Superintendent's Report

April 21st, 2011

LEARNING UPDATE

- **Self-reflection on our learning efforts –** During the spring of each year, April consistently serves as a great time to do some self-reflection. I believe the reason for this is our work to finish the current school year (and fiscal year) with the greatest value and at the same time "lay the tracks in front of the train" for the next school (and fiscal) year. With our focus as an organization consistently on learning, I thought it might be a great time to organize my thoughts around our learning efforts as a way to both celebrate the work and articulate the vision for where we are headed.

  Two years ago when the state eliminated our Learning Improvement Days (LID) for professional development, many other districts either backfilled this loss or eliminated the days altogether. I'm sure this will not surprise you, but in La Center we approached this process a bit differently. What we did was engage those who were willing (rather than herding everyone along) around the idea of the Lab Classroom Project (LCP). This is where teachers learned to change their practice as a learning environment leader rather than as deliverers of content. We started out with five teams that first year and last year the LCP idea grew to encompass eleven teams across the district and one team from the Green Mountain School District. The learning these educators accomplished was incredible and has served as a key spark of energy that has carried us through the tough times economically we all have faced to stay both excited and focused on our mission as a district. This work has been instrumental in not only changing our collective practices, but has also been key to eroding so many barriers of isolation that have kept teachers separated and isolated as learners.

  This year in addition to LCPs there has been an opportunity to form other learning teams funded through money set aside in the budget to support teacher learning efforts in what is known as Learning Conditions Mini-Grant (LCMG). The focus of this learning effort was to learn how to implement the district's learning model into the classroom. I had the pleasure of leading two of these LCMG funded teams and they were known as the Old Dog teams (as I am the "Old Dog"). The aim of our learning work was to explore how to intentionally create lessons within the district learning model in order to better meet the board's Ends policies. One of these teams is an elementary level team and the other is a high school level team. I am learning a great deal from these educators about how to help teachers learn to intentionally create learning environments specifically focused on meeting the board's Ends policies. What they have taught me and what we have developed together will lead to a systemic effort to align our learning efforts across the district to an even greater degree. It is very exciting work and I believe the dividends we will all gain (especially our students) will be profound. We need to think of LCMG money as seed money similar to Venture Capital funds in business, but this seed money is around creating stronger learning environments. Not every expenditure will be a winner, but some will change the system.

Beyond LCPs and Old Dog teams, I have learned a great deal from those schools that have come to La Center to visit and learn about our learning model. Over the past year we have become much more skilled in helping others experience the learning environments we create for our students in quick and understandable ways through learning walks. The most interesting part of these experiences is how self-reflective these visitors become after learning how to use the processes and tools we have developed as a district team of learners. To tap into this experience for all of our own teachers, I have begun a process of scheduling learning walks with each of our teachers so everyone can experience the same self-reflective experience as well as better understand our learning model in action. This work will take a lot of time and energy, but I think the learning opportunities this effort will generate for all of us will be just as impactful as LCPs and Old Dog learning.

Finally, I have learned a great deal from the presentations we have given at conferences over the past year. Our presentation at the WSSDA conference and at ESD 112 on the district's Pathways Model, three presentations for the Washington Association of School Principals (AWSP) on Learning Walk and their impacts on our practice as school leaders, and two presentations for the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) on Pathways model and Policy Governance have all added to my learning. Connecting all this work through these presentations clearly show just how much Learning is embedded within our culture here in La Center.

Looking forward, I am very excited about the energy building around the idea of a regularly scheduled, late student arrival. As you know, this idea simply takes small chunks of time teachers already have (5 minutes before the start of school and 5 minutes after the start of school) and coalesces the time into a usable hour each week for staff to use to improve their own practice. How staff utilize this time would be up to them, but I have extreme confidence that their hunger for collaboration time to improve their practice is so strong as a result of the LCP, LCMG (i.e. Old Dog team) efforts that it will be fun to watch and learn from them in the process.

All this energy is directly connected to your work as a board through your own learning process embedded within Policy Governance. Thank you for your leadership, your own drive to learn as board members and your clearly articulated expectations around everyone learning.

BOARD UPDATE

- **State Budget Update** – As you are probably aware, the Senate has now passed its budget and it is actually less favorable to K-12 education than the House budget. From the district's perspective, the biggest negative impact in its original form was the introduction of Average Daily Attendance (ADA). The good news is the backlash was so strong last week against this idea that the Senate took that idea off the table. Once this occurred, I believe that the biggest pieces of the puzzle are now in place, but the Senate and the House must now decide how to arrange the pieces to make a final budget. With that in mind, we are now thinking there will <u>not</u> be any need for a Reduction In Force (RIF) for staff. Brett and I feel strongly that our previous actions have positioned us well to address the reduced revenues headed our way. Good news to be sure!

Beyond the district budget, the legislature is considering impacting teacher wages in one of two ways, so we may be still needing to be cognizant of how this could impact our programs. The House is considering freezing all teacher wages and step increases. The Senate is proposing a 3% wage reduction for all teachers. Since our teachers have not had any cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for the past several years, either of these options could have significant impacts on our staff, especially our newest and least senior teachers. How exactly this will impact the district is not clear, as our staff as you know are very selfless and dedicated. But at some point I am concerned that these types of financial impacts on our teachers will impact our ability to meet the mission. More on this concern, if and when something happens.

- **WASA Board Position** – I have been elected to serve our ESD 112 region as a board member for the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA). I have served in this capacity previously and have found the connections and opportunities to express positions our district faces to be of good value for the time and energy. Many of their meetings are connected to other meetings and/or conferences I attend. FYI.

Please give me a call if you have any questions. Talk with you later.

Mark