

C O O P E R A T I V E E D U C A T I O N I N I T I A T I V E

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Background

Washington State's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reports that in 2006-07 1,031,846 children attended public schools in Washington State in grades PreK through 12¹. Parents chose to enroll their children in public school because of their reliance on the state and local school systems to provide free quality education to all Washington children. Unfortunately, Washington public schools are not performing well as depicted in the following table² reflecting the results of 2007-2008 assessments of Washington students meeting state standards.

Grade Level	Reading	Math	Writing	Science
3rd	70.4%	68.3%		
4th	72.3%	53.4%	62.1%	
5th	75.3%	61.0%		42.9%
6th	68.6%	48.9%		
7th	62.8%	50.3%	69.7%	
8th	65.9%	51.5%		47.9%
10th	81.3%	49.3%	86.2%	39.7%

Moreover, only 72.2% of Washington State high school students graduate on time³.

An estimated 20,000 children are home schooled in Washington State. The reasons parents choose this option to educate their children include freedom to select an education model, social safety for their children, individualized instruction, and schedule flexibility. The quality of education for home schooled children varies on the skill, knowledge, aptitude, support resource availability, and commitment of the parent providing instruction. Children who are home schooled may find it difficult to qualify for college or university programs without a recognized high school diploma. Little data is available to assess the quality of home school programs as measured by success in college or university, or success in other areas of adult life.

OSPI reports that in 2006-07 84,141 children attended private schools in Washington State in grades PreK through 12⁴. Parents elect this option to educate their children taking advantage of the extended education they believe private school environments offer. The extended education elements offered by private schools include lower student-to-teacher ratios, extended education services (including foreign languages, longer days, longer years, art programs, and music programs), academic focus, religion, historical student success, social safety, and curriculum. Private schools enjoy reputations of producing graduates who largely attend colleges and universities.

While they may use different education models, public school districts and private/home schools have the same objectives of preparing children for successful lives. OSPI is responsible for many aspects of educating children.

1 OSPI website, data and reports page (<http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/>).

2 OSPI website, report card page (<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2007-08>)

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A principle OSPI responsibility is assuring that all of the state's students receive a basic education that meets established standards. The formal definition of basic education is embodied in the state's education standards known as Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs). EALR definitions continue to undergo evolution with arguable results.

The Problems

The combination of private and home school enrollments total more than 100,000 students. OSPI has little visibility into, offers little support for, and has nearly no control over the quality of education provided by private schools or home schools. Washington State funding policies for public schools make it more difficult every year for public schools to provide more than basic education services to their communities.

OSPI has authority over the curricula and accreditation of public school districts. In the absence of objective data, parents who choose private schools for their children generally rely on the subjective reputation of private schools to deliver quality education.

Parents who elect to educate their children at home may have difficulty obtaining resources to assist them in providing quality education for their children, using proven curriculum and instructional practices. Home school children may find education and professional barriers when they do not earn a recognized high school diploma.

Choice is important in our society, including choices for parents when deciding on education alternatives. The world economy is changing the preparation requirements for children as they become adults. The skills and knowledge children gained in schools just a few decades ago will not be the skills and knowledge our children and grandchildren will need to be productive adults. As servants to society, federal, state, and local government agencies, like OSPI, should set basic requirements for all pre-kindergarten through grade 12 education enterprises. These basic requirements must be dynamic and expansive to respond to the ever changing demands on adults in a global community.

Setting basic education standards is not a sufficient step in assuring competent education for all children. A flexible, non-intrusive, method of monitoring education enterprises must be defined to assure our children are receiving quality, modern education. Today, OSPI is not prepared or authorized to support, influence, or monitor achievement of basic education standards for private or home school operators.

A Solution

This paper proposes a simple, yet effective, approach to allow OSPI to expand its support and leadership for private/home school activities to assure these schools achieve basic education performance while honoring the right of parents to make choices regarding their children's education. Concurrently, the proposed approach will offer public schools an opportunity to observe a variety of education models that can be used to make appropriate adjustments to public school models. The key element of the proposed approach is cooperative funding.

Washington State funds public schools to provide basic education for all children. When a child is enrolled in a private/home school process, OSPI has no effective leverage for monitoring the quality of education the child receives. Moreover, when a child attends a private school, or is home-schooled, basic education funding is lost to the school district and to parents who elect to use alternative education services. This paper proposes the extension of local public school district responsibilities for monitoring the effectiveness of private/home schools. These voluntary cooperative relationships would be effected in the form of contracts between the local public school district and individual private/home school operations. These contracts would allocate Washington State basic education funding to local public school districts and to private/home schools when the private/home schools' students acceptably meet grade level expectations as defined by Washington State's EALRs.

Funding Process

Formal agreements between the public school districts and private/home schools would appropriately share state and federal basic education funds to recognize the contributions of each enterprise. The portion of state funds allocated to a private/home school for each enrolled child would equal the local public school district's direct classroom related (teaching, food services, and maintenance and operations) per student budget for the prior year. The percentage allocation for this portion of the per student budget for 2006-2007 was 81%⁵. For the initial contract year, funds would be advanced quarterly as long as the private/home school operator had satisfactorily demonstrated compliance with EALR's and student expectations for the prior quarter. In subsequent contract years, funds would be pre-distributed to the private/home school at the beginning of each academic year for enrolled students as long as the private/home school satisfied the contract's performance requirements for the prior academic year.

Private/Home School Qualifying Process

To qualify for basic education fund allocations, private/home schools would document their adoption of the EALRs and associated grade-level student expectations, demonstrate that their instruction plans address every EALR, and document student assessment results that demonstrate students are achieving acceptable performance levels.

OSPI's Role

For this proposed cooperative program to properly function, it would be necessary for OSPI to provide reliable definitions of academic standards that represent established national and professional definitions. OSPI would also provide assessment tools for local districts and private/home school operations to use for monitoring and assessing the achievement levels of participating private/home school operators. OSPI has made progress in their formal definition of basic education standards for Washington State students. More work is necessary to complete the standards definitions for all academic areas.

In addition, OSPI would extend funding authorization to local school districts to allow the local district to allocate funds to private/home school operations.

Local School District's Role

The proposed cooperative education program would require local school districts to provide support services to participating private/home school operators. These services would include contract administration, fund allocation accounting and dispersal, participants' assessment monitoring, program reporting to OSPI, curricula consultation, and inclusion of participant's staff in district inservice / professional development programs.

Assessments

Assessment of any school's achievement should be based on the ability of its students to demonstrate the knowledge and skills associated with individual and collective EALRs. Today, OSPI relies heavily upon the WASL examination which is administered periodically during a child's school experience. Other, more frequently applied assessment tools need to be defined. Reliance on a single assessment tool to determine the success of a student or a school is not the most effective way to assess school or student performance when the primary objective is to assure individual student success. Effective assessment tools are varied in purpose, format, and process. Assessments should include traditional examinations, instructor observations, and rubrics.

5 OSPI website, (<http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2007-08>)

This cooperative education initiative would require OSPI to provide, in addition to the basic education standards, assessment tools and guidelines that could be administered by public, private, and home school operators. Assessments would be required from participating schools no less often than once in each academic year. Results of these assessments would be promptly published on the OSPI web site for public access.

Program Benefits

Should this initiative be adopted, every entity participating in the cooperative agreements would benefit. These benefits include:

- OSPI's leadership would assure basic education standards are met for an expanded student population. OSPI would be able to monitor the performance of participating private/home schools. Local school districts would measure the performance of contracting schools' ability to demonstrate achievement of student expectations.
- Private and home schools would be given assistance, when requested, in defining improvement programs for their enterprises.
- Participating home schooled children could earn high school diplomas.
- Additional funding would be available for local school districts. Private schools attract students from the public school district's geography and students residing outside district boundaries. Currently state and federal funds are not being distributed to the public school districts for private/home schooled students. The proposed contracts would provide public school districts with needed state and federal funds for all private/home school students in exchange for contract administration and monitoring private/home school performance.
- Private/home schools would receive funds from the local school district.
- The creation of private alternative schools dedicated to the education of children with special-needs or who use English as a second language (ESL), would be encouraged.
- OSPI could receive additional annual federal funding to develop a model for implementing this innovative program to improve instruction for all Washington State children.
- Parents considering use of private or home school alternatives would have access to quantitative data to support their decisions. Some private schools, and many public school districts, offer extended education services beyond the state's basic education definition. When parents elect to enroll their students in a private school that participates in the proposed cooperative program they will do so with the knowledge of the school's conformance to established student expectations and published assessment results.
- Parents with high expectations or special needs would have additional options for their children's education.

The Next Steps

The most effective approach to new program definitions is to establish a pilot to model the program to adjust processes and establish assumptions achieve optimum results, minimize risk, and provide information to support broader deployment. A five year pilot program wherein OSPI would authorize local school districts to establish agreements with local private/home school operators. This pilot program would be largely funded by existing per-student state and federal funding processes.

Among the expected results of this pilot program would be:

- measurement of voluntary participation levels of private and home school operations,
- definition and establishment of OSPI supplied program support tools,
- definition of the level of administrative resources required by local school districts to support the program,
- measurement of the programs benefits and negative impacts, including the impacts on private

school and home school student achievement of basic education standards,

- measurement of projection of impacts of a full deployment, and
- recommendation for state wide deployment or abandonment.

The establishment of this pilot program would include the following steps:

1. Write pilot program plan including review processes and success criteria.
2. Obtain OSPI approval of pilot program.
3. Identify OSPI and ESD focal point administrators.
4. Define cooperative education contracts.
5. Document basic education definitions.
6. Define/develop flexible assessment tools.
7. Develop program communication materials for presentation to potential private/home school operators.
8. Solicit program participation by private/home school operators.
9. Add participating student counts to ESD enrollment tally.
10. Distribute initial quarter funding to participating private/home school operators.
11. Produce periodic program status report for participants.
12. Refine and extend assessment tools as necessary.