

January 17, 2006

Dear Senator or Representative:

As representatives of a wide array of educators and citizens who care deeply about our kids, we are united in pursuit of one goal: to ensure *every* student in Washington gets a quality education and earns a meaningful high school diploma. This is the foundation of a full and happy life. Establishing common standards and requiring all students to meet the new graduation requirements are central to achieving our goal.

Washington is at a crossroads in K-12 education. We can either realize full-scale positive change in public education or bring 12 years worth of reform to a halt. Our organizations believe that turning back on education reform efforts would be disastrous and demoralizing for students, particularly those most in need of academic support. In the coming days and weeks, you will hear from some groups who want to diminish standards or “delink” the WASL from graduation. They may be afraid students cannot do it. They may say the standards are too high or that the system is moving too fast. We disagree.

We fully support requiring students to meet standard in reading, writing and math on the 10th-grade WASL in order to earn a diploma beginning in 2008, with the addition of science in 2010. We urge you to stay the course on our state’s education reform efforts this session.

Our students can do this! More of our students achieve our state standards every year, and the track record in other states shows us that once the graduation requirement and supports are in place, those numbers will increase dramatically.

Washington’s standards are not too much to ask of a high school graduate – they are a good first step. Independent analysis has shown that our high school exam measures seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade reading, writing and math skills. These are skills every high school graduate must have at a minimum. Today’s world is different from even 10 years ago. More is being demanded of young people as they enter work, vocational programs, the military or college. We must help every child prepare. Pulling away from the WASL as a graduation requirement will not eliminate the dire consequences for students unable to read, write or do mathematics. It will simply delay those consequences until young people enter the real world and must survive without the skills they need and without the support offered by the K-12 system.

Education reform is working and, as we reach the crescendo of implementation, we must not waver or retreat. The 10th-grade WASL is the best representation of the minimum skills our state has determined students need. It has been proven by multiple independent evaluators to be a valid and reliable measure of student progress, and it should be the primary means by which students demonstrate their achievement.

Our students can and will rise to this challenge if we give them the opportunity and the support they need to get there. They need us to believe that they are capable. ***We believe it is imperative to push forward on the implementation of the new graduation requirements and the funding needed to help all students achieve the state’s academic standards.***

We realize some students will struggle with the format of the exam. They should have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills in a different form. Therefore, ***we support the 2006 Legislature’s efforts to approve an alternative comparable in rigor to the 10th-grade WASL for students who have taken the exam at least twice, but have not yet performed at the required level.***

We also know that additional, targeted assistance is needed to achieve the state’s academic standards. ***We support Gov. Gregoire’s proposal to provide additional funding in the 2006 supplemental budget, ensuring schools have the resources to help all students meet the state’s academic standards.***

Our organizations – and the thousands of educators, administrators and business leaders we represent statewide – want to stay the course in providing standards-based education for all students and implementing the WASL reading, writing and math requirements in 2008, with the addition of science in 2010. Please do not hesitate to contact any of our organizations if you would like to hear more voices of support.

Sincerely,



Terry Byington, executive director
AeA



Susannah Malarky, executive director
Technology Alliance



Don Brunell, president
Association of Washington Business



Carol Whitehead, president
Washington Association of School Administrators



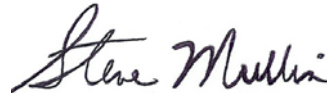
Paula Quinn, president
Association of Washington School Principals



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Brenda Nunes, chair
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Steve Mullin, president
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Steve Leahy, president
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