Superintendent's Report

October 22nd, 2009

LEARNING UPDATE

- **Online Learning Leadership Summit** – Two weeks ago I attended an online learning leadership summit at the ESD with Lauri Landerholm and Dan Bentson-Royal. This summit was an excellent opportunity to learn about what the state is doing to prepare for an increase in the demand for online learning options by parents and students. We have seen this increased demand within our district as well and have lost some students to districts via their own Internet academies. They have created these Internet academies because of their economy of scale, but the topography in this new learning landscape is rapidly changing. For several years, we have explored ourselves options for online learning (either our own creations or through different vendors or universities). These explorations have been only at the high school level and mainly focused on credit recovery or providing options for students so they could take other courses where schedule conflicts have occurred. Besides the increase in this demand, we are now beginning to see a wider range of students (beyond high school age) taking advantage of these current statewide offerings. This online learning summit gave us some good information and lots to think about. As a result, I have decided we need to reach out to these parents and students to learn what exactly they are trying to accomplish so we can determine if we have the capability and critical mass to create our own online school. More on this as we learn.
- **Vancouver School District Patron Tour** – Last week I visited two Vancouver School District schools (Alki Middle School and Chinook Elementary School) in what they call their Patron Tours. VSD offers these tours six times a year (because of their size they need that many) to both let patrons see learning in action and at the same time communicate to these patrons the work the district is focusing on. It was a great experience and without question VSD does a great job with this effort and their work with students. I believe we too offer great programs for our students and this experience has helped me think about how we might do the same thing (except only once or twice a year). I will keep you up-to-date on my thinking relative to this idea as we work out the details of actually implementing something similar. FYI.
- **Assessment Learning** – As a leadership team, we are working hard to expand our collective knowledge of classroom assessments. This week our entire leadership team focused our regular learning walk on classroom assessments during a visit to the high school. What we learned was as administrators we need to broaden our own thinking about assessment options beyond the traditional observations, quizzes and/or tests. To assist in this effort, there are several book studies (as teams and as individuals) underway in order to build our knowledge base. We clearly have lots to learn, but I am impressed with the energy our team is expending to learn in this area.
- **Special Education Learning Walk** – One of our learning initiatives this year is to expand our awareness of how we are supporting our special education students within the regular classroom. Last week, Dave Holmes, Ann Hutchison (ESD), Michelle Murer (ESD) and I observed special needs students who are integrated into regular education classrooms to see how they are being supported and engaged in the learning process. There were several ideas of how we could improve support for these students as a result. The key finding was that we need to assist them in decoding the vocabulary to a greater degree as part of their pullout classes. This should also more closely connect what is being learned within their special education time with their regular education

classroom time rather than simply doubling up on them. Additionally (as a result of my last summer's Harvard learning), we could clearly see that the decoding process would also be helpful for our regular education students as well. This learning has expanded our lens and idea toolbox in our efforts to support all of our regular education teachers as well.

- **We are learning how to use Netbooks** – There is a new tool that will rapidly change our ability to connect digitally. The tool is known as a netbook. If you have not heard of them, essentially they are laptop computers that are the size of a small book. We have purchased two of them to use and explore. Netbooks allow for Internet access, creating via common publishing tools, communication via email, Skyping (i.e. video streaming) and so on. The cost of these tools is around $300. Additionally, we are also exploring open source software (which is free) for the operating system (Linux – Ubuntu) and publishing tools (Open Office instead of Word, PowerPoint and Excel). The result appears to be a low cost, portable yet powerful digital interface tool that could transform how we create learning environments and learn.
- **Lab Classroom Project** – As you know, we have five teams of teachers (5 to 7 teachers per team) along with an administrator across the district working on a team developed problem of practice. I have been able to attend some of their meetings and classroom visits as well as keep up through reading their meeting notes. I have been impressed by what they are learning, but more importantly I am amazed at how they are so openly sharing about what they need to learn to improve their practice. This is a huge step for teachers that essentially learned as isolated practitioners. The thing to keep in mind here is just consider the types of learning environments they will create for students when as teachers they themselves are more open to their own learning. Without question, I am impressed with our staff and how hard they are working to improve their practice as a team of learners.
- **Technology Learning Opportunity Creation** – I have come to the conclusion that we need to create opportunities for staff and students to learn how to harness the power of technology to supercharge their ability to learn how to learn. From the increasing need for online learning to what I am seeing within the lab classroom project, I now believe it is critical for us to create opportunities for us to learn how to recreate the learning environment around the digital mindset. A couple of ideas that are percolating around allowing our social studies staff at the high school to develop their own curriculum built upon digital connections they develop. This will require a one-to-one computer to student configuration, but we would initially do this where the computers would stay within the classroom. Another idea would be via a K-12 Internet school if we could determine that option was viable. Creating these learning experiences for students could prove to be very powerful for those involved, but from a broader perspective, we could learn how to create better learning environments for all students.

BOARD UPDATE

- **School Impact Fee Approval** – I have spent a significant portion of my time over the last couple of weeks working with and attending meetings at the county level in regards to our impact fees. The good news is, this week the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) finally approved our recommended impact fees as part of our updated capital facilities plan. The root of all this work was caused by the building industry association's effort to get the county to reduce, delay and/or adjust collections of the impact fees (similar to the request a local developer made to the school board). In the end, the BOCC finally approved your recommended impact fee amounts.

- **P.E.R.P.** – Prepared Emergency Response Partnership (PERP) is a joint effort between the La Center Police Department, Fire District 12 and the district to improve our readiness for emergency situations. We met recently to discuss our upcoming emergency response drill that will take place within the next month or so. This year's drill will start as a modified lockdown drill resulting from some event that occurred at one of the casinos. The LCPD will make this modified lockdown call and we will not know when exactly it will occur. From this first phase, the K-8 will be allowed to return to normal operations and the high school will be placed into full lockdown that will involve police and fire to arrive on campus. For the first time, as part of this exercise we will initiate what is called an emergency command post to control operations. My hope is that the K-8 drill will only last 15 to 20 minutes and the high school drill will be finished in 30 to 40 minutes. As part of this effort, we will inform parents of the window of time (i.e. "An emergency drill will occur at some point during the week of…") so panic won't set in. FYI. Lauri Landerholm and Laurie Kansanback serve with me on PERP. Additionally, Lauri Landerholm represents the district on a county-wide emergency planning team. Kudos to both of them for their hard work in this essential effort.
- **Partnership Meeting with the Classified Association** – I recently had a meeting with our classified association leadership team to discuss a variety of ideas and to answer questions about our work together. We clearly enjoy a strong working relationship with the association's leadership and I have been very impressed with their system-wide thinking. Time and again they have come from a perspective that what is good for the district is good for staff rather than simply focusing on what is good for their membership regardless of the broader organization's needs to support students. As part of these regularly scheduled meetings, I also had the opportunity to brief them on the volatility of the district's revenue streams and how that might impact them. At this meeting I shared with them the fiscal variables that are ahead of us (similar to my briefing prior to the start of the recent community linkage meeting). This communication is an effort to keep them informed, but more importantly to invite them to create some potential solutions in meeting the fiscal challenges ahead of us. We are simply starting the process we went through last spring earlier in the year because of the uncertainly before us. Again, I am continually impressed with their system-wide focus and the collective unselfishness as we work to support our students.
- **CORE-24 & Meaningful High School Diploma Update** – I continue to serve on the State Board of Education's Task Force on CORE-24 and Meaningful High School Diploma. Both these opportunities to serve are rich sources of information to learn about what is happening at the policy level within the state. These expenditures of time have, and I believe will continue to pay dividends in our own work to create the best possible learning opportunities for students by getting ahead of the changes that are coming. FYI.
- **ESD Board Retreat Invitation** – Dr. Twyla Barnes (our ESD 112 superintendent) has asked me to present at their upcoming ESD Board Retreat next week. The topic she wants me to share with the board is about our learning efforts, both within the district as well as outside of the district (i.e. Harvard Group, Washington State Leadership Academy). Additionally, she wants me to share how this effort (as a group of superintendents) has changed the way ESD meetings and county superintendents' meetings are now conducted by moving towards a team learning focus rather than simply a group of individuals with a management focus. I consider the request to be a real honor and will be building my talk upon the foundation of your work as a board to establish a team learning structure via Policy Governance. FYI.

I think that is all for now. Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark