

Washington's Race to the Top:
*2010 Legislative Recommendations for a
Competitive Race to the Top Proposal*

ANNE LUCE
SEATTLE UNIVERSITY: MASTERS PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
PUBM 590: CAPSTONE THESIS
DECEMBER 3, 2009

Executive Summary

In this increasingly complex and global 21st century it is more important than ever that students are provided with a strong public education – an education that prepares them for college, work and life. However, this is not happening. The nation’s education system is not serving as a top-of-the-line factory producing students with a full-range of intellectual skills. Instead, the system is doing the opposite. It is a dropout factory, producing schools where at least 40 percent of 9th graders fail to reach the 12th grade in three years (Princiotta, & Renya, 2009). Clearly, the education system needs to be reformed.

In January 2009 the Department of Education announced a national competitive \$4.35 billion grant opportunity, Race to the Top (R2T). Secretary of the Department of Education, Arne Duncan, explained R2T as “a historic opportunity, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, to lay the groundwork for a generation of education reforms” (Duncan, 2009). R2T will reward states where policy reforms are already in place or where states adopt a strategic plan to allow for “four assurances” to be implemented. These assurances are:

- Adoption of national common-core standards and high-quality assessments tied to these standards;
- A strategic plan to develop human capital;
- Investments in statewide longitudinal data systems; and
- Regulations allowing for intervention in low performing schools and the development of alternative high-quality schools, like Charters.

These criteria are stringent and the Department of Education has made it clear that states that do not have measures in place to implement these reforms will not receive funding.

Washington State is in need of bold education reforms – reforms that will raise the dismal 71 percent graduation rate and expand the opportunities for students in this state (Finne, 2008). It is only through an aggressive R2T application that Washington State will be well positioned to be rewarded federal funding to implement, and improve, the state’s current underperforming education system.

Challenges to submitting a bold application are present. A significant challenge will be garnering the support and focus of the legislative body to pass necessary education reform legislation during a short 60-day session that will be heavily influenced and driven by the \$2.3 billion state budget deficit. In addition, state education leaders Governor Christine Gregoire, State Superintendent Randy Dorn and Executive Director of the Washington State Board of Education (SBE) Edie Harding will need to work in tandem to develop necessary legislation and uniting this group around specific priorities has been historically difficult. Finally, despite Washington State announcing that it would not be submitting an application for early consideration, the State has only until June 1, 2010 to develop a robust application that demonstrates how it will meet the reform requirements identified in the R2T proposal (Associated Press, 2009).

It is the purpose of this paper to assess and analyze Washington State's current education policies and then, based upon this analysis and the four mandatory assurances in the R2T application, outline specific and realistic education priorities that can be adopted by the legislature in the short, 60-day 2010 session that will enhance the state's R2T proposal.

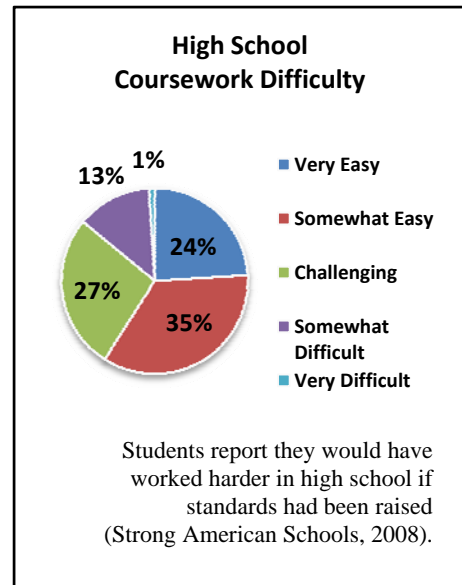
Enactment of such legislation will advance the State's opportunity to win a R2T grant opportunity. Furthermore, it will make necessary education system changes that will better the system as a whole – improving graduation rates, expanding opportunities for youth and paving a path for students to succeed in college, work and life.

The Problem

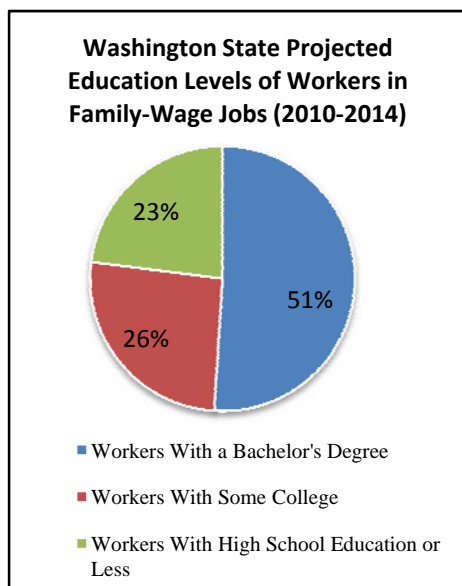
A silent epidemic is occurring within our nation’s high schools. It is especially prevalent amongst students who come from low-income, minority, single-parent families and attend large urban public schools. This epidemic is the low academic achievement occurring within high schools.

This epidemic is reflected in plunging high school graduation rates. Graduation rates are a dismal average of 68% nationwide (Barton, 2005) and more than 1 million students drop out of high school every year. And of those students who graduate, only 14% indicate that high school adequately prepared them for college (US Department Education).

As such, it is not surprising that only 43% of high school students who take the ACT college entrance exam meet benchmarks of college readiness (ACT, 2008) and that students who receive a SAT score below 1000 are twice as likely to require remedial education classes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). When comparing our education graduation rate with 36 international industrialized nations the United States ranks 21st; a



disappointing number given that we once led this group (Strong American Schools).



Washington State is experiencing the same troubling education system the latter data presents. The State has a 71% graduation rate and of this number only 73% of student’s will graduate high school in four years (Education Watch State Report, 2009). Furthermore, while nearly 76% of high school graduates will enter a two- or four year college within two years of graduating high school more than half of the students will require remedial

courses before they can enroll in credit-bearing course – as such, these students are more likely to drop out of college (Improving the Odds, 2009). Given that nearly 77% of family-wage jobs will require at least some postsecondary education or training by 2014 the education system in Washington State is failing to adequately prepare its youth for college, work and life (Improving the Odds, 2009).

This silent epidemic has lasting effects. High school drop outs earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates, are twice as likely to suffer poverty, are more likely to commit crime, and are highly dependent on some type of government assistance (Iceland, 2005). And, in Washington State of the projected top ten occupations with the greatest number of openings due to growth that can provide a family-wage job eight require at some post-high school education or training (Improving the Odds, 2009).

The most discouraging fact is the reason why high school students are dropping out. As identified in the report *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, John Bridgeland, John Dilulio Jr. and Karen Burke Morrison list the top five reasons students leave schools:

- Classes were not interesting & students were bored; 47%
- Missed too many days and could not catch up; 43%
- Spent time with people who were not interested in school: 42%
- Had too much freedom and not enough rules in their life: 38%
- Were failing in school: 35%

This dropout crisis must end. The negative social-economic impact for individual students and our economy are costly and unacceptable. Education reforms are needed that will immunize us from this epidemic. It is critical that measures are taken to improve teaching and curricula, create the opportunity for alternative schools and student support systems, implement high-quality data systems to monitor student achievement, and guarantee a common core curriculum and assessments tied to the curriculum. These reforms will provide students with better teachers, stronger curriculum, and needed supports to ensure that they will graduate from high school prepared for work, life or college.

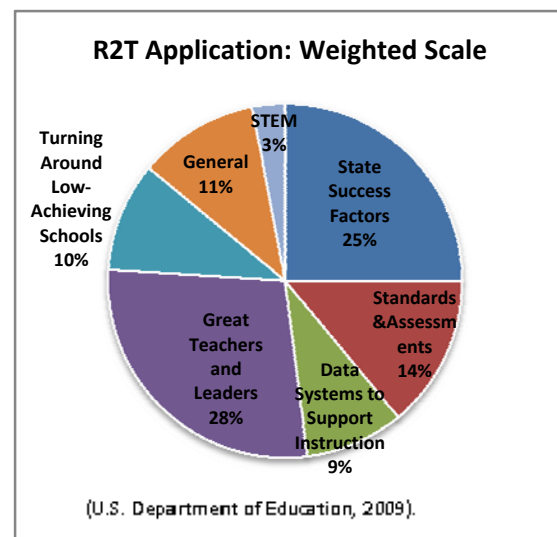
Good education policy does not happen in a vacuum; it must be connected to political common sense for legislators called on to take difficult votes that some of their supporters oppose. It is here that the financial benefits of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) can be brought to bear.

An Opportunity

In an unprecedented moment of consensus that will make the latter education reforms possible, President Obama signed into law on February 17, 2009 the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The ARRA creates the largest financial foundation for education reform in United States history by providing \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top (R2T) fund, a competitive grant program designed to encourage and reward states that demonstrate, adopt or outline a clear strategic plan for adoption of bold education reforms designed to reduce the achievement gap across student subgroups. Washington State has an opportunity to submit a grant request for these funds, but real substantive change is needed in order for the state's proposal to be competitive.

R2T is a bold statement that American education must improve. The federal grant process is being conducted in two phases – states have the opportunity to apply for R2T funds by either January 19 or June 1, 2010 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Regardless of the phase of their application submission, every proposal must meet the following assurances:

- Adoption of the *national common-core standards and high-quality assessments* tied to these standards;
- A strategic plan for the *development of great teachers and leaders*;
- Investments in *statewide longitudinal data systems*; and
- Regulations allowing for intervention of *low performing schools*.



In addition to four required assurances identified above, the R2T proposal includes other areas by which each state's proposal will be assessed. Included in the weighted framework are three additional categories:

- State Success Factors: articulation of state's education *reform agenda*, ability to *implement and scale proposed reforms*, and a pledge to *close the existing student achievement gap*.
- General Selection Criteria: state's current and previous commitment to *making education funding a priority*, the *development of alternative high-quality schools*, like Charters, and a demonstration of *reform conditions*.
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM): *emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic curriculum*.

The competition for R2T funds is much more than a symbolic political decision. It comes with more funding than any other previous Federal program and is tied to incentives rather than being mandate driven. No State is required to apply; though all are encouraged to do so. Education Secretary Arne Duncan's plan reflects the government's commitment to break out of the standard pro-quo education reform efforts, like those seen in the most recent federal "No Child Left Behind" legislation, and establish a new model that has the potential to truly transform public education in the United States.

For states that choose to submit R2T proposals it is imperative that they put forth an application that best addresses each of the assurances identified in the application. For many states, including Washington State, bold actions must be taken in order for these assurances to be met – and in many cases these measures will require swift action by state leaders and the legislative body.

Washington State's Opportunity

In Washington State, the graduation rate averages 71 percent, and based upon the “Quality Counts” report released by *Education Week* the state receives the grade of a C or below for four of their six categories surrounding education success¹:

- K-12 Achievement: C-
- School Finance: C-
- Transitions & Alignment: C
- Teaching Profession: C

Washington State has an unprecedented opportunity to reform its education system through R2T. However, because Washington State currently does not currently meet the assurances identified it is imperative that state education leaders – Governor Christine Gregoire, State Superintendent Randy Dorn and the SBE – unite during the upcoming 2010 legislative session and develop a strategy and tactics to persuade legislators to pass the recommended legislation that will allow these assurances to be acted upon and implemented.

Research Methods & Approaches

The method used to identifying legislative recommendations involved a series of different approaches that included a full literacy review on the R2T process, the assurances within the R2T proposal and education reform legislation in Washington State. Sources included national education journals, educational reports, newspaper articles, and personal interviews with Washington State educational leaders in both government and the nonprofit sector.

Of priority was identifying the key concepts that are outlined in the R2T application – areas that Washington State would need to demonstrate its ability to pursue. The assurances anchored throughout the R2T application, served as a foundation to the conceptual framework. In addition to these assurances the R2T application calls for states to identify state-based educational

¹ Grading based upon indicators gathered from a variety of sources, including the Common Core of Data and other National Center for Education Statistics databases, Consolidated State Performance Reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education, George Washington University's Center for Equity and Excellence in Education, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, state education budgets, and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

innovations. As such, Washington’s commitment to advancing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic (STEM) subject areas was included in the conceptual framework.

Conceptual Framework	
Common Core Standards & Assessments Longitudinal Data Systems Development of Human Capital Turnaround School Intervention & Charters Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Based Reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do These Reforms Already Exist? - What Prior Actions Have Occurred: both Non-legislative & Legislative? - Who Are the Stakeholders? - What Stakeholders Oppose and Support These Reforms? - What is Likelihood of Legislative Action?

With the latter conceptual framework in place, research from the literary review was framed and organized. This served as a probing mechanism to allow for deeper analyses of the national and Washington State educational context key questions were identified throughout the literary review. Of significant focus during my assessment and analysis were the following questions:

- What are the 2010 actionable educational legislative priorities for Washington State that will enhance Washington’s application for R2T funding?
- How can the state emphasize and capitalize off its current education legislative policies?
- What distinguishes Washington State as an education innovator?
- How will the union-driven Washington Education Association (WEA) impact the legislative session and proposed education reforms?
- What does a state-by-state competitive analysis look like? Where does Washington compare to other states applying? What is the likelihood of receiving R2T funding?

The results generated from the conceptual framework provided greater insight into the education political context within Washington State and garnered a realistic understanding of the obtainable legislative actions needed during the 2010 session.

A final step was taken to further distil the results from the literary review and expert interviews into specific legislative recommendations for Washington State. Information highlighted by the

conceptual framework was aligned with the expert interview and literacy review findings and then condensed into the following two grids:

- Washington State Comparative Analysis: *a grid designed to benchmark Washington State against other states deemed aggressive competitors for R2T funding through scholarly journals and articles; and a*
- Washington State Legislative Recommendation: *a grid designed to identify common themes and recommendations for legislative action as provided during expert interviews.*

With a full analysis and assessment conducted by means of the conceptual framework and the two high-level grids, a hypothesis and assessment of how Washington State must strategically and tactically approach the 2010 legislative session was developed:




Hypothesis: In order for education legislative action is to pass during the 2010 session it must be conducted and presented in a united front by the State (Governor, OSPI and State Board of Education), and be limited to only three strong, clear and outcome-based reforms.

Assessment: Given the understandable focus on the budget deficit during this session, legislation jointly sponsored by the Governor, State Superintendent and State Board of Education will have more traction and momentum. By limiting legislation to only three proposed actions, legislators will more quickly comprehend the reform strategy and how the legislation will impact the R2T application.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived from the results provided by the conceptual framework and grid analyses and are tightly aligned to the requirements outlined in the R2T application. Both the conceptual framework, and more so aforementioned grids, provided a visual chart by which patterns and themes from the findings became transparent.

While each recommendation is a legislative priority, it is necessary to distinguish amongst these recommendations those most likely to be enacted in this short legislative session. To distinguish this latter critical context, a color code system provides an indicator of likely adoption:

 Strong opportunity for legislation to pass.
 Moderate opportunity for legislation to pass.
 Weak opportunity for legislation to pass.



Legislative Recommendation: Authority and State Intervention for Turnaround Schools

Recommendation:

The State should enable the SBE to intervene in low-performing schools and districts to implement practices necessary to turnaround the school or district.

Context:

Both President Obama and Arne Duncan, Secretary of the Department of Education, have specifically addressed the importance of being able to not only identifying low-performing schools but for state education departments to intervene in a struggling school or district (Quaid, 2009).

Not surprisingly, the R2T application includes measures requiring that states have the authority to intervene in low-performing schools or districts and implement turnaround processes to better conditions.

Secretary Duncan made it clear that turnaround intervention for the lowest performing schools is a means to ending the perpetual cycle of adult poverty and social hardship which schools in large urban low-income, minority districts otherwise tend to endure: “we must address the needs of children who have long been ignored and marginalized in chronically low-achieving schools.” Secretary Duncan has made it clear that R2T funding will only go to states that support “rigorous interventions” and promise “rapid improvements” (Department of Education, 2009).

Momentum & Opportunity:

There is great momentum and opportunity within Washington State for turnaround authority legislation to be successful this 2010 session.

The 2009 legislative session, House Bill 2261 was introduced and became law, Washington Chapter Law 548. Within this bill are several significant education reform measures but, most significantly to the state’s efforts to turnaround struggling schools, is the creation of a new accountability framework (Washington State Chapter 548, 2009).

HB2261's framework tasked SBE to take actions in three specific areas (Washington State Board of Education, 2009):

- An accountability index to identify schools for recognition and additional support;
- A proposal and timeline for a voluntary system of support for persistently low achieving schools; and
- A proposal and timeline for a formalized, comprehensive system of improvement targeted to more "challenged" schools and districts.

The SBE has been supportive and outspoken in its commitment to improve the current performance accountability system and align itself with the new federal models of intervention (Expert Interview; State Board of Education, 2009). The SBE is working diligently to reclassify the state's criteria for a persistently low achieving school to align with that of the federal government's three tiered system.

The passage of HB2261 and its education reform measures coupled with the State Board's commitment to develop a system to identify and assist struggling schools shows the beginning of a collective stakeholder agreement that education reforms are needed, and turnaround school intervention is an area of priority.

Legislative Action:

Despite the improvements that HB 2261 established for turnaround school authority, Washington State still does *not* allow for *state* intervention of a low-performing school. This is at odds with the R2T application which requires no prohibition to state intervention for federal funds. Therefore, without legislative action to allow the state to intervene in persistently low achieving schools and their districts, the state will not qualify for federal funds from R2T.

Turnaround school authority must be overseen by the OSPI. As such the OSPI should take the lead to introduce turnaround school intervention legislation with the support from the Governor and SBE.


A strategic process and plan for state intervention of low performing schools is important due to the simple fact that the state has never before done this. Building a requirement that calls for swift, yet phased intervention will make passage of such legislation more likely and is important as the state will need to finalize its reclassification of “at-risk” schools and districts based on the new federal requirements, and accurately develop SBE skills and methods for intervention. In addition, it is important to consider the impact state intervention will have on schools, teachers, leaders, students and the community in which the school is located.

By requiring a strategic process and planning element to the state turnaround school intervention legislation, SBE will be provided the opportunity to consider the latter situations, their implications, and identify possible potential state partnerships that could be sought for assistance in implementing this measure. In addition, it will be imperative that the SBE has set performance metrics, goals and tools to measure performance for both districts and school. With a systematic method and model to identify low-performing schools intervention turnaround efforts will likely be more warmly accepted by the public, union members and school or district officials. States that have successfully implemented turnaround authority should be used as a benchmark for Washington State – specifically the SBE will want closely research the model used by the state of Colorado, Indiana and the Louisiana Recovery School District (Expert Interview; Public Impact, 2009).

Impact and Outcome:

State intervention authority in low-performing schools could result in three powerful and impactful outcomes for Washington State:

- Students will no longer be forced to attend schools with long track records of failure;
- The potential for intervention can generate improvements in low-performing schools;
and
- The turnaround of low-performing schools will establish statewide performance and accountability measures which schools will be held to.

 **Legislative Recommendation: Adoption and Implementation of Common Core & Aligned Assessments**

Recommendation:

The State should formally adopt the national common core curriculum and establish, and require, aligned formative and summative assessments that are benchmarked to the common core curriculum.

Context:

Governor Gregoire has joined with forty-eight other governors in a national pledge to consider full adoption and alignment of national common core requirements with the states curriculum developed in collaboration by the National Governor’s Association (NGA), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Together these organizations identified a set of fewer, clearer and higher of academic requirements that have been internationally benchmarked to ensure that students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society.

The R2T requirement builds off the action by NGA, NASBE and CCSSO by requiring states to commit to fully adopting or aligning its state curriculum to the common core. In addition, R2T calls for states to develop strong formative and summative assessments based off the common core that will result in the ability for the government and states to directly compare student achievement scores at a state-to-state level.

Momentum & Opportunity:

Until July 2008, Washington’s graduation credit requirements had not been modified since 1985. The state’s recognition that globalization and technology has changed the social-economic conditions in the state and expectations of high school graduates is reflected in the SBE passage of CORE 24 in July 2008 which increased the minimum graduate requirements from 19 to 24 credits – adding additional requirements in science, math and world languages.

Furthermore, over the last two years the OSPI and SBE have been collaborating to review the current set of K-10 math and science curriculum standards. Collaboration is also occurring

between OSPI and the State Board as they work to identify and align a strong curriculum that supports the revised standards.

Additional momentum toward the adoption and adaption of the common core is seen in the “periodic pulse” survey conducted by the Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA). In the survey, random members were asked various questions surrounding the administration’s R2T education plan and Governor Gregoire’s pledge to adopt the common core curriculum. The survey results show overwhelming support:

- 80% of WSSDA members support the establishment of common core academic standards; and
- 76% of WSSDA members support the establishment of assessments based on common core standards (Washington State School Directors’ Association, 2009).

Despite the state’s strong actions toward improving curriculum, graduation requirements, and the Governor’s pledge to consider adoption of the common core, there has been minimal focus on using either formative and interim assessments as a measure of student achievement.

Currently the state uses a variety of tests to administer student achievement, yet none are tied directly to the curriculum and standards that the state has adopted. As such, the state does not have evidence-based data that demonstrates if the curriculum the state is using is effective.

Legislative Action:

The national common core curriculum and assessments compliments the work the state has already done to improve standards in math and science and will provide instructional materials that are aligned with the standards. The state is primed for formal adoption and adaption of the common core to Washington’s current curriculum. It is recommended that the legislature advance the current momentum and support for a strong state curriculum by formally directing OSPI to adopt the common core curriculum.

Legislative action is recommended to further support the adoption and adaption of the common core. It is recommended that the legislature mandate OSPI to begin using internationally benchmarked formative and interim assessments that are linked to the common core standards and curriculum.

Impact and Outcome:

The expected impact and outcome resulting from implementation of the common core standards, and development of standard formative and summative assessments, will be a giant leap forward for the state.

WA Minimum High School Graduation Requirements	WA Minimum Four-Year College Entry Requirements
3 Credits English	4 Credits English
3 Credits Math	3 Credits Math
2 Credits Science (one lab)	2 Credits Science (all lab)
2.5 Credits Social Studies	3 Credits Social Studies
0 Credit World Language	2 Credits World Language
1 Credit Visual or Performing Arts	1 Credit Visual or Performing Arts
2 Credits Health & Fitness	0 Credit Health & Fitness
1 Credit Occupational Ed.	0 Credit Occupational Ed.
5.5 Credits Electives	N/A
(Improving the Odds, 2007).	

As a state we have not held our youth to rigorous graduation requirements. A student can meet all necessary high school graduation requirements and still not meet the curriculum requirements to apply to a four-year college (Expert Interview; League of Education Voters, 2009). There is a misalignment between Washington's minimum high school graduation requirements and the minimum level of courses a student must have to be eligible to apply to a four-year college (Improving the Odds, 2007).

Adopting the common core, and implementing statewide use of formative and interim assessments that are aligned with the curriculum, will better prepare students for college, work and life and also allow for statewide and state-to-state comparative data.

With greater education data Washington will be well positioned to improve other elements that result in student achievement – specifically, targeted grade level curriculum improvements, identification of struggling schools or districts and the beginnings of a strong teacher performance and accountability data system.



Legislative Recommendation: Restructuring Teacher Evaluation Systems

Recommendation:

The State should modify its current teacher evaluation practices to include require teacher evaluations to include student achievement data. The State should also modify other teacher evaluation measures – specifically extending the teacher provisional period before tenure is awarded and redesign the teacher salary schedule to include performance fiscal incentives.

Context:

The R2T guidelines provide a ratings and assessment rubric for state proposals. Included in this rubric are those measures that align to the Development of Human Capital requirement. In comparing this component of the rubric to the other three assurances it becomes very clear that the Federal government is requiring t states to revisit their current teacher evaluation systems. The importance of this evaluation system is reflected in the fact that the number of points a state gets for this area is significantly greater than any other part of the rubric.

Momentum & Opportunity:

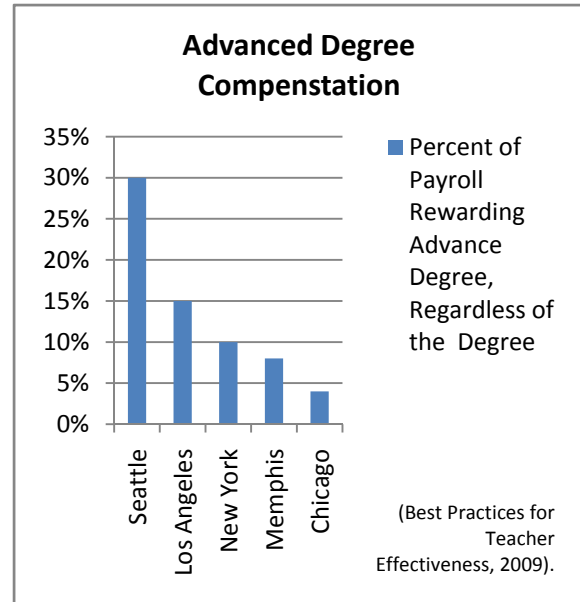
There are significant political challenges facing the Governor, OSPI and the State Board of Education in enacting legislation to modify the current teacher evaluation system. The Washington Education Association union members will strongly oppose any modifications to the current system making the passage of legislation very difficult.

Yet, there are small signs of momentum and opportunity that can be leveraged to in the state’s R2T proposal.

The passage of HB2261 in 2008 was a giant leap in requiring a review of the current teacher evaluation process. Specifically the law directs the formation of two workgroups to evaluate specific measures of teacher performance and effectiveness.

First, the law calls for the formation of a workgroup to provide a constructive review of the different teacher certification programs, and their outcomes in producing effective teachers. This workgroup is commissioned to report its findings by July 2011. The formation of this workgroup

opens the door to “third party validation” of studies that indicate that advanced degrees do not necessarily produce more effective teachers (Best Practices for Teacher Effectiveness, 2009). Despite this fact, districts continue to provide incentives to teachers who receive advanced degrees – advanced degrees in *any* subject. This is at variance with common sense. Recent studies indicate that the Seattle School District is one of the leading national districts in rewarding teachers for advanced degrees regardless of whether they improve a teacher’s effectiveness (Cohen).



Secondly, the law requires the formation of a teacher compensation workgroup to discuss and propose revisions to the current teacher pay structure and possible financial incentives. This workgroup formation is aligned with a current national trend to more rigorously evaluate teacher compensation and incentive systems. This trend has been catalyzed by the recent Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation grant announcement of \$335 million to four school districts committed to reforming aspects of its human capital systems – including teacher compensation structures (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2009).

Finally, results of a study conducted by the think tank “Public Agenda” indicate there are significant generational differences on teacher evaluation and compensation between Generation Y teachers and those teachers in the Baby Boom and X generations. Specifically the study found that Generation Y teachers are supportive of modifying current teacher evaluation and compensation structures (Coggshall, Ott, Behrstock, & Lasagna, 2009):

- 71% of Generation Y teachers strongly favor giving financial incentives to teachers who work harder and/or receive certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards;

- 49% of Generation Y teachers and 32% of Generation X teachers believe that an effective means to improve teaching would be to tie student performance to teacher compensation; and
- 79% of Generation Y teachers believe easing the process of terminating ineffective teachers would be an effective way to improving teaching;

Given that the American workforce is beginning to experience the retirement of those workers in the Baby Boomer generation, the latter study provides significant momentum that state leaders can utilize when advancing legislation calling for the modification to current teacher evaluation systems.

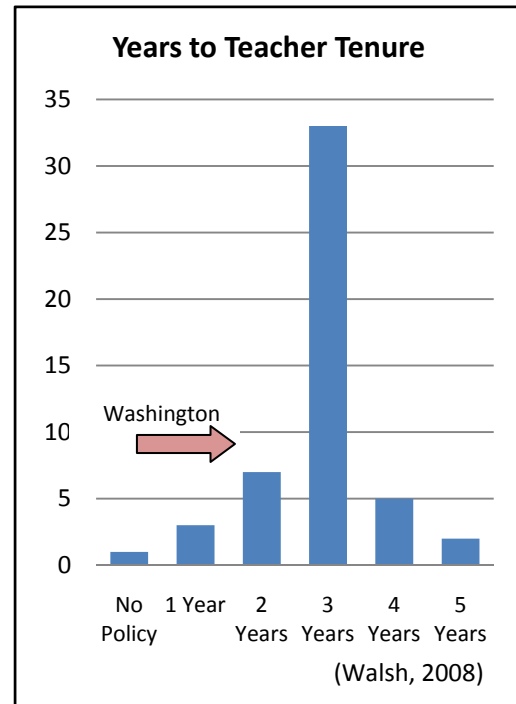
Legislative Action:

It is recommended that the Governor, OSPI and SBE jointly introduce teacher human capital improvement legislation that contains the following elements:

- Require the redesign the current teacher salary schedule by eliminating coursework incentives that do not improve a teachers effectiveness (i.e. advanced degrees unrelated to improving teaching skills) – reallocate these finances to provide bonuses to those teachers assigned to hard-to-staff subjects and schools (Cohen, 2009);
- Require statistical evidence of student learning and achievement and multiple measures of student growth in a teachers annual evaluation;
- Require that the Washington CEDARS data system begin tracking and tying student achievement scores to teachers;
- Use a four- or five- tiered multiple rating system to differentiate teacher’s performance;
- Use teacher-student achievement growth in the annual evaluation process for teachers and use the evaluation to inform compensation and staffing decisions;
- Use teacher-student achievement growth as a measure of effective and ineffective teachers and modify teacher tenure laws to allow for discharge of those teachers deemed ineffective after two-years of minimal student gains;
- Require school districts to publicly report the distribution of teachers’ performance on annual evaluations;

- Require teacher preparation programs to report on the effectiveness of their graduates (per the model the State of Louisiana uses); and
- Increase the tenure provision for teachers from two years to four years.

In a benchmark comparison to other states, Washington's teacher evaluation methods and systems can be considered substantially lower. The state does not have an exemplary effectiveness evaluation process in place before granting tenure – and, in fact, Washington is one of the eleven states that awards tenure during a teachers first two years teaching (Walsh, 2008). Furthermore, Washington allows new teachers to teach for up to two years before teaching licensing tests must be passed (Walsh, 2008) and teachers with an advanced degree, regardless of the degree, earn on average \$6,000 more a year than colleges without an advanced degree (Cohen, 2009) while teachers with related prior work experience in their teaching subject are not compensated (Walsh, 2008). Recognizing and rewarding strong teacher performance is important; though it must be rooted in data and advance a teacher's skill set.



The National Education Association (NEA) has publically commented on the R2T proposal's requirements and is forthright in its objection to state modifications of current teacher evaluation systems. In a letter sent by NEA President Dennis Van Roekel to Secretary Arne Duncan, he indicates that the teacher evaluation reform measures advocated by Duncan do not support the skills teachers need to be effective educators, in particular by supporting alternative routes to licensure and failing to reward advanced degrees. In addition, the NEA believes the R2T encouragement of states to reform evaluation practices by linking student-teacher data is inappropriate (Van Roekel, 2009).

In support of NEA's position, the Washington State Education Association (WEA) has taken a similar stance and, as such, will oppose the passage of this legislation. WEA President, Mary Lindquist, publically stated on TVW her opposition to a merit or performance compensation plan for teachers as well as using student achievement scores to identify highly-effective and ineffective teachers (Inside Olympia, 2009).

The suggested legislative provisions of this teacher evaluation make it unlikely that such legislation will pass in the short 2010 session. This is due both to the multiple elements included in such legislation and to the strong position that both the national and state unions have taken opposing these recommendations.

However, without enacting such legislation the state cannot demonstrate its commitment to the R2T proposal and the direct call from the administration for teacher effectiveness reforms. But controversial legislation has a history of taking several years to win passage. The first year such legislation is introduced is frequently an education opportunity. Supporters can then, over time, work with opponents, better understand each other's points of view, and seek compromise which can eventually result in legislative success.

Impact and Outcome:

There is currently a disconnect between teacher evaluation systems and teacher performance. While it is unfair to place the brunt of the responsibility on teachers for failing schools and low graduation rates, they do play a large role in improving school and student performance.

Improving teacher evaluation performance systems, Washington will make a bold statement of support in strengthening the teacher profession. Furthermore, the impact will resonate with students – providing a clear gesture of recognition that every student deserves an effective teacher that is dedicated to helping them succeed in college, work and life.

Next Steps

The Department of Education is clear in its R2T proposal that it believes the current education system is broken. The \$4.35 billion grant competition calls for states to submit proposals that demonstrate their passion to improve education opportunities for all students and to implement systems rooted in accountability measures.

Governor Gregoire, State Superintendent Randy Dorn and the SBE must be actively persuaded to take swift action by introducing legislation on all three fronts outlined above: (1) to allow for state intervention of turnaround schools, (2) to adoption of the common core and aligned assessments, and (3) to restructure current teacher evaluation system. The latter three recommendations are clearly supportive of the R2T requirements identified in the application. Unfortunately, without the passage of this legislation it is very doubtful that Washington State will qualify for a R2T grant.

While the odds of winning a R2T grant without all of the latter legislation being enacted are not great, there is an outside chance that the State's current financial crisis could help achieve the otherwise unachievable.

Summary

The national "Race to the Top" to improve the education of our nation's students has begun. As states prepare to submit competitive grant proposals to receive part of the \$4.35 billion provided within the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), each state is faced with determining how best to demonstrate a passionate commitment to implementing necessary measures in its own education systems.

As Washington State prepares its own application for funding it is important that the State take noteworthy legislative action as a means not only to demonstrate its commitment to the R2T requirement's but also to bettering the educational experience of students..

Enacting these legislative recommendations will require strong alliances across the state's education leaders – specifically Governor Gregoire, State Superintendent Randy Dorn and the

SBE – but also amongst stakeholder groups such as the WEA, state-based education nonprofit organizations, community groups, and teacher and parent groups.

While challenges exist in implementing the recommended education reforms this 2010 legislative session, Washington is also in a position to build off the momentum from recent education legislative victories. And, regardless of how grave this challenge is, it is one worth pursuing given the states obligation to ensure all students receive an excellent and equitable education that prepares them for college, work and life in the 21st century.

Works Cited & Consulted

- ACT. (2008). *College Readiness: Benchmark's Met*. Retrieved from <http://www.act.org/news/data/07/benchmarks.html>
- Associated Press. (2009, November 20). "Washington to skip first round of race to the top." *The Seattle Times*. Retrieved from http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2010320139_webracetotop20.html
- Ballantine, A, Ferguson, R, Hackman & Hanna, R. (2008). *Getting It Done: Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps in Whole School Systems – Recent Advances in Research and Practice*. Report on the 2008 Annual Conference of the Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University. Available at <http://www.agi.harvard.edu>
- Barton, Paul E. (2005). *One-Third a Nation; Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities*. Princeton, NJ: Education Testing Service.
- "Best Practices for Teacher Effectiveness" (2009, November). *National Council on Teacher Quality*.
- Bridgeland, J, Dilulio, J, & Morison, K. (2007). "The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts." *Civic Enterprises*.
- Cohen, E. (2009, October). "Human Capital in Seattle Public Schools: Rethinking How to Attract, Develop and Retain Effective Teachers." *National Center on Teacher Quality*.
- Cogshall, J, Ott, A, Behrstock, E, & Lasagna, M. (2009). "Supporting Teacher Effectiveness: the view from generation Y." *Public Agenda*. Retrieved from <http://www.publicagenda.org/pages/supporting-teacher-talent-view-from-Generation-Y>
- Department of Education, the United States Government. (2009, August 26). "Obama Administration Announces Historic Opportunity to Turn Around Nation's Lowest-Achieving Public Schools [Press Release]." Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/08/08262009.html>
- Duncan, A. (2009, April 1). "\$44 Billion in Stimulus Funds Available to Drive Education Reforms and Save Teaching Jobs." Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2009/04/04012009.html>
- "Education Watch State Report: Washington." (2009). *The Education Trust*.
- Expert Interview; Governor Gregoire's Office (2009, October 16).
- Expert Interview; League of Education Voters. (2009, October 12)
- Expert Interview; Partnership for Learning (2009, October 5).

Expert Interview; Public Impact. (2009, November 18).

Expert Interview; State Board of Education (2009, November 16).

Finne, Liv. (2008). The Washington policy center education reform plan. *Washington Policy Center for Education*, 1-22.

Iceland, John (2003). *Dynamics of Economic Well-Being: Poverty 1996-1999*. Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Keeling, D, Mulhern, J, Sexton, S & Weisberg, D. (2009). "The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness." *The New Teacher Project*.

"Improving the Odds." (2007). *College Work Ready Agenda – Partnership for Learning*. Retrieved from http://www.collegeworkready.org/downloads/finalforweb_improvingthe_odds_report_113007.pdf

Inside Olympia. 2009, October 1. "Education Funding and Reform." *TVW*, Olympia.

"Interpreting Race to the Top: Summary and Analysis of USDE Draft Guidelines." (2009). *The New Teacher Project*.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). Computation by DAS-T Online Version 5.0 on 11/28/07 using U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statics, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS: 04/06).

Princiotta, D, & Reyna, R. (2009). Achieving graduation for all. *National Governors Association*, 1-42.

Quaid, L. (2009, May 11). "Obama Wants to Turnaround 5,000 Struggling Schools." *ABC News*.

"Quality Counts: A Portrait of a Population." *Education Week*, 28(17).

Strong American Schools (2008). "Diploma to Nowhere." Retrieved from <http://www.scribd.com/doc/8534051/Diploma-To-Nowhere-Strong-American-Schools-2008>

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (2009, November 19). "Foundation Commits \$335 Million to Promote Effective Teaching and Raise Student Achievement" [Press Release]. Retrieved from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/press-releases/Pages/intensive-partnership-for-effective-teaching-091119.aspx>

U.S. Department of Education (2009). Race to the Top Program – Executive Summary.

U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress,
<http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard>

Van Roekel, D (2009, August 1). "Letter to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan." National Education Association.

Walsh, Kate (2008). "Washington State Teacher Policy Yearbook: What States Can Do to Retain Effective New Teachers." *National Council on Teacher Quality*.

"Washington's Race to the Top Proposal: Overview Document." (2009) The State of Washington, Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction & Washington State Board of Education.

Washington State Board of Education (2009, November 16). "An Excellent and Equitable Education for All Students: A State and Local Partnership for Accountability." Washington State Board of Education Meeting.

Washington State Chapter 548, Laws of 2009. 61st Legislature, 2009 Regular Session. Retrieved from http://fundingwaschools.org/Legislature/WA_ESHB_2261_Signed2009May20.pdf

Washington State School Directors' Association. (2009, July 31). *Sounding Board: "Race to the Top."* Retrieved from http://www.wssda.org/wssda/WebForms/en-us/News/2009/20090821_soundingboard.asp