested by School Board Members:

What, exactly, is the District planning to do with Amplify scores?

Is there any way to stretch out the 2016-17 (full implementation goal), or to commit to extending it if more challenges arise?

The District is not planning to use Amplify scores for any purpose other than supporting classroom instruction and providing diagnostic information to parents about their child's progress in meeting District learning goals. We do not anticipate using Amplify benchmarks for any high-stakes purposes such as program placement, school accountability, or teacher evaluation. Teachers and schools may use Amplify results as one of the data points they consider as part of their MTSS process to identify and provide targeted supports to individual students based on their instructional needs. Teachers may optionally choose to set student learning goals based on Amplify assessments, but those are teacher-by-teacher choices.

More specifically, the scores will be used to support instruction. Teachers will have access to the results for the purpose of adjusting their instruction. Our intent is to provide teachers with professional development in the form of job embedded professional learning communities. During the times that we have scheduled to provide professional development, curriculum specialists and other central office staff will support the teachers as they analyze the results and make plans to help students.

We are only doing a one-year contract with the vendor. A single year contract gives us more leverage with the vendor to make certain that critical improvements are made this year and provides the Board an opportunity to approve any renewal for 2016-17. There are major efforts already underway to significantly improve the assessments and our rollout for Year 2. This work actually has been intensively underway over the last two weeks.

At this time we know we need to have common assessments in order to provide teachers with the information to make the instructional shifts necessary to close the achievement gap. Whether it be Amplify or other assessment tools we will continue to need some formative assessment to ensure effective instructional practices.

Many thanks for all the information you provided today. I keep hearing about high failure rate on mClass Beacon indicating difficulty of the tests. This seems inconsistent with your description of the assessments as being purely diagnostic and formative measures of

progress. Where is it coming from? Is there a pass/fail way of interpreting the results? And if so, what explains a high failure rate?

As we had expected with the introduction of more rigorous academic standards, the mClass Beacon assessments this year indicated that some students need more work to reach the higher bar (master the new standards). On average, districtwide and across grade levels, the total percent correct ranged between 45-50 percent correct for ELA and between 35-40 percent correct for math. Reasons for lower scores include more challenging questions requiring students to draw inferences from reading high-complexity text, and math problems assessing deeper conceptual understanding than may have been taught.

We also believe there is an opportunity to refine and calibrate the mClass Beacon assessments to improve their formative use in classroom instruction. Indeed, one of the main advantages of the mClass Beacon platform is full customization of the assessments to District specifications. We will therefore work closely with the vendor to realign and recalibrate our assessments. This process will include refining the items and adding more lower-difficulty items to help teachers identify what students already know and can do even if they have not fully mastered the new standards at all depths of cognitive complexity.

To ensure that we deliver the highest quality assessments, we are partnering with consultants who are national experts in designing formative assessments aligned to the new standards. With the help of these subject matter experts, and in partnership with the vendor, we will clearly define the learning targets each assessment is focused on and create detailed item specifications to define how each standard and target is to be measured. We will implement an intensive quality review process using specific criteria to ensure the assessments measure the standards with precision and all questions are clear and unambiguous for students. In keeping with best practice, our mClass Beacon assessments will be reviewed for cultural bias and sensitivity to ensure they are fair for all students. This is to ensure the assessments do not measure irrelevant knowledge or skill, do not offend, upset, or otherwise distract test takers, and treat all students with appropriate respect in test materials.

As we discussed, the uproar against testing is already being directed at this system of assessment. If we do not take a no-test approach and if these are construed as high stakes with high failure rate they will be opposed by parents and teachers. I've explained to people in the community that it's exactly the system of assessing that we need to shift to. But if I'm mistaken in my understanding I'd like to know right away.

Your understanding is accurate. The District is not planning to use Amplify for any purpose other than supporting classroom instruction and providing diagnostic information to parents about their child's progress in meeting District learning goals. We do not anticipate using mClass Beacon benchmarks for any high-stakes "testing" purposes such as program placement, school accountability, or teacher evaluation.

mClass Beacon assessments are formative and diagnostic tools to support learning in the classroom. Teachers will be able to see how students perform in key focus areas such as problem solving and conceptual understanding in mathematics. Each assessment will include a

range of lower and higher order questions to help teachers precisely gauge the level of mastery students have achieved. The interim benchmark design will allow teachers to see if students are making progress and growth throughout the year in key domain and focus areas, and will be able to isolate specific skill gaps.

To support teachers in using these assessments to adjust their instruction, we intend to provide professional development in the form of job embedded professional learning communities. During the times that we have scheduled to provide professional development, curriculum specialists and other trained central office staff will support the teachers in how to analyze the results and develop plans to help individual students improve and make progress toward mastery.

Also will you please provide the entire board with a copy of the kind of information or data that teachers receive from these assessments? It will inform our discussions and decisions.

Yes, we will include sample diagnostic information in our presentation to be provided in advance of the Board meeting on June 3.

Are students or teachers ever informed that students have failed or that there is a failure rate? This is what I'm hearing from the community - that these assessments have a high failure rate. If this is true we need to take a more growth focused approach to interpreting the scores. High failure rate is counterproductive and demotivating for teachers, students and parents. There's no reason to interpret scores through this lens.

I will speak for the public now in stating yet again that I'm very disturbed that these tests do nothing to accommodate ELL students. Particularly as you point out, they are more demanding of conceptual thinking; meaning questions and the ability to respond depend on high level of fluency in English. For the same reason they also discriminate against many Sped students who may have problems with reading, writing and conceptual thinking.

I hope the "lower level" questions that you're going to bring in will accommodate the needs of these students to have their abilities and growth accurately assessed.

The use of mClass Beacon is to provide teachers information to support instruction to meet the needs of the students, not an evaluation of pass or fail. As can be seen in the attached letter, the emphasis of this report is on mastery of specific skills. There is no information about pass or failure nor is there a cut point for passing that is reported. Information about how the student performed compared to classroom and school averages is provided for context. Additionally, this report is customizable by the District and we will be working to improve the information that is provided so that parents have a detailed understanding of the standards and how their child is progressing toward mastery.

Because the intent of the assessment is to enable teachers to make adjustments to instruction and our goal is to support ELL students in language proficiency, providing this assessment in English not only exposes students to assessment language in a formative environment, but also provides

the teacher with specific information about the students' needs. That being said, we are also evaluating if we can provide translated assessments for our level 1 ELL students.

It is our goal that whatever math assessments are used in Seattle Public Schools that they provide insight for teachers into how well their students are progressing toward learning the key work of the grade. To define the key work of each grade, the central math program is using guidance from OSPI on the major focus of the grade and guidance from the Common Core State Standards on fluencies at each grade.

Here are the links to these major emphases from OSPI:

<http://web3.esd112.org/docs/default-source/smerc/ospi-ccss-major-focus-k-2.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
<http://web3.esd112.org/docs/default-source/smerc/ospi-ccss-major-focus-3-5.pdf?sfvrsn=0>
<http://web3.esd112.org/docs/default-source/smerc/ospi-ccss-major-focus-6-8.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

Here is a link to a document containing the Common Core "Required Fluencies" per course:
http://achievethecore.org/content/upload/Focus%20in%20Math_091013_FINAL.pdf

A team of centrally based math curriculum specialists and math teachers from across the district are working diligently this spring to be sure that the math Scope and Sequence is aligned to these major emphases. The central math team will then align mClass Beacon assessments to the Scope and Sequence and therefore to the key learning for each grade.

The central math program has also been able to work with an external consultant to learn more about test creation so that we know how to specify in industry standard language the product we want mClass Beacon to create. We are optimistic that these efforts will pay off and the assessments will be aligned to the key work, the scope and sequence and therefore provide teachers some insight into how students are progressing in learning the standards for the course.

Attachment: Beacon First Benchmark Letter to Families