Superintendent's Report

May 20th, 2011

LEARNING UPDATE

- **What is Quality Learning?** – The following is a copy of an article I was asked to write for the Washington State Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development (WSASCD) that I thought you might be interested in reading.

What is Quality Learning for the Information Age?

Rethinking how we create learning environments

In the 21st century, the body of knowledge humankind has at its disposal is growing exponentially. The "half-life" of knowledge continues to shrink as the overall expansion of knowledge occurs. Put another way, this means that what may be considered the "truth" or correct information one day may become outdated and replaced the next day. Just look at a world map from a couple of years ago and compare it to today. Now expand this idea to science, art, literature, mathematics, music, engineering, technology, etc. and you will quickly see that simply teaching students what they need to "know" doesn't cut it any more.

Our students must be able to "think" in a process where they are perpetually learning and un-learning in an ongoing cycle rather than simply learning to know. Therefore, learning environments that are built on a teacher/textbook centered learning model that expects students to memorize rapidly decaying information that is disconnected from the learners' life trajectory or fails to engage the learner in meaningful high cognitive demanding work is at best a futile educational effort and at worst a monumental disservice to the learner and to our society. In order for quality learning to prepare students for a rapidly changing world, the learning environments we create for students must also change.

To achieve this end, our practice as educators must change to support this shift in learner needs. The educational opportunity our students need today must be more of a learning platform that assists them to learn how to think independently rather than simply perpetuate the factory learning model designed to transfer knowledge from the teacher or textbook to the student as if their minds are some sort of biological file cabinet. To do this, we must create powerful, internally motivating learning environments that harness the energy behind every learner's innate human need to learn. This work must begin with a redefinition of our roles as teachers from being simply deliverers of content (sage on the stage) to seeing ourselves as learning environment leaders (guide on the side) who use the content to develop independent life-long learners. Put simply, quality learning environments must be refocused to help students *learn how to think* rather than *learn what to know*.

A *Learning to Think* classroom (or better seen as a learning team rather than as a classroom) must be focused on assisting all learners to learn to think by using the content as compared to learning to know the content. The content remains vitally important but for a very different reason than we previously thought. Think of the content as more of a learning topography that the learners immerse themselves into so as to learn to think and thereby be able to learn anything (beyond the

content used) independently of the teacher. In other words, the content is a means to an end rather than the end itself. A *Learning to Think* classroom is: 1) Designed to consistently engage the learner in both real and meaningful learning endeavors that expect the learner to have cognition beyond the memorization level; 2) Allow learners to receive and add on to multiple flows of information within and around the learning targets/objectives; and 3) Be built upon a foundation of trust that everyone within the learning team (learner and leader) has an innate need to own their own learning.

In conclusion, as educators we need to have a shift in thinking around how we create learning environments for our students. Failing to do so is similar to trying to teach someone how to drive a car by only seeing the image from the "rear view mirror". As leaders of learning environments, we ourselves must look through the "windshield" and into the future and recognize that all signs point to a rapidly changing body of knowledge that our students must face. In other words, our students must become independent learners (i.e. thinkers) for a lifetime rather than simply knowers of information. This outcome can only occur if we ourselves as educators examine and change as needed first so as to create quality learning environments that are built upon learning how to think. Then and only then will our students have a real opportunity for quality learning for the information age.

BOARD UPDATE

- **State Budget Update** – Well, we continue to wait for the legislature to make their mind up about which way they will be headed for next year's budget. Several times over the past couple of weeks we got some indication that there may be some movement and a "behind the scenes" deal would appear to have been struck to break the log-jam. Then the word would come out that progress has stalled once again. Yesterday we started to hear news about the strong likelihood that there would need to be a second special session in order to get all the work done that must be accomplished even if there were an agreement. However, today we heard that the House has called all of its members in to work through the weekend to get the necessary bills passed to be able to get done and go home. This may once again be a sign that a "deal" has been reached and a budget is on the horizon. But we certainly have seen this movie before so I hope no one is holding their breath on this latest version of "As Olympia Turns".

- **Community Service Award** – On Friday, May 20th, Dave Holmes and I presented to the Casino Charitable Trust the Washington Association of School Administrators' (WASA) Community Service award at an ESD awards ceremony. As shared earlier this year, the "Casino Foundation" as it is commonly called has provided through grants more than $245,000 either directly to our district or to our students in the form of scholarships. They are most certainly deserving of this recognition and both Dave and I were proud to represent our district and community in giving out the award.

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

Mark