

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 15, 2005

Memorandum

TO: All Employees
FROM: John P. Welch

John's Journal

Reflections from the Superintendent

Preparing all students

My work over the last month has included a focus on trying to understand better what rigor looks like and what it means to be college and career ready. Over the past 45 days, members of my team and I have visited many classrooms and had numerous conversations with principals and teachers. I am involved in a series of conversations with parents and community members about what our graduates should know and be able to do and how can we better prepare them for the future. I have attended other larger events where business, non-profit, educational, and community leaders are having similar conversations.

Is it truly possible for all students to go on to college? Do they really need college to find pathways to a life of opportunity, family-wage income, and civic contributions? And, why the shift? Isn't getting our students to graduation our goal?

I want to take a moment and define college as I think about it. I refer to college as a broad range of post-secondary options, including four-year university, two-year community or technical college, apprenticeship programs, and other post-high school training that leads to family-wage careers. We are preparing students for college so that each student has *options* and can make the choice that is right for him or her. This is a shift in our thinking. It requires us to think about the rigorous experiences that all students need so they *have* choices.

The senior leadership team, along with central office directors, is reading *The World is Flat* by Thomas Friedman, which examines how technology and the Internet are allowing American businesses to tap into a highly-educated workforce in nations such as India and China and how that is leveling the global playing field. I strongly believe it is our responsibility to understand that we are preparing our young people for a different world than we entered as young adults. The world is more connected than ever and changing rapidly. Some days it scares me; other days it excites me. But I believe the opportunities for our students are endless if they leave our schools as problem-solvers, analytical thinkers, decoders of information, strong communicators, respectful workers, and lifelong learners.

As educators, we are thinking not only about what this new global workplace means for our students, but what it means for how we do our work. Our high schools are each engaged in the journey of improving instruction to better meet the needs of all students and prepare them for a changing world. In doing so, they are tackling the enormous issue of the structure of high school. Small schools (as in the reconfiguration on the Tyee campus) or small learning communities (such as the current ninth-grade academies at Mount Rainier) are examples of that effort. At the core is the goal of reaching more students through personalization, and creating schools in which teachers can work more closely together to meet the needs of their students.

I appreciate all that each of you do as you think about and grapple with your work to help our students reach higher levels. Your focus on every child in our elementary schools lays the foundation. You are expecting more from students in our middle schools. And our high schools are developing innovative new ways to reach students. At all levels, you are doing heroic, hard work.

Reflecting on Thanksgiving

As our fall turns into winter and the chill in the air gets a bit more breathtaking, I am reminded of all that I am thankful for. My top 10 "thankful-fors" look something like this:

1. The respect we show to one another, our students, and their parents.
2. Conversation, staying engaged in a positive way.
3. Laughter (two kinds: the kind that makes your stomach hurt, and the laughter of learners - trying something on , knowing it didn't go the way you planned, picking yourself up, and trying again tomorrow).
4. Young people who can see what sometimes we adults can't.
5. Lifelong learning.
6. Dreamers.
7. High expectations every day for everyone.
7. The concoction of good strategies and hard work that leads to results.
8. Human spirit and its relentless ability to move mountains.
9. Love.
10. Pumpkin pie with real whipped cream.

May you each have a wonderful Thanksgiving.