

High Expectations Work Group July 10, 2014 Meeting Notes

Present: Tom Taggart, Chair; Senator Steven Thayne; Cheryl Charlton; Alan Millar; and Jason Hancock.

Not present: Cindy Wilson

Others present: Robin Nettinga, Executive Director, Idaho Education Association (for Cindy Wilson; Marilyn Whitney and Tracie Bent, State Board of Education

Chairman Tom Taggart reviewed the topics of discussion for the meeting: Mastery based system, 8th grade plan, Advanced Opportunities, and the funding formula. The group began to formulate its recommendations for the July 28th Joint Structure & Governance presentation.

Mastery Based Education

The group acknowledged that the original Governor's Task Force had suggested that if Idaho changed to mastery based education system, it would necessarily change the funding formula, but they now see that the issues are separate. Maine experimented with a mastery system, but it imploded due to the high cost of resource. Nothing in current Idaho law prevents districts from adopting a mastery model, and in fact, it is conducive to experimentation.

In elementary school, the challenge is both a cultural one (groups move in groups) and a lack of funding incentives: if a child finished elementary school in five years instead of six, the district would lose FTE funding, however theoretically, the State would save money. Any funding incentive for elementary schools to encourage students to move faster would need to be upfront. The group agreed that pilot grants to schools which are ready to try mastery models would be a first step, however, outcomes would need to be measured. Districts will need to determine how to show the legislature that their programs are working. At the present time, Idaho does not have any measure except the SBAC¹ test, which is not yet fully implemented. If pilot programs were adopted, recommended strategies would be useful to track data for research.

Mastery at the high school level might be on an individual basis where a student could challenge a course. In Utah, if a student graduates high school with two years of dual credit, the state pays for two more years of college. Earning college credits in high school is data driven and measureable. Funding is more of an issue at the elementary level.

¹ Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

8th Grade Plan

The group reviewed the Administrative Rule covering the 8th grade plan. All agreed that most districts are not using it effectively, primarily because they do not have the staff, and parents do not see the benefits. The students who are missing it are the ones who need it most. Advanced opportunities, such as 8 in 6 and Fast Forward have created incentives that did not previously exist, but parent/student awareness and planning needs to begin earlier in order to take advantage of these programs. Simplifying and consolidating the Advanced Opportunities programs will help.

A continuing challenge is the lack of school counselors, which has decreased 25 percent in recent years. Alan Millar said that when he sought to hire a career counselor in his district, he did not seek a certified counselor, who would have been expensive, but instead hired a registrar and trained him in the sole function of career counseling. The group explored how this concept could be employed regionally to serve smaller, rural districts. Funding a new career counselor concept could be expensive. Near-peer and para-professional alternatives were explored. They agreed that the emotional connection between counselor and student played an important role in ensuring follow through. Alan Millar suggested funding a regional service model that uses counselors as coaches that will help support students who might not otherwise see themselves going on to college.

Encouraging parents and students to think about career earlier than 8th grade is key to reaching the State's 60% goal.² Currently, schools tend to work with the only the upper quartile of students on a traditional 4-year college path. The 60% goal mandates that schools reach more students who may choose a professional-technical certificate. A pattern of encouraging parents and students is most effective at a student's transition points: kindergarten to first grade, 6th to 7th and 8th to 9th. Reinforcing parents early will help to ensure that parents are aware of opportunities and decisions down the line. Student-led conferences, in which students state where they are in their education, their challenges and their goals, encourages student ownership and promotes confidence.

The group agreed that the 8th grade plan administrative plan needed to be revised to include a high school section to include annual evaluation.

Funding Formula

Tom Taggart reported about his research on funding formulas in other states. The original Task Force had hoped that funding on enrollment would release some requirements in the Idaho System for Educational Excellence (ISEE) data points. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Attendance is a key indicator under the ESEA waiver, and a variety of programs use it.

² 60 percent of Idahoans aged 24-35 to have a certificate or degree by year 2020.

Mr. Taggart found that states vary greatly in timing for attendance reporting: some one day, others monthly, October/March, and 3 year averages. Most states are moving away from a single count. Their methods have grown out of local circumstances. In addition, many states are changing from enrollment to attendance; others from attendance to enrollment. No clear direction presents itself. Which every method is chosen, it incentivizes itself, i.e., reporting on attendance encourages attendance, however, it also penalizes lower socioeconomic areas where resources are needed, but attendance is lower.

Stability, mastery and reporting simplification were the basis of the initial Task Force recommendation to change to enrollment funding. Senator Thayn pointed out that since mastery does not apply, reporting simplification does not apply, and no clear direction exists to change, then the payoff is probably not worth the battle.

Other challenges in funding exist, however, such as multiple attendance, and virtual charter schools. The group suggested that a recommendation be made that they move their focus to those areas. Jason Hancock explained that the tendency for a high school drop-out is to enroll in a virtual charter school, but the virtual charter does not get that student's funding. Their cost structure is different than traditional schools – their costs are scaled, and if they get a large influx of students, their costs go up but the funding had already gone to the traditional school. Tom Taggart agreed to pull together a subcommittee from large and small districts, charter and traditional schools, online schools and the IDLA to explore these areas further and report back.

Next Meeting:

Advanced Opportunities: Simplify the programs, and recommend moving them into their own chapter of Code.

Career Counselors: Cheryl Charlton to prepare a counselor survey to determine what activities they do now and how they prioritize their various roles.
Invite Jessica Piper, College Access Challenge Grant Coordinator to discuss Near Peer Mentor Program.

Mastery: Tom Taggart to prepare a written description of the Maine model and prepare a separate proposal in High School Dual Enrollment. End-of-Course Assessments can be challenged. Set up an environment with financial incentives to effect change at the local level. A key point will be the specific vision.

Funding Formula: Tim Hill and Joyce Popp to attend.

August meeting: August 12, 9:30 – noon.

