

Achievement Index comments, Washington State Board of Education May 8, 2013

The Bellevue Special Needs PTA and its board of directors are concerned with the proposed Achievement Index for the Washington State ESEA waiver. There has been insufficient work done for the special education subgroup. The result of the limited input to the Achievement & Accountability Workgroup (AAW) around special education shows itself in the inadequacy around tracking of achievement for special education students.

At the State Board of Education meeting on February 13, 2013, several parent representatives on the discussion panel voiced concerns on the achievement index and left disappointed by the overwhelming confusion as to how special education students should be included in the measurements. The AAW had one representative for special education assigned. Other special education advocates had raised concerns last summer, but the request to increase representation for special education on the AAW committee was denied.

In Washington State there are over 158,000 students with disabilities.¹ Most of these students are not meeting state standards under No Child Left Behind. The low performance of students with disabilities has enhanced stakeholder beliefs that these students are not capable of achieving proficiency. These entrenched beliefs foster a system that assumes failures are due to the nature of the child's disability, instead of looking for the reforms needed in our public education system. The Center for Public Education states, "With special accommodations and support services, the majority of students with disabilities should be able to perform at grade level and graduate from high school with a regular diploma."²

With Washington State's ESEA waiver, we have the opportunity to change the path Washington's students with disabilities are on. By adequately tracking achievement and progress towards proficiency, we can improve the outcomes for each and every student. If we want a system that will encourage increased achievement for ALL children, then special education must have thoughtful work done around how to track their progress.

We find the proposed achievement index to be inadequate for helping to close the achievement gap for special education students in Washington State. We are respectfully asking the State Board of Education to convene a diverse workgroup to specifically work on the challenges associated with special education students and the achievement index.

¹ OSPI, Washington State 2011-12 Report Card: Student demographics of Special Education and Section 504

² Cortiella 2007, Dillon 2007)