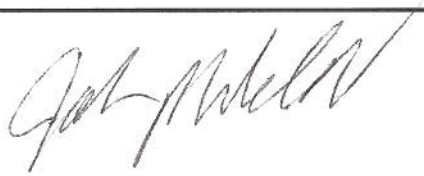


HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

November 6, 2008

Memorandum

TO: All Employees
FROM: John P. Welch



John's Journal

Reflections from the Superintendent

Dear Colleagues:

We have come to the end of a long and historic campaign season. Both local and national elections offered our students plenty of opportunities to learn about the democratic process. This is a critical piece of preparing students for citizenship.

Citizenship preparation also means getting students ready to be contributing members of their communities. A number of our schools require students to do community service as part of their learning experience or in a senior culminating project. As a system, we are working to provide more guidance to schools on what preparation for citizenship looks like. Our goal is for all students to graduate with a sense of civic duty and an understanding of their role in creating the common good.

Of course, learning about citizenship also encompasses the importance of participation in government by residents and voters. Many of our schools did a great job of capitalizing on this fall's election to engage students with school elections and objective, informative discussions of issues and candidates.

Now that the election is over, we have the opportunity and the obligation to survey the new political landscape and chart our course accordingly. We have a new state representative, Tina Orwall, who takes the seat vacated by Shay Schual-Berke. Governor Gregoire retains her office in Olympia; but at the time of this writing, we don't yet know if Terry Bergeson or Randy Dorn will lead our state school system.

Though some of the faces in state government may change, one thing the election could not change is the budget deficit facing our state. The bleak financial picture will result in belt-tightening for public schools. In Highline, we anticipate having to make significant budget cuts next budget year. This is on top of the \$3.5 million we had to cut from the

budget for this current school year. This pattern is likely to hold until our state changes the way it funds public education.

As the legislative session gets underway in January, the school board will join the efforts of education organizations in Washington that are pushing for changes to school funding. The coalition formed around this issue includes associations representing principals, school district administrators, school board members, the Washington Education Association, and the state PTA.

A change to basic education funding is the school board's top legislative priority. We will urge our lawmakers to restructure the funding formula so that it reflects the actual costs of bus transportation, special education, teacher and staff salaries, and other costs. It is critical that state leaders take action, or we will continue to see our funding erode as our costs for salaries, benefits, utilities, fuel, and other fixed costs increase.

Another major priority for the school board is an end to unfunded mandates - that is, new requirements placed on schools by the state with no increase in funding to pay for them. These requirements put an increasing burden on school finances at a time when we are also struggling to meet the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind act—another law that came without corresponding funding.

I want to thank you for the work you do every day with limited resources. As we make budget decisions, we are often faced with tough choices that impact students and staff. I applaud you for keeping our vision in front of you and doing all you can to push students to high levels of achievement, in spite of funding challenges.