

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 15, 2009

*Memorandum*

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TO: All Employees  
FROM: John P. Welch



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John's Journal

*Reflections from the Superintendent*

Dear Colleagues:

There is a big Sunday coming up in the next few weeks - and I don't mean the Superbowl. I'm talking about College Goal Sunday - an event that could be life-changing for some of our students.

On January 25, volunteers and experts will be stationed at four of our high school campuses to assist students and their families in filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), the gateway to college financial aid. The FAFSA can be an intimidating document. Failing to complete it correctly, or not submitting the proper documentation, can mean the difference between getting financial aid or not. And that could determine whether or not some students get a higher education.

Federal financial aid can be used for a broad range of post-secondary options, including technical schools, community college, and university.

I believe that an important part of our work is to assist our families with navigating the steps to college -- "college" meaning the whole spectrum of post-high school learning. For some, that will be apprenticeship to a trade; for others, a two-year certification program; for others, a bachelor's degree; and so forth.

College Goal Sunday is a tremendous opportunity to open the doors to college for families who don't think they can afford it, and for those who just need some assistance negotiating the paperwork involved in getting financial aid.

College Goal Sunday is also an opportunity for us at Highline Public Schools to take some tangible steps toward our vision of preparing every student for college, career, and citizenship. It is our job to get all students ready academically, but we can't stop there.

It is also critical to educate families about the steps they can take to overcome financial barriers to college.

You can be a part of this. I invite you to volunteer at College Goal Sunday. You can help students fill out the paperwork, greet families, assist with registration, or provide language interpretation services. To register as a volunteer, go to [www.collegegoalsundaywa.org](http://www.collegegoalsundaywa.org).

The event is January 25, 2:00-5:00 p.m. at the following locations:

- Mount Rainier High School
- Highline High School
- Tyee Educational Complex
- Evergreen Campus

College Goal Sunday is a one-day event. But our schools are working every day to prepare all students for college. And we are making progress.

The number of students taking the SAT is up significantly for the second year in a row. Over the past two years, an additional 89 students have taken the SAT. That's like adding another large high school campus to our SAT participation.

More students than ever are taking Advanced Placement classes in high school. In 2007, 248 students took AP exams. A year later, that number was 376. More students are enrolling in Algebra II.

Though we are not where we want to be, our graduation rate is climbing. In 2008, our on-time graduation rate was 72%; for students who needed more than four years, our graduation rate was 80%.

The numbers of graduates meeting entrance requirements for four-year college have gone up dramatically, from 38% in 2005 to almost 50% in 2007.

It is invigorating to see the strides we are making toward our vision of college readiness for all. All of us, working together, are making this happen. We have miles to go, but we can get there. Each of us plays a part.

Thank you for your efforts every day that make a difference in the lives of our students. Keep up the great work!