

RE: As educators, we urge you to fund the expansion of Ninth Grade Success

April 13, 2021

To our legislators:

First and foremost - thank you. Two years ago you invested in the Ninth Grade Success strategy, a program that is successfully working to increase the number of students on-track to graduation. Although our districts are located outside of the five-district pilot area that received funding from OSPI, as educators and administrators we have also committed to implementing Ninth Grade Success strategies within our own schools because we know that students who pass all their classes in ninth grade are four times more likely to graduate high school on-time. **We applaud your investment in the Ninth Grade Success strategy and are writing to express our enthusiastic support for expanding this program to serve eighty schools in 2021-23 with \$8 million from the state general fund.**

No one could have foreseen just how difficult the work of education would become once COVID-19 hit our state. But the fundamental aspects of the Ninth Grade Success approach -- a team-based approach that empowers educators with actionable data to identify students' needs and create solutions that work within the unique circumstances of any student, school, and community -- provided a dependable framework during the pandemic that helped us support students toward graduation day. **When our ninth graders walk through the doors next fall, many will enter a school building for the first time since the seventh grade.** We know the gravity of this situation and we know that an investment now will meet the urgency of this moment.

Research shows that the transition from middle to high school is crucial. Ninth graders are 3-5 times more likely to fail a course than students at any other grade level. Further, students across all achievement levels experience a decline in GPA from 8th to 9th grade. Inversely, **the Ninth Grade On-Track metric is a more accurate prediction of students' likelihood to graduate than their test scores, racial identity, or family income.** That's why we've partnered with the Center for High School Success. In the Center's first semester of collaboration with nineteen Washington high schools - including 5,292 ninth grade students - they saw overall a 16% improvement in Ninth Grade On-Track Rates from 60.6% to 75% after the implementation of the Ninth Grade Success strategy.

Establishing a Ninth Grade Success Program is a low-cost, research-backed strategy to strongly support incoming ninth graders during a critical milestone in their education journey towards graduation. This fall, ninth graders will be entering high school less prepared than ever with unprecedented layers of academic and social-emotional complexities compounding what the research previously revealed about the importance of ninth grade. Please continue your investment in this critical program so that we can continue to support our community's recovery in the years to come.

Sincerely,

the undersigned educators from Bellingham, Blaine, Burlington, Cheney, Deming, East Wenatchee, Royal City, Quincy, and Spokane Valley

Several educators added further individual comments to the above letter, included below.

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Debra Smith-Hicks	School Counselor	Squalicum High School, Bellingham
Joseph Doucette	Assistant Principal	Bellingham High School
Jessi Bugbee	Special Education Teacher and 9th Grade English Teacher	Blaine High School
Christina Searle	Spanish 2 teacher, Ninth Grade Success team member	Burlington-Edison High School
Heather Paton	GEAR UP Site Coordinator, College & Graduation Specialist	Burlington-Edison High School
Hannah Smith	Ninth Grade Success Team Lead and Science Teacher	Burlington-Edison High School
Samantha Wasson	Teacher	Burlington-Edison High School
Jimmy Schofield	Team Lead	Cheney High School
Kelsey Anderson	Assistant Principal	Cheney High School
Matt Stevens	Principal	East Valley High School
Jabez Harlan	Teacher	East Valley High School
Natasha Wood	English 9	Eastmont Junior High
Jared Jaeger	Team Lead	Eastmont Junior High
Keesha Knutson	Drug and Alcohol Counselor	Eastmont Junior High
Shelley Charlton	Business Education Teacher	Eastmont Junior High
Tera Semanko	Guidance Counselor	Eastmont Junior High
Debra Brown	Principal's Secretary	Mount Baker Jr/Sr High School
Paula Graham	Educator	Mount Baker High School
Felicie Becker	Principal	Quincy High School

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- **Paula Graham, Mount Baker HS educator:** *“This data driven approach is a sound tool towards increasing graduation rates with our youth. Students benefit from this model and it is a sound investment in traditional and non-traditional school settings. Thank you for your consideration.”*

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- **Heather Paton, Burlington-Edison HS GEAR UP Site Coordinator and College & Graduation Specialist:** *“This work is critical. Our 9th grade success team is having a real impact on 9th grade outcomes and it is one of our only vehicles currently for addressing serious equity issues in our district. Thank you.”*
- **Courtney McCoy, Royal HS Principal:** *“I had the good fortune to work with Ninth Grade Success Coaches during my tenure at Warden High School. The Ninth Grade Success focus on short (two week intervals) students' data (9th grade discipline, attendance, and academics) had far reaching positive impact: not only did Warden's 9th graders experience greater success, but success became contagious at all grade levels. Teacher beliefs and behaviors also became more positive. The master schedule continued to be improved based on the 9th graders passing and achieving at higher levels. The 9th grade success movement became a trickle up and out and everywhere movement.”*
- **Tera Semanko, Eastmont Junior High Guidance Counselor:** *“A critical look at equity in grading is a main point of our conversation and practice. This has impacted students positively, especially during remote teaching /learning during a pandemic.”*
- **Natasha Wood, Eastmont Junior High English teacher:** *“Many more students have passed their classes with having this program than they would have without it.”*
- **Joseph Doucette, Bellingham HS Assistant Principal:** *“Thank you for supporting this much needed and targeted intervention for the future of our students and the long term health of our state community.”*