

WSSDA Testimony before the State Board of Education  
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On November 22, 2008, the WSSDA board adopted a resolution outlining the association's position regarding accountability. You have a copy of that resolution in your board packets. It acknowledges our Board's continuing support for accountability in our districts and specifically our board's support for improved academic achievement for all the students we serve.

The WSSDA resolution also affirms the aspiration of all of us for greater achievement, while recognizing (as you have) that the challenges to achieving our goal must be addressed in a meaningful and systematic manner. For example, all of us would like to see a "turn around" for all students immediately, but we realize that despite this urgency it takes time for the resources, the materials and the staffing to make the necessary changes that will result in significant academic improvement. We recognize that reaching our goal will require a coalescence of a commitment to high achievement for all students, excellent instruction, measurable student learning and adequate resources.

Today, I will provide additional comments regarding the State Board resolution which was developed subsequent to the WSSDA board resolution.

We recognize, as I am sure you do, that there continues to be insufficient details in the resolution. Therefore, it is challenging to offer definitive support or comment on some of the concepts. The phrases used in the resolution, leave a variety of options and approaches open – some of which would be acceptable to our association and some of which would not be acceptable. For example the phrases:

- ***"After a time set"*** – The amount of time allocated to a district and community to make meaningful student achievement changes is crucial. One year is not enough time, perhaps in two years a small amount of progress would be achieved, but we don't believe academic watch should occur based on a set time line without recognition of incremental progress.
- ***"Where there is no significant improvement"*** Appropriate measurement of improvement is another challenge. Progress is not always measurable in equal increments year after year. The first year may see no progress, the second year of new innovations may bring 20% increase, and the third year may be the year the district finally gets over the hump with 60% or 70% increase, but we may never get to that point if the district is forced to change its approach after year two because significant improvement did not occur in a mandatory timeframe.
- ***"Academic Watch"*** –We have many questions about academic watch. What will this look like in a district, what will be the components of academic watch that will allow a district to make meaningful progress? What value will state oversight bring to the district? It would be our desire that in crafting "academic watch" the State Board keep in mind that the purpose of Academic Watch is not to further burden or penalize districts, but to add value – we suggest the State Board focus on how academic watch can be structured to enhance the district' reform and intervention efforts.

I would like to address two additional areas of the draft resolution. The current resolution states that the State Board of Education will report jointly to the local community with the local school board. We believe there is a role for the State Board in communicating regarding education, but we believe that role is at the state level and not for each local school district. The locally elected board of directors is and should remain responsible as the voice of and to their local community on education issues.

Further, your resolution states that the accountability framework become part of the basic education funding revisions and that the Legislature provide appropriate legal authority and resources to the State Board and OSPI. Those are the only two entities you mentioned as needing legal authority and resources. However, the local districts will have primary responsibility in implementing the new accountability provisions and in that role they will also need the legal authority and resources to fulfill their responsibilities. This will require a thorough evaluation of existing laws governing local school boards, perhaps to include additional legal authority, as well as the additional financial resources.

We understand that the accountability system is a work in progress and that you will continue to seek input from stakeholders as you begin to answer these questions. We applaud your understanding of the need to continually engage in dialogue and specifically your understanding that the accountability system cannot effectively proceed without the input of locally elected school directors.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on the statewide accountability proposal. I look forward to working with you as you refine and revise the document.