



Washington State  
**PTA**<sup>®</sup>  
everychild.one voice.



# PTA Case Study Part II:

## Three Schools Struggle with Inadequate Funding

*“Some students in poverty are homeless, live in cars, dumpsters, shelters, with friends, and on the street.”*

### Overview

We often hear or read about the disturbing trends in school funding and how challenging it is to ensure every student, even those with complex academic needs, meet the state’s educational standards. Yet, we don’t often hear about how these struggles play out at the school level. Part II of Washington State PTA’s study strives to shed light on this aspect of the story.

## **Executive Summary**

We often hear or read about the disturbing trends in school funding and how challenging it is to ensure that all students, even those with complex academic needs, meet the state's educational standards. Yet, we don't often hear about how these struggles play out at the school level. Part 2 of PTA's study strives to shed light on this aspect of the story.

As described in Part 1, PTA followed up on its 2004 study<sup>1</sup> that had identified 17 low-funded districts with very high rates of students with extraordinary needs. The districts also had below-average fourth grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores.

Wondering how such districts coped with their limited budgets and what impact such restrictions had on their students, PTA chose to study three of the 17 districts in more detail. The three chosen – the Highline, Kent, and Yakima School Districts – serve large numbers of students who are in poverty, have disabilities, or are English Language Learners (ELL). Yet, the funding levels in these districts in school year 2001-02 ranged from \$79 to \$652 less than the state average funding per pupil.<sup>2</sup>

As school year 2004-05 began, many students in these districts were still far from passing the 10<sup>th</sup> grade WASL, a state requirement beginning with the class of 2008.

### Brief Recap of the Findings from PTA's Part 1: Case Study of Three Districts

Part 1 details the budgetary challenges that the districts faced in school year 2004-05. In brief, PTA found that, despite exercising such options as drawing on funds held in reserve and seeking grants from public and nonpublic sources, two of the three districts, Highline and Kent, were forced to make large budget cuts in school year 2004-05. (Yakima made no budget cuts in school year 2004-05. The year before, however, Yakima cut about \$800,000 from support services, particularly maintenance programs.) Although Kent and Highline tried to protect instruction, both districts found it necessary to reduce expenditures in basic education, special education, highly capable, and transitional bilingual programs among others.

### Scope and Methodology of PTA's Part 2: Case Study of Three High Schools

Part 2 details the results of PTA's study of a comprehensive high school in each of the three districts. PTA interviewed principals at the Highline High School in Burien, the Kent-Meridian High School in Kent, and the A. C. Davis High School in Yakima. When available, PTA also interviewed assistant principals, teachers, custodians, and program officials associated with the school. The school's principal or custodian accompanied the PTA researcher on at least one tour of every school. PTA reviewed OSPI budget and school data reports, district guidance and memos, and some school reports.

---

<sup>1</sup> Billingham, Barbara. "Washington State School Finances: Does Every Child Count?" Washington State PTA, (March 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The state's average total funding per pupil, \$6,906, was based on federal, state and local general fund revenues. All funding figures in the 2004 PTA study were weighted for student needs and adjusted for differences in the local costs of educational resources. See appendix I for further details on cost adjustments.

PTA focused on the budget impacts identified by the principals during school year 2004-05. PTA also obtained information from the principals in May 2006 that helped determine whether improvements had been made or not.

### Much Student Diversity in Case Study High Schools

To appreciate the complex environment of school principals, it's important to grasp the amazing breadth and depth of student diversity in these schools. For example, top flight students who crave the intellectual challenge of Advanced Placement courses mingle with struggling students who are two years behind their peers in reading.

The five basic categories for reporting ethnicity – White, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Hispanic – don't do justice to the rich variety of nationalities, cultures, and languages present in these schools. For example, students speak 56 different languages at Highline High School. At Davis High School, the designation "Hispanic" encompasses many students. Some can trace their roots back to the Spaniards, Mexican-Americans, and Tejanos who originally helped settle this country, and others have families who initially came from Mexico or countries in the Central and South Americas.

Students who come from poverty attend these schools as do students from very wealthy families. Extreme poverty envelops those students who spent the night in shelters, on the street or even in dumpsters. Whatever the backgrounds and abilities of the ir students, principals in all three schools are absolutely passionate about helping them achieve their best. Every principal PTA interviewed insisted that every child could learn and perform at high levels. They simply asked for the right resources and sufficient time to make it happen.

### Major Findings From Part 2

When describing the impact that limited funding had on their schools, all three principals identified the same five concerns as well as others more specific to their situation. Among the five common concerns were three that PTA judged to directly affect instruction. These were the difficulty in hiring or retaining qualified teachers, core class sizes that are too large, and too few textbooks. The other two common concerns dealt with security and custodial/maintenance systems. Although such concerns are considered to be related to school support and not instruction, PTA found that budget cuts in these areas can still negatively affect instruction. Finally, other budget constraints that were cited included limited professional development, a reduced number of electives, and staff reductions.

Although not always a money issue, the principals and certain district officials also had concerns about the extent that teachers were using textbooks, curriculum, and instructional strategies that were aligned with the state's academic standards. Officials from Yakima in particular said that they had the right resources, programs and training in place to achieve the desired alignment and improve academic intervention, but that the district needed time for these efforts to take effect. One district official said that Yakima had already made progress in reading, but that it was still too early to expect much difference in math.

If they had the funds needed to make improvements, all three principals called for more textbooks in classrooms, better surveillance cameras, improved truancy interventions, and some type of outreach program to students and their parents that targeted 8<sup>th</sup> graders, English Language Learners, students in poverty, or students of color. The focus of such outreach programs tended to vary with the particular demographics of the principal's school. The outreach programs would provide such things as instruction in academics and productive work habits, and offer referrals to appropriate social agencies if needed. The Kent principal also desired training for his teachers to help them better align their curriculum and instructional methods with the state's academic standards.

In May 2006, two principals reported improvements since PTA's original visit. The Davis principal said that efforts to train classroom teachers in the strategies for teaching students not fluent in English were well underway and that the district introduced a new math program and purchased new math books for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders at Davis for school year 2005-06. The Highline principal reported improvements along a number of fronts. For example, the district replaced a security officer the school lost in school year 2004-05, purchased new textbooks for geometry, integrated science courses, and an AP history course, and is in the process of painting the school. The district also plans to use new bond money to install new surveillance cameras and other security measures at the school; bond funds cannot be used to pay staff salaries. However, the security officer's position is again threatened as the district contemplates a \$3.1 million shortfall in its 2006-07 budget.

Below is a brief description of the five common concerns expressed by all three principals.

#### 1. Hiring and Retaining Qualified Teachers is a Concern

For example, the Highline principal said that she had trouble recruiting a science teacher, and the Davis principal said the same regarding bilingual teachers. The Kent principal said that the district tended to hire new, inexperienced teachers who needed training in literacy strategies among other skills to teach a complex mix of students. He also said teachers who constantly deal with the challenges of academically deficient students risk burn out and that the district was trying to lessen the turnover among its teachers.

#### 2. Some Core Class Sizes are Too Large

All three principals said that some core classes, such as math, history, English, or science were in excess of 30 students and too large. A Highline teacher said her classes sometimes held as many as 38 students. Principals gave various reasons for the large core classes. For example, the Davis principal said that certificated teachers were needed for ELL and remedial courses that maintained class sizes of about 20 students. He also said that the state's formula for determining the number of certificated staff was based on the school's monthly enrollment average. However, the school's actual monthly enrollment tended to be above average in the early months of the school year and below average later on as students left the school or dropped out. As a result, classes in the early part of the year were usually overcrowded.

School finance expert, Allan Odden, and his associates report that the evidence on the most effective class size for grades 4-12 is scarce.<sup>3</sup> However, in a report describing the most effective school-level components that are linked to high quality instruction, the authors point out that the national average class size for high school is 25. The authors also note that the consensus of many experts who have designed comprehensive education reform models is a high school class size of 25. Odden et al suggest that small classes are more effective because teachers are less distracted by disciplinary matters and students are better able to engage in the lesson.

Any teacher may expect to differentiate his or her instruction to accommodate the learning styles and abilities of her students. In PTA's judgment, a reasonable person might conclude that teachers with 30 or more students in their classes face a daunting challenge to accommodate all learners, especially if the students present a wide range of abilities and interests.

### 3. Many Textbook Concerns

All principals said that many classes had too few textbooks and that students had to share the books and could not take them home. For example, the Kent principal said that, though the school's textbooks were of the right age and reading ability, the district simply could not afford to buy enough for every student to have one. He said this problem ran across all subjects and grades. Other problems cited were that textbooks were too old and did not cover all the content covered by grade level expectations. Some classes did not have any textbooks, forcing teachers to spend long hours at the copying machine compiling materials for their course. Outdated and too few biology textbooks confounded the Integrated Science teachers at Highline High School until school year 2005-06, when the district purchased new textbooks for the program. However, other Highline courses, such as AP English, still lack textbooks.

Odden et al report that "Up-to-date instructional materials are expensive, but vital to the learning process. Researchers estimate that up to 90 percent of classroom activities are driven by textbooks and textbook content."<sup>4</sup>

In Washington state, textbooks are among the many items funded by the state's nonemployee-related cost (NERC) allotment. In addition to textbooks, NERC money finances other instructional supplies such as computers and many facility items such as energy, water, and insurance services.

### 4. Security Concerns

All three high schools are located in communities where crime, some gang-related, is present. Principals and their staff are very aware of the importance of maintaining a safe environment. All three schools employ security officers. The Kent principal said he needed another officer and the Highline principal is worried about losing her school resource officer in light of the district's budget shortfall for school year 2006-07.

All three principals also said the critical and sometimes time-consuming job of maintaining a safe school could be made easier if they had better surveillance cameras.

---

<sup>3</sup>Odden, Allan, Picus, Lawrence O., Goetz, Michael, and Fermanich, Mark. An Evidenced-Based Approach to School Finance Adequacy in Washington. Prepared for the K-12 Advisory Committee of Washington Learns. Draft April 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 118-119.

The Kent and Davis principals wanted indoor cameras for their schools and the Highline principal said the school needed better outdoor cameras. In fact, the Highline School District plans to upgrade Highline High School's surveillance cameras and other security measures in the coming year with new bond money.<sup>5</sup> Short of issuing a bond, districts would have to pay for security cameras with NERC funds.

Not having a better security system does create opportunity costs that affect instruction. For example, the Davis principal said that he wishes he could spend more time coaching inexperienced teachers and visiting classrooms, but instructional issues sometimes take a back seat to security. When security measures fail to prevent student fights – as they have in Davis and Highline – students may be suspended or expelled.

#### 5. Custodial and Maintenance Issues

Long neglected maintenance issues and repeated budget cuts to custodial services have left all three schools with ongoing and often very costly problems. In particular, these problems at Davis and Highline are overwhelming. Buildings at both schools have persistently leaking roofs, inefficient heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, and poorly designed classroom space. Davis buildings also have inadequate electrical systems, cracks in floors, walls, and ceilings, and inadequate bathroom facilities for students with disabilities. The custodial service at Highline is inadequate. Outdoor grounds, school hallway floors and walls, common areas, and lavatories are not kept clean and free of litter.

The Kent principal said that budget cuts have led to the loss of trained, experienced custodians at his schools. Repairs now take longer in his buildings as the school must wait for the district to send a knowledgeable maintenance person to fix the air conditioning unit, furnace, or other equipment that fails.

Such problems can affect student learning. For example, the Kent principal said that too many of his students come from chaotic, messy environments and that “being in a clean and orderly environment elevates their behavior, helps them to shift their attitudes to be more productive, and gives them the message we care about them.” Indeed, two Highline High School students recently expressed their despair about the poor physical conditions of their school in their student newspaper.

Finally, Highline's superintendent said that the huge drain on classroom funding that such maintenance problems pose was one reason why the district sought approval for its recent capital construction bond. In March 2006, voters approved Highline's \$148 million bond to replace four elementary schools and perform other capital improvements. In contrast, voters in Yakima recently turned down the district's construction bond for \$119.5 million that would have helped finance the replacement of Davis and the replacement or renovation of seven other school facilities.

#### Matters for Consideration

In light of its findings, PTA urges readers to consider the following two matters related to high-stake standards, and the work of the Governor's Washington Learns Committee.

---

<sup>5</sup> Voters in the Highline School District approved a March 2006 construction bond for \$148 million that will help build four new elementary schools, upgrade technology, renovate some district buildings, and improve security measures.

### High-Stakes Standards

Currently, parents, students, educators, business representatives, legislators, and many others are debating the efficacy of high stakes standards. Proponents argue the standards are needed for the student's own sake, to ensure the student is ready to graduate as a productive member of a fast-evolving work force. Opponents assert that many students will be denied diplomas and unfairly punished for failing to achieve standards in a system that did not meet their educational needs.

Perhaps there is a way out of this quandary. Jay Heubert, a legal and educational scholar, says there's no reason why high stakes testing should force us to choose between two undesirable options: "failing a large number of students or allowing those students to graduate... without having achieved established performance standards."<sup>6</sup>

Instead, Heubert says that for states to be successful in implementing high-stakes testing, they must first ensure that:

- Clear performance standards have been defined,
- The curriculum is aligned with the performance standards, and
- Instruction is aligned with both the performance standards and the curriculum.

In addition, Heubert said educators need to make frequent and early assessments of student learning "to diagnose students' needs, tailor instruction, and target educational resources." Heubert goes on to assert that "Standard-based reforms will help students if used in this way to build instructional capacity – to fine-tune and improve curriculum and instruction so that all children achieve well-defined, high academic standards."<sup>7</sup>

If these conditions are met, Heubert says that standards-based reform may be used as "levers to improve teaching and learning." However, if the conditions are not met, Heubert does not expect all students, especially those with disadvantages, to be successful. As a consequence, he predicts "existing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic achievement gaps" to likely grow larger.<sup>8</sup>

Although Heubert is not an advocate of using a single test to judge a student's performance, his advice makes sense regardless of the form that graduation requirements assume.

Given the findings from this study – that some schools have not had the opportunity to align their curriculum and instruction with the state's academic standards – it might be reasonable to consider delaying the implementation of state graduation requirements until districts and schools have made demonstrable progress in the alignment process.

### Washington Learns Committee

---

<sup>6</sup> National Research Council. 2002. *Achieving High Educational Standards for All: Conference Summary*. Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Timothy Ready, Christopher Edley, Jr., and Catherine E. Snow, eds. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Finally, as it did in Part 1, PTA commends the Governor for initiating the Washington Learns Committee and welcomes the committee's efforts to reform the state's school finance system. A key goal of the committee is to identify how best to distribute current dollars given the new expectations of the K-12 education system, and to determine whether additional funding is necessary to achieve Washington's standards.

PTA believes that its current study has many lessons for anyone interested in revising the state's school finance formulas. One of the biggest needs is to reevaluate how the state's appropriation formulas allocate funds for certificated employees, classified employees, and nonemployee-related costs (NERCs). Our study suggests that the state would more fairly recognize the true cost of education by considering the complex mix of students in a district and whether that district faces higher costs for educational resources because of such factors as crime or cost of living.

PTA will continue to monitor the Committee's efforts. PTA will also urge the full legislature in the 2006-07 session to seriously consider the Committee's recommendations due to be reported in November 2006.

Yakima School District: A.C. Davis High School, Grades 9 – 12, Principal Lee Maras  
212 South 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. Yakima, WA 98902

Davis High School is located in an urban neighborhood in southeast Yakima. The main features are three three-story brick buildings with flat roofs and an auditorium all surrounding a concrete court yard. Another nearby brick building houses two gymnasiums and a science center. About a dozen portables sit just south of the main complex. Two of the brick buildings have exterior balconies on the second and third levels because the buildings' original open-classroom design did not call for interior hallways. The school was established on this site in 1968 when the first main classroom building was built and the 1936 auditorium was renovated.

In terms of demographics, more than half of Davis's students are Hispanic, compared to a state rate of 13 percent. With 67 percent of the students qualifying for free and reduced-price meals, Davis's rate of students in poverty is almost double the state's average.

The graduation and drop out rates and WASL performance levels in Davis High School are troubling. Davis's annual drop out rate is about double the state's average. About 62 percent of Davis 12<sup>th</sup> graders in school year 2004 graduated on time. Tenth grade WASL scores for Davis High School are all less than state averages in each subject tested.

<b>Davis High School Student Demographics</b>		
<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>State</b>
October 2004 Student Count	1,688	-
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>State</b>
Hispanic	54.9%	<b>12.9%</b>
African American	4.6%	<b>5.7%</b>
American Indian	3.1%	<b>2.8%</b>
Asian-Pacific Islander	1.1%	<b>7.9%</b>
White	36.2%	<b>70.7%</b>
<b>Special Programs</b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>State</b>
Free or Reduced-Price Meals (May 2005)	67.0%	<b>35.9%</b>
Special Education (May 2005)	13.4%	<b>12.3%</b>
Transitional Bilingual (May 2005)	29.0%	<b>7.1%</b>
Migrant (May 2005)	0.0%	<b>1.5%</b>
<b>Graduation and Drop Out Rates</b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>State</b>
Annual Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>1</sup>	12.4%	<b>5.8%</b>
On-Time Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>2</sup>	62%	<b>70%</b>
Extended Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>3</sup>	68%	<b>74%</b>
Cohort Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>4</sup>	38%	<b>21.5%</b>
<b>2004-05 10 Grade WASL Results<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Davis</b>	<b>State</b>
Reading	51.6%	<b>72.9%</b>
Math	27.4%	<b>47.5%</b>
Writing	44.0%	<b>65.2%</b>
Science	17.7%	<b>35.8%</b>
Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Report Card <a href="http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/">http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/</a>		

1Percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school in the 2003-04 school year.

2Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so on time after a four-year period.

3Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so regardless of how many years they spent in high school.

4Percentage of students who began school in fall of 2004 and who dropped out during their high school years.

5Percentage of 10th graders who achieved the proficient level or better on the indicated test.

Over the past five years, the increasing diversity in Davis High School's student body has brought pride and challenges to the Davis community. The school has many reasons to celebrate the growing multi-ethnic heritage of its students. In 2005, about 55 percent of the students were of Hispanic ethnicity, up from 46 percent in 2000. This designation includes an amazing variety of students. Some trace their roots back to the Spanish, Mexican-Americans, and Tejanos who have long lived in this country and some have families who initially came from Mexico and countries in the Central and South Americas. The school's community has been enriched by the many opportunities students, teachers, and families have had to express their cultural identities. "The school is thriving," said the principal, "students are happy to come to Davis."

At the same time the school must deal with the challenges posed by an increasing number of students who come from a background of poverty. The portion of students qualifying for a free-or-reduced-price meal has more than doubled in the past five years, increasing from 31 percent in 2000 to 67 percent in 2005.

The school, long established in the community, has a well-respected curriculum, including an International Baccalaureate program, and many clubs and sports programs. Along with maintaining these programs, the school has had to plan how it would devote more resources to helping the increasing number of disadvantaged students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

In 2005, Davis's Principal was clear in assessing the progress still to be made in helping these students:

Of the nearly 1,700 students who attend Davis High School, 400 are below the 7<sup>th</sup> grade reading level. Most of these are students in poverty, English language learners and special education students. It's a huge problem that these students are not academically prepared for high school.

Davis's Principal and Title I Migrant Coordinator both said poverty was the overriding factor that explained why so many students had such difficulty achieving academic success. The pair provided further insight into these students who struggle academically.

#### Some Students in Poverty Lack Basic Necessities

About two-thirds of Davis students come from poverty. The depth of their poverty was revealed in an anonymous student survey that Davis conducted in the fall of 2004. About 1,270 students, roughly 80 percent of all students, responded. The principal and migrant coordinator said the nonrespondents were predominantly students from poverty, non English speaking, and academically deficient students. Even so, some disturbing findings came from those who did respond:

- 13 percent (155 students) lived outside of their home with a relative, friend, in a shelter, or on the street.
- 18 percent did not eat another meal outside of school.
- 33 percent have to work, most to survive or to help support their family.
- 7 percent did not have a way to get a coat, blanket, or shoes if they were needed.

- 47 percent did not have access to the internet in their home.
- 33 percent did not have a computer in their home.

On the basis of this survey, the migrant coordinator said she began collecting sleeping bags to hand out to students who needed them.

### Many English Language Learners Have Low Academic Skills Upon Entering 9<sup>th</sup> Grade

About 70 percent of the students who enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade at Davis High School as English language learners have very low or limited academic skills along with limited English skills. Some of these students entered Davis directly from another country and have almost no English skills. However, many have already been in United States schools, have some limited English and academic skills, but not enough to tackle the more rigorous demands of high school.

Principal Davis and his staff said that these students have simply not had the appropriate educational opportunities needed to ensure their academic success. Frustrated by this lack of success, many of these young students express feelings of anger, cynicism and alienation and without the right care, run a high risk of dropping out. At Davis High School, the principal said that the school has had success in designing courses to meet the needs of these students and that the school's ELL courses have the best attendance rates.

### A Minority of Students Affiliated with Gangs

The principal estimated that about 20 percent of the students are gang affiliated, although the degree of attachment and involvement greatly varies. As an example of a minimal association, the principal said that, in some neighborhoods, students have to declare a gang affiliation just to be able to safely walk to their bus stops without being harassed. The principal acknowledged that even a very small number of actual gang members in a school could have an undue negative influence on the rest of the students. However, the principal and his staff said the school has strict policies and procedures in place, such as enforcing appropriate dress codes and behaviors and providing counseling and consequences that help maintain a safe environment at school.

### Absenteeism and Drop Outs Highest Among 9<sup>th</sup> Graders

About 25 percent of the students miss at least one period each day. The biggest attendance issue is for 9<sup>th</sup> graders. Davis is an open campus in an urban setting; easy for students to walk away and easy for strangers to walk through, said the school's principal. Although enforcement would be difficult, the principal is considering enacting a policy to prohibit 9<sup>th</sup> graders from leaving campus. (In fact the principal will enact a closed campus policy for 9<sup>th</sup> graders for the 2006-07 school year.)

Ninth graders accounted for about half of all students who dropped out of Davis High School in school year 2003-04.<sup>9</sup> Almost one in five 9<sup>th</sup> graders dropped out, for a total of 104 students who dropped out from the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

---

<sup>9</sup>Graduation and Dropout Statistics for Washington's Counties, Districts, and Schools, School Year 2003-04, Office of Superintendent of Public Information, Washington State, September 2005.  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx#dropoutgrad>

### Despite Many Challenges, Students Express Desire to Succeed

Although many of Davis students lack resources and deal with many challenges in their young lives, their aspirations and willingness to help themselves is striking. For example, despite the difficulties many students face, 97 percent of students surveyed by Davis said they planned to graduate from high school.

Perhaps even more telling, on Monday through Thursday, nearly a hundred students regularly gather in the school library after the last bell rings and stay until 9:00 pm because it's a warm, safe place for them to be and because it has become a good place to receive tutoring services.

The school's head librarian volunteers her time to stay and supervise the after-school gathering. The students are polite and grateful for the space and have organized themselves into study groups she said. No meal is provided. Initially the City of Yakima provided a grant for a tutor to help the students and then the district provided some funds. The library closes after the last bell on Friday, the day PTA visited, but even so, about 20 students lingered at tables and on couches hoping the librarian would delay her departure.

### Limited Funds Have a Negative Impact

Although the Yakima School District did not cut its budget for school year 2004-05, Davis's principal identified five areas where limited funding over the years has had a negative impact. These were shortage in bilingual teachers, large class sizes in core classes, lack of text books, security shortcomings, and maintenance problems.

### Too Few Bilingual Teachers

Bilingual teachers are important in providing dual language instruction, shown by research to be the most effective model for helping limited English speaking students.<sup>10</sup> With about 30 percent of Davis' students enrolled in transitional bilingual programs, the school has a need for bilingual teachers. However, the principal said only about eight teachers are bilingual. Yakima's Executive Director of State/Federal Program said the district has a shortage of bilingual teachers at all levels.

Training for classroom teachers in strategies to help students not yet fluent in English is an important part of developing the English and academic skills of these students. During PTA's first visit to Davis in school year 2004-05, such training for classroom teachers had not yet been provided. However, since then, the principal said the district has provided training in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) to classroom teachers in the district including those at Davis. SIOP is a researched-based methodology that trains classroom teachers to use simplified language, physical activities, visual aids and the environment to teach the concepts of their subject.

Yakima's Executive Director of State/Federal Program said the district has been working with OSPI to adopt a district-wide research-based model for teaching English to non-

---

<sup>10</sup> Description of Bilingual Education Instruction Models, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State. <http://www.k12.wa.us/MigrantBilingual/instructionalmodels.aspx>

English speaking students. The district initially revised the elementary programs and at the time of PTA’s visit in school year 2004-05, was getting ready to revise its high school programs. State funds alone are not adequate for the professional development that’s needed said the executive director. She said that teacher training programs in universities do not prepare teachers to teach bilingual students and that the model the district was adopting required this skill. To finance the training of teachers for this purpose the district will rely primarily on federal Title III funds.

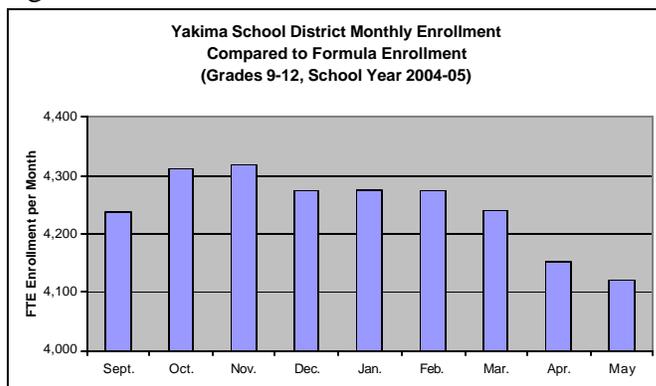
### Some Core Class Sizes are Too Large

Although remedial, special education, and ELL class sizes are usually no more than 20 students, core class sizes tend to be large. In the first few months of the school year, the school’s enrollment is high, causing many core class sizes to be in excess of 30 students. Classroom sizes tend to fall off after December, when students are more likely to drop out of school.

The state school finance formula allots staff units based on average monthly attendance. So, just when schools need staff in the beginning of the school year to hook the kids’ interest, particularly 9<sup>th</sup> graders, the school is forced to overcrowd their classes – knowing that after the drop outs occur the classes will be less crowded said the principal.

For example, in school year 2004-05, the Yakima School District’s average monthly enrollment for grades 9 through 12 was 4,244. Yet, the actual monthly enrollments were as high as 4,317 in November and as low as 4,120 in May. See Figure 1 below which shows that the *actual* monthly enrollments exceeded the average in five of nine months. During those five months, PTA found that the district should have had from 0.6 to 1.6 additional certified staff units allocated to it.

Figure 1.



### Lack of Textbooks

Some courses do not have textbooks and others have too few or use outdated textbooks said Davis’s principal. In general, students are not allowed to take their text books home. For example, English classes do not have a textbook to explain grammar rules, writing conventions or literary styles. The sophomore English teachers last adopted their program in 1992. One set of literary books serves two or three sophomore classes. Specifically, the teachers share one set of the course’s main book, Braided Lives: An Anthology of Multicultural American Lives published in 1991. For some courses, such

as creative writing and science fiction, the teachers have no books and use hand-outs to supplement their instruction.

*Special note regarding math:* In school year 2005-06, the district focused on completing its adoption of a new math curriculum for high school students. The Davis principal said that in fact, the school began using SIMMS Integrated Mathematics textbook for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders in school year 2005-06.<sup>11</sup> In OSPI's recent review of instructional mathematic materials, the SIMMS Integrated Mathematics Levels 1 and 2 received the review panel's highest rating of all the materials reviewed for being in alignment with the state's 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade level expectations for mathematics.<sup>12</sup>

### Security Concerns

Maintaining a safe school environment is a top priority and requires much staff time and resources. Davis administrators say they are successful in this effort and point to a May 2006 survey of their students conducted as a part of the school's self-study process.<sup>13</sup> All the students interviewed said they felt safe at Davis, citing the presence of many security guards.

The situation was very different in 2002 when Davis's principal first came to the school. At that time, the school was dealing with confrontations among rival gang members. At one point the principal remembers looking into his waiting room and seeing six students, each handcuffed to a chair with a police officer in attendance.

Since then, the principal and his staff worked to establish relationships with the students, met with family members, enforced dress codes and discipline policy and made Davis High School a safe place for students. Maintaining a safe environment, however, is a never-ending job that requires constant surveillance and extra resources.

Currently the principal, four assistant principals, four school resource officers, and one police officer represent the security staff at Davis. All the staff carry walkie-talkies. The school has four security cameras but none are inside the building. The principal believes that the security system is not adequate. "We need more cameras inside the school to identify culprits, prevent graffiti, and deter bad behavior," he said. A recent survey identified over 40 locations, including blind spots in stairways, hallways, and breezeways where students or outsiders cannot be easily seen and a video camera is needed. Also, Davis has 104 exterior doors making it difficult to ensure no unauthorized entrance or exit from the school. No factor in state funding formulas specifically targets security issues; most of the district's security staff are funded by the local Maintenance and Operations levy.

The opportunity costs of not having better security measures are evident in the number of disciplinary actions at Davis High School requiring suspension or expulsion. In school

---

<sup>11</sup> The SIMMS (Systemic Initiative for Montana Mathematics and Science) curriculum is a complete National Council of Teachers of Mathematics Standards-based mathematics program.

<sup>12</sup> Washington State Instructional Materials Review, K-10 Mathematics, Core Comprehensive Materials, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State, January 2006.

<sup>13</sup> The self-study is in accordance to the process prescribed for accreditation by the Northwest Association of Accredited Schools.

year 2003-04, such actions reached 741, up from 533 the previous year.<sup>14</sup> Most actions were for insubordination, fighting, intimidation, or assault and about 30 percent of these were gang-related. Ninth graders accounted for about 62 percent of all actions. The Davis principal said that the number of actions reported in 2003-04 was higher than normal, and that the number has since declined to more typical levels.

Managing a safe environment also has its opportunity costs. The principal wishes he could spend more time developing inexperienced teachers and visiting classrooms, but instructional issues often take a back seat to security. A good deal of the principal's time is spent meeting with troubled students and their families. He has even conducted several home visits. He said he suspends or expels students only after numerous interventions with students and their families and only as a last resort.

Even as the school has worked to minimize the threat of gangs on campus, gang activity has increased in the community and is now a valley-wide problem, not just confined to the southeast area of Yakima. In a 2005 gang assessment report, the Yakima Police Department recognized the increase in gang activity and estimated 15 different gangs existed in Yakima Valley and were actively engaged in criminal activity.<sup>15</sup>

### Maintenance Needs are Overwhelming

The Davis High School roof, the heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, the electrical system, classroom and storage space, cracks in walls and ceilings, and building code violations are major concerns. The school scored 29 out of a possible 100 points in a recent building condition survey. The district is asking voters to approve a bond for \$119,505,000 that would help finance the replacement of Davis and the replacement or renovation of seven other school facilities.<sup>16</sup> The cost of repairing and renovating Davis is estimated to be 95 percent of the \$73 million cost to replace it. (Voters turned down the construction bond in the May 2006 election.)

Davis High School's head custodian accompanied PTA on two separate tours of the complex and made the following observations.

- Roof

The head custodian explained that the flat roof of the school building allows rain and snow melt to pool and stagnate. Water has leaked through the roof in several locations causing damage and creating mold concerns. Water stains on ceiling tiles is evident in several buildings and leaks in Davis's old gym have caused the ceiling to fall in many locations. An annex building was never properly attached to an existing building, leading to leaks occurring along the adjoining wall and into a girl's lavatory. In one classroom, leaks during the current school year caused ceiling tiles to fall. In another classroom, recent leaks ruined about 15 World History books. These books are not used in class because they smell bad; but now students can take them home. The leaks are an ongoing problem despite repeated efforts to fix them.

---

<sup>14</sup> Data taken from the 2003-2004 Davis High School report entitled: Reported Out of School Suspensions by Type of Behavior.

<sup>15</sup> July 25, 2005 Memo to the City Councils of Union Gap and Yakima from the Yakima Police Department regarding gang activity in Yakima. [http://www.ci.yakima.wa.us/services/police/gang\\_survey.asp](http://www.ci.yakima.wa.us/services/police/gang_survey.asp)

<sup>16</sup> The district estimates that the total cost of all projects to be financed by the bond is \$217 million of which the state will fund \$97 million.

- Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) Systems

One of the main school buildings was built in 1968 and designed as an open school system with no interior walls and few windows. Interior walls have since been built to enclose classrooms, but now the HVAC vents and thermostats are not aligned with the classrooms.

In any event, the HVAC system is powered by an antiquated, pneumatic system. The system works by driving steam in cold weather or coolant in hot weather through a network of pipes and condensers, which are prone to leaks, said the custodian. A condenser in the gym leaked hot water causing a 2 by 4 foot section of the gym floor to lift. As a result of the network leaks, the classrooms are sometimes too cold in the winter and too hot in the summer. The school's three boilers generate an adequate amount of power but they are old, inefficient and very expensive to run said the custodian. One of the three gas-driven boilers was converted from a very old coal-stoking boiler. The other two boilers were built in 1962. Conversion to an electric system would be very expensive.

The ventilation system needs to be cleaned. Obvious discoloration around ceiling vents prompt school officials to worry about mold, dust, and pollen contaminating the air and causing sickness. A contractor estimated it would cost \$10,000 to clean it.

- Electrical System

In some buildings, the school uses more than 95 percent of its electrical capacity that regularly results in blown fuses and lost school work said the custodian. In one classroom, 15 computers, each drawing about 3 amps, were all connected to a 20 amp circuit breaker.

- Classroom and Storage Space

Athletic, electrical and HVAC equipment are often stored in the same room. The breaker panel in one such store room has insufficient clearance surrounding it, in violation of the fire code. This is the same room where large, room-sized wrestling mats are rolled and stacked on three-tiered shelves. The custodian said the mats were inappropriately stored and very difficult to take down and reshel. Another room was used to store both sports equipment and a condenser. The heat generated by the condenser made the room unbearably hot.

Some of the classrooms and the cafeteria are too small for the number of students they serve. PTA visited a small social studies classroom that the custodian said was 572 square feet and held 35 desks, eight more than classroom standards recommend.<sup>17</sup> The cafeteria was designed to seat 330 students; many of Davis's 1,700 students stand or sit in hallways or classrooms or go outdoors to eat their lunch. PTA also visited a special education class in a small, narrow room with no windows and in a building that did not have a wheelchair accessible bathroom.

---

<sup>17</sup> As a comparison, the North Carolina Public School Facilities Guidelines recommend classroom space of 750 to 850 square feet for 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade regular classrooms and recommend adding an additional 15 to 20 square feet for each computer station in the room. Allowing for a classroom of 29 students, the maximum 9<sup>th</sup> grade size recommended by North Carolina, and 4 computer stations, the class room should be at least 810 square feet (750 square feet + 60 square feet). See [www.schoolclearinghouse.org/pubs/facilityguidelines2003.pdf](http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/pubs/facilityguidelines2003.pdf).

- **Building Cracks**

Foundation settling has caused cracks in the walls and ceilings of two buildings. In one case, the settling caused bricks to fall out of a wall and a window to pop out of its frame. A new uplifting in the cafeteria's kitchen tiled floor may also be caused by settling, said the custodian.

Many of the school's structures, such as the courtyard, outside stairways and balconies, railings and archways are made of concrete. Chunks of concrete have fallen from an archway and are missing from many stair steps. Cracks run the length of concrete dividers.

- **Some Structures Do Not Meet Current Safety and**

- Americans with Disabilities Act Building Codes**

Many problems plague the auditorium, originally built in 1936, and then encased in a jacket of concrete in 1968 to fortify its foundation. The building does not meet current fire safety or the Americans with Disabilities Act building codes. For example, the auditorium still uses the original 1936 wooden chairs, which do not have seats that automatically lift up, in violation of fire safety codes. No bathroom is on the main level; patrons must climb stairs to use the second-level bathrooms. Leaks are evident in the auditorium's ceiling.

Although the school has three large separate buildings, an auditorium and a gym and science resource annex, the entire complex has only one bathroom with wheelchair access.

### Principal's Views on Needed Improvements

Besides calling for more textbooks in the classes that needed them and installing security cameras inside the school, the principal made comments on the need to improve the school's 8<sup>th</sup> grade transition program and the school's intervention program for students who are truant.

- **Expanding the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Transition Program**

The current program to help 8<sup>th</sup> graders transition to high school is only for two days said the principal. A program providing more substantial instruction in academic and social skills is needed he said. For example, he said students need more instruction in math and reading as well as in making the right choices, conflict resolution, and study skills. He said parents would need to be involved in this effort.

- **Improving Truancy Intervention**

The principal said the state's BECCA Truancy Law had a limited effect on student attendance and truancy. The law requires, among other things, that districts file a truancy petition with juvenile court if a student has seven unexcused absences in a month or 10 in a year. The court may order the student to return to an appropriate school setting and if need be, to a substance abuse program.

For schools to comply with this law, school staff must determine on a daily basis whether students' absences are excused or not. This is a costly record keeping requirement for which the districts are not compensated. Also, once a district files a truancy petition, it

must also assign a staff with legal training to represent the district in the courts. Staff costs are also uncompensated.

The principal said his staff works hard to check on the whereabouts of every student reported missing from class which he estimated to be about 25 percent of Davis's 1,700 students and mostly 9<sup>th</sup> graders.

The principal said he would like more focus to be on unexcused absences when they first occur, rather than waiting for the number to increase to the point where a court referral is needed. He said the real work of improving attendance comes with making immediate and personal contact with a student whose absence is unexcused. However, he said the school lacks the staff to handle attendance problems in such a timely manner. If it did, he said the BECCA bill would serve as a stopgap measure to deal with the more flagrant violators. The principal also said that, under current conditions, the courts are overwhelmed by other more serious matters and tend to treat truancy in too light of manner.

#### Academic Intervention and the Alignment of Curriculum with Academic Standards Need More Time

Finally the principal and the district's Associate Superintendent made the following comments about programs for providing academic intervention and aligning curriculum with state standards. Here the issue does not seem to be a matter of money, but rather a matter of time. PTA recognizes that the bulk of the school's work in ensuring all students meet state standards still needs to be done, but that the programs to accomplish this goal appear to be largely in place at Davis. The need for time does appear legitimate as only 27.4 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> graders met the WASL Math standards in 2005, 20 percent below the state average.

The principal said that the district is headed in the right direction with its intervention programs. Davis High School's accreditation report of May 17, 2006 agrees with the principal's assessment. Among other commendations, the report praised the school for providing the High Point Reading intervention program for struggling readers and hosting three WASL camps on Saturdays during the 2005-06 school year to help student with their math, reading, and writing skills. The school is currently organizing summer school for students whose 2006 WASL scores were less than proficient.

The accreditation report made suggestions that build on the current programs already in place. For example, the report recommended that school administrators emphasize the alignment of instruction with the state's grade level expectations in all math classes and review the Math WASL camp to ensure that it targeted the needs of lower skilled students.

The Yakima School District has targeted improving reading and math skills by the year 2007 and has realigned staff and resources as much as possible to achieve these goals. In 2003, the district adopted a new reading curriculum and placed literacy coaches in all buildings to help classroom teachers implement the new curriculum and assess the students' progress. The district launched its new math curriculum and began placing math coaches in schools in the fall of 2004.

“It’s a struggle to catch up,” said Yakima’s Associate Superintendent. These intervention efforts, begun in 2003, have made a difference in reading, but it is still too early for math she said. Students are showing progress on reading assessments and, to some degree, on the WASL. The difficulty is helping non English speaking students who are not literate in their own language improve in their reading skills in time to pass the WASL.

Highline School District: Highline High School, Grades 9-12, Principal Patricia A. Dunn  
225 South 152<sup>nd</sup> Street, Burien, WA 98148

Highline High School was built in 1924 on a spacious campus, twenty years before the Seattle Tacoma Airport was built. It now stands less than a quarter mile west of the airport's northern runways. The main building, an 80-year-old, two-story brick structure, stretches along South 152<sup>nd</sup> Street. Additional facilities behind the main building house the common areas, two gyms, and a cafeteria. The district's Performing Arts Center sits on the east side of the main building. Athletic fields lay to the southeast of the school's campus.

In school year 2004-05, Highline High School's student profile was typical of the state, except it had slightly more English Language Learners than average and slightly fewer special education students. Of the 1,519 students enrolled in the school, a little more than a third qualified for free or reduced-price meals. Highline High School has a diverse minority population that comprises about 41 percent of the population. Hispanics and Asians form the two largest minority groups.

Highline High School's drop out rates and graduation rates in 2003-04 are better than the state's averages. WASL scores for 10<sup>th</sup> graders in 2004-05 were very much in line with the state's average scores with students faring much better in reading than in math.

### Highline High School Student Demographics

<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Highline</b>	<b>State</b>
October 2004 Student Count	1,519	-
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Highline</b>	<b>State</b>
Hispanic	17.2%	<b>12.9%</b>
African American	7.8%	<b>5.7%</b>
American Indian	2.3%	<b>2.8%</b>
Asian-Pacific Islander	14.1%	<b>7.9%</b>
White	58.6%	<b>70.7%</b>
<b>Special Programs</b>	<b>Highline</b>	<b>State</b>
Free or Reduced-Price Meals (May 2005)	34.9%	<b>35.9%</b>
Special Education (May 2005)	10.1%	<b>12.3%</b>
Transitional Bilingual (May 2005)	10.0%	<b>7.1%</b>
Migrant (May 2005)	0.0%	<b>1.5%</b>
<b>Graduation and Drop Out Rates</b>	<b>Highline</b>	<b>State</b>
Annual Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>1</sup>	1.1%	<b>5.8%</b>
On-Time Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>2</sup>	87%	<b>70%</b>
Extended Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>3</sup>	95%	<b>74%</b>
Cohort Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>4</sup>	na	<b>21.5%</b>
<b>2004-05 10 Grade WASL Results<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Highline</b>	<b>State</b>
Reading	75.1%	<b>72.9%</b>
Math	47.5%	<b>47.5%</b>
Writing	60.9%	<b>65.2%</b>
Science	33.8%	<b>35.8%</b>
Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Report Card, <a href="http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/">http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/</a>		

1Percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school in the 2003-04 school year.

2Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so on time after a four-year period.

3Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so regardless of how many years they spent in high school.

4Percentage of students who began school in fall of 2004 and who dropped out during their high school years.

5Percentage of 10th graders who achieved the proficient level or better on the indicated test.

The Principal of Highline High School is proud of her students. She points to the impressive gains her 10<sup>th</sup> graders made on the WASL reading test since the new reading program has been implemented. She's optimistic that the district's new math program will help students make similar improvements on the Math WASL. She's an enthusiastic supporter of the district's new effort to group high school teachers and students into Smaller Learning Communities as a way to personalize education and increase learning for all students.

However, the principal is realistic about the challenges her students face and the fact that many of her charges need more help than the average student. The school serves many students in poverty and many whose first language is not English.

Although the high school's reported rate of students in poverty is 35 percent, about average for the state, the principal said the actual rate is closer to the district's rate of 50 percent, representing about 800 students. The principal and her vice principal said high school students typically do not disclose their true financial need to avoid being embarrassed in front of their peers at lunchtime. Some students live in shelters, cars and even on the street in dumpsters said the school administrators and many students are transient who come and go through out the school year.

Adding to the complexity, about 150 students or 10 percent of the school's population speak a language other than English as their primary language. Highline high school reports that these students speak over 56 different home languages.

Still, the principal said her students "are just as smart and just as capable as other students and they should be able to get what they need to be successful."

#### Limited Funds Have Significant Negative Impact

Getting what they need, however, hasn't been easy. Budget cuts and limited resources in the Highline School District have stymied progress on several fronts. At Highline High School, the impacts in school year 2004-05 were felt in staffing, security, class size, elective courses, hiring qualified teachers, professional development, textbooks, and custodial and maintenance services said the principal and vice principal.

Some gains have since been made in these areas, but the district is again facing an estimated \$3.1 million shortfall in its budget for school year 2006-07.

- Staff Reductions

The \$50,000 cut from Highline High School's budget forced the principal to start the 2004-05 school year without three alternative education staff. These staff had helped older students earn the last few remaining credits needed to graduate. Despite their absence, the principal was able to design a plan for the students to earn credits by working in her office. However, she said she was going to miss the three because they specialized in educating at-risk students and were adept at writing grant proposals.

- Security

An important goal of the school's mission is to maintain a safe environment for its students. To help meet this goal, Highline High School had come to rely on its school

resource officer (SRO), an armed King County police officer assigned by the King County Sheriff's Office to the school. However, federal funding for the SRO under Title IV of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act unexpectedly ended leaving the school without an SRO in the fall of 2004. Unfortunately, the loss of the SRO coincided with an increase in gang activity in neighborhoods surrounding the school. According to a King County Sheriff stationed in Burien, members of various gangs from California and south Puget Sound area had moved into the Burien area and were competing with other groups to establish their identity and recruit new members.

Without the school resource officer, school administrators said that the beginning of the year began with problems that occurred off-campus and out of reach of school authorities spilling over onto campus. The administrators said the problems resulted in fights; some were violent and involved weapons and some involved gang members and individuals who were not students. To deal with the fights, the school immediately enforced a strict discipline policy. The first fighting offense earned a 45-day suspension, the second, a 90-day suspension. Students watching the fight earned a 3 to 10-day suspension depending on the extent of their involvement. A student told PTA that before the school began enforcing the suspension policy, many fights occurred on campus, including one involving a knife and another, a bat.

The district provided PTA with the high school's security report showing that 326 security incidents<sup>18</sup> occurred when the school did not have an SRO in 2004-05, compared to 303 in school year 2003-04 and 288 in school year 2005-06 – years when the school did have an SRO. However, for different reasons, the data is incomplete for school years 2003-04 and 2005-06, making it difficult to draw any conclusions about the effect of SROs.<sup>19</sup>

A school resource officer is just one element of the school's security program. Other elements include community school officers employed by the district and an outdoor video surveillance system. However, the advantage of SROs, said school administrators, in contrast to community school officers, is that SROs can investigate disturbances off-campus and make arrests. The administrators said that their SRO came to know students at the high school and was often able to diffuse confrontations and deter fights from breaking out. Also, the administrators and the district's Chief Security Officer said the high school's security cameras needed to be upgraded. The Chief Security Officer said that the cameras needed to be able to zoom in on individuals and cars to provide clear images of faces and car tags.

#### *May 2006 Update:*

#### **SRO Funding Again Threatened; But New Security Measures to Be Installed**

Although, the district funded a school resource officer (SRO) for Highline High School in 2005-06, it may cut funding for all school resource officers for 2006-07. Highline's superintendent anticipates that the district will have to cut expenditures for school year 2006-07 to help bridge the anticipated \$3.1 million budget shortfall. In a May 2006 memo to district employees explaining the proposed cuts, the superintendent said, "We

---

<sup>18</sup> Security incidents are classified as alcohol, assault, disturbance, drugs, failure to cooperate, harassment, gang robbery, theft, threats, and weapon possession.

<sup>19</sup> For example, robbery and theft incidents were not calculated for 2003-04 and incidents for 2005-06 were only reported through May 2006.

now have more and better trained district security officers in our schools... I am confident our district security officers are able to provide the level of safety we expect and require for our schools.”

The new security measures to be installed are a result of a \$148 million construction bond approved by voters in March 2006. The district earmarked \$2 million of this amount to improve safety and security at its four high schools. Specifically, the funds are for camera surveillance systems, additional lighting for schools’ exteriors, and security fencing to better control certain access points to the schools’ campuses. Bond funds cannot be used to pay staff salaries.

- **Larger Core Classes and Fewer Electives**

For school year 2004-05, as required by the district, the principal converted one of her classroom teacher positions to a literacy coach whose full-time job was to help classroom teachers develop strategies for improving student reading and comprehension. Although the literacy coaches have been effective, the consequences of this action and other budget cuts were larger core classes and fewer electives.

The principal said that the regular core classes ran 32 to 35 students in size. However, elective, remedial and ELL classes were smaller. Both an English and a science teacher confirmed this class size range and said that sometimes the numbers ran even higher, as much as 38.

Students who were a year or more behind in reading were placed in a remedial program rather than an elective. The principal said about 60 ninth graders and 120 tenth graders were assigned to a remedial program for reading and writing, in addition to taking their core courses in English or literature. The school also offered remedial math classes.

The additional remedial classes meant that the school had fewer electives to offer. Initially, the school had to give up shop and some electives for accelerated students said the principal.

*May 2006 Update:* In school year 2005-06, the school recovered some of the electives. The principal said the school added higher-end math and science electives to the upper grades and plans to add more for the 2006-07 school year. At this point, only 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade accelerated classes have fewer electives she said.

- **Difficulty Hiring Qualified Teachers**

The principal said that the school tried to hire a science teacher for school year 2004-05, but was unable to attract one. In general, she said, math, science and special education teachers were hard to find. The principal was also worried about current special education teachers complying with provisions of The No Child Left Behind Act that will take effect at the end of the 2005-06 school year. The Act will require special education teachers to be endorsed in the subject matter they teach; at Highline, four special education teachers don’t have the required endorsements.

- **Limited Time and Funds for Professional Development**

Time for professional development is a limited resource as are funds for substitutes. In school year 2004-05, the principal said that classroom teachers have not been trained in strategies for teaching students who were not fluent in English.

Also, school administrators said that Highline's two big school-wide initiatives vied for professional development time and that not enough time was available for all the training. First, the school was in the midst of phasing in its Smaller Learning Communities, a district-led effort to develop four themed communities within the high school.<sup>20</sup> Second, the literacy coach sometimes trained teachers during the teachers' planning time, thus lessening the amount of the time available for teacher planning, particularly as a team.

- Limited Funds for Textbooks

Highline School District officials acknowledged that funding textbook replacements is a problem.<sup>21</sup> In school year 2004-05, Highline High School administrators said that most courses did not have enough textbooks for every student, and some did not even have enough for a class set. Some textbooks were out of date, forcing teachers to "reinvent the wheel," that is, take the time to plan lessons and gather scarce resources that were in alignment with the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements. As a consequence, the principal said her copy machine budget was a "black hole in her building budget." In May 2006, the principal reported that district funding and private grants have since allowed the school to purchase new textbooks in a number of areas.

In school year 2004-05, Highline High School administrators said they lacked textbooks for geometry, Advanced Placement (AP) history and biology. They also cited out-of-date history books that did not cover the full range of the state's grade level expectations, particularly those related to the global economy.

The textbook problem was acute for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade Integrated Science classes; required courses that help prepare students to take the 10<sup>th</sup> grade science WASL. The administrators borrowed an 11-year-old biology textbook from an Integrated Science teacher to illustrate its tattered and marked-up condition and how it was held together by duct tape. The school did not have enough copies to ensure that each of the 35 students in the class have their own book. The textbook is so old that the teachers can't find it in print any more. These books were for class time use only; there were too few of them to risk a student' losing one at home. A science teacher also said that some books had been water-damaged and developed mold, causing some students to become sick when they opened them.

For some courses, the only class set of books was stored on a rolling cart, posing several scheduling challenges for school administrators. Teachers who shared these books couldn't teach at the same time and yet had to be located close to each other to enable ease of transport.

In ninth grade English classes, the teachers did not have enough copies of novels, such as Shakespeare's Macbeth and Golding's Lord of the Flies, for every student to take home and read. Teachers dealt with the problem by using class time to read the novel aloud or by copying pages of the books for students to read on their own.

---

<sup>20</sup> Each small learning community seeks to provide students with personalized attention and continuity. For a more complete description of Highline's Small Learning Communities go to the Highline School District website at <http://www.hsd401.org/smallschools/index.htm>

<sup>21</sup> See Part 1

The principal said that the need to use copied materials as a substitute for proper classroom materials places a big burden on her building budget of \$89,000. She also said teachers have to spend valuable time copying and developing materials, leaving less time available for students.

*May 2006 Update: New Funding for Science, Geometry and AP History Textbooks; Courses to Emphasize College Preparation*

During school year 2004-05, the district revamped its Integrated Science Curriculum and chose new textbooks and science materials. The district trained science teachers during the summer of 2004-05 and purchased the textbooks and materials in time for the start of school in 2005. The district also purchased new geometry textbooks for school year 2005-06. Finally, the district obtained a grant to purchase Advanced Placement History textbooks which were made available to the class in December 2005. Prior to that time the history teacher mainly relied on copied materials and student-purchased books. However, the AP English course did not have a textbook for school year 2005-06.

Looking to the future, the district plans to emphasize college preparation and academic achievement in designing the new small learning communities at the high school. In an April 2006 memo describing restructured high schools, the district explained that

Course offerings will be more closely aligned with college admission standards, and all students will have access to the courses they need to be admitted to and successful in college. In an effort to push students to higher levels of achievement, Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are being expanded. Many more teachers are receiving AP or IB training. Most small learning communities will have an honors option for 9th and 10th graders. Some may offer stand-alone honors courses for students who choose a more demanding curriculum. Others will offer advanced work within core classes, for which students can earn an Honors designation on their high school transcripts.

- **Reduced Custodial and Maintenance Services**

Highline School District had to make district wide cuts to its maintenance and custodial services in school year 2004-05 and in previous years. At Highline High School, an 80-year old building, the budget strain is apparent in the difficulty in keeping the campus clean, the leaking roof, and the problems with the Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system.

Both the school's exterior and interior environments are dirty and in need of paint and some repair. In a tour of the school, the principal acknowledged this and regretted the condition but custodial service wasn't a priority for her building budget. The 1,600-student school has one custodian on duty from 5:00 am to 1:30 pm and no custodial supervisor. A plugged toilet or a classroom spill can take up a good part of his time, leaving less time to do the routine tasks. The principal said one custodian is not enough to keep classrooms, hallways, and especially bathrooms clean and deal with the accidents, breaks and spills that happen every day.

At Highline High School, custodians sweep the floor, but they are afraid to strip it before waxing it because the tiles might come up. So, twice a year, custodians wax over the

previous layers of grime, resulting in scummy gray-looking tiles. A group of teachers became fed up with the look and scrubbed and buffed the tiles outside their classrooms – they now have the only white-tiled hallway in the school.

Highline High School has a flat roof. Scattered throughout the building are holes (some that leak) in the ceiling. One 2 foot by 2 foot hole and leak just outside the library has caused ceiling, wall, and floor damage.<sup>22</sup> When questioned about repairing the leak, a district budget official said that the state now requires districts to go outside for bids to do work that cost \$15,000 or more. Districts could use their own resources to do it for less, but are not allowed to do so. To hire outside contractors, not only would districts need to spend more money fixing the problem, but also more money administering the contract as well.

Highline high school administrators said the performance of the school's Heating Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) system is below standard. The school has three different boiler systems, which did not have enough "boost" to properly heat classrooms over a three-day period last winter. Classrooms were so cold during one week last year that the staff wanted to go home said the principal. Vents are filthy and the ducts have not been cleaned. The principal is worried about air quality issues.

The old building is not student-centered, especially lacking in storage space and common meeting areas for students and staff. However, the principal said that the school does well in making use of what it has by prioritizing space for student needs and using some areas for offices and counseling rooms. Student table and chairs in some areas, particularly the cafeteria, are old and falling apart.

The poor physical condition of the school doesn't escape the students' notice. In the May 2006 issue of the school's newspaper, *The Highline Helm*, two students made their views known. One student reported that the school's old and dirty features were at least partially to blame for the lack of school spirit among her classmates. She cited cracked windows, yellow and brown water stains in the ceiling, unlevelled floors, unsanitary lavatories, and old classroom furniture, books, and equipment. She justifiably asked: "What I don't understand is, if children are the future, and education is so important, why is it that our school is in such horrible condition?" She ends her piece with a suggestion that students do their part to keep the school clean.

Another student described the unhygienic condition of the girls' lavatory. She offered this advice to her fellow students: "The next time you plan on going to the bathroom at school make sure you reach in your backpack and pull out that personal stock of toilet paper and hand cleanser."

#### *May 2006 Update: Some New Furniture and a New Paint Job*

For school year 2005-06, the district purchased new science tables and chairs.

In the spring of 2006, the district began the process of cleaning and painting the exterior of the school. The district also plans to paint the interior.

#### Principal's Views on Needed Improvements

---

<sup>22</sup> In late March 2005, the district sent workers to repair the leak and replace ceiling and floor tiles. In September 2005, PTA noticed that the new white ceiling tiles were marred by brown water stains.

When questioned about desired improvements, the principal focused on four areas: classroom resources, outreach programs for students in poverty and English language learners and their families, funding to better prepare English Language Learners to take college entrance exams, and changes to the BECCA Truancy Law.

- Classroom Resources

Specifically, the principal said she would obtain adequate classroom resources and tools for her teachers including textbooks, computers and an adequate budget for the science department. The school's science department head told PTA that her 2004-05 school-year budget of \$4,000 was enough to buy one beaker for each student. She said that the department was short on consumables such as batteries for graphing calculators and probing instruments that measure pH and O<sub>2</sub> levels. The budget was not enough to keep microscopes and balances in good working condition she said. Such instruments occasionally require new parts or realignment. She also said that lab materials are in short supply and that there's never enough for all 32 to 35 students in her Integrated Science classes.

*May 2006 Update:* For school year 2005-06, the district purchased new textbooks and lab materials for the Integrated Science Courses. The district trained the Integrated Science teachers during the summer of 2005. The district also purchased new science classroom furniture.

- Outreach Program

The principal would like a program that actively reaches out to students in poverty and English language learners and their families. The principal believes such a program would help parents appreciate the importance of an education and turn passive parents into proactive ones.

The Coordinator of Highline School District's ELL Department shared similar concerns. The coordinator said the district needed a transitional orientation program that would assess the needs of migrant students and their families who are new to the community. The program would direct them to appropriate agencies, help place the student in an appropriate school setting, track the academic progress of students, and encourage the involvement of parents in their child's education. Although many of these roles are done by various teachers and administrators in the district, the coordinator said the district needed an organized, coordinated approach to ensure all English language learners and their families were served.

The district's ELL Department Coordinator also said that the district in general needed more bilingual teachers and more opportunities for English language learners to advance to the next level when they are ready to do so. The coordinator said that too often English language learners who are ready to move on to the next level cannot do so because space is not available at the next higher level.

- PSAT Funding

The principal would like funding to pay for PSAT tests (Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test) for English language learners. The PSAT is a practice test that provides students with base line verbal and math scores that indicate how the student can expect to do on the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test). Many colleges require their

applicants to take the SAT to help judge the student's academic potential. The cost of the PSAT is \$13. The principal believes her students are academically capable as students any where else and need more opportunity to prepare themselves.

*May 2006 Update: New Funds for PSAT and SAT Testing*

In school year 2005-06, the school received an \$800 grant from the Highline School Foundation to pay for the PSAT and SAT testing of Latino students and students with low-income backgrounds. The principal said that the district plans to pay for the PSAT testing of all sophomores in school year 2006-07.

• **Truancy Intervention**

The principal was critical of the state's BECCA truancy law which requires, among other things, that districts file a truancy petition with juvenile court if a student has seven unexcused absences in a month or 10 in a year. The court may order the student to return to an appropriate school setting and if need be, to a substance abuse program.

For schools to comply with this law, school staff must determine on a daily basis whether students' absences are excused or not. This is a costly record keeping requirement for which the districts are not compensated. Also, once a district files a truancy petition, it must also assign a staff with legal training to represent the district in the courts. Staff costs are also uncompensated.

The principal said many students don't show up each day. It's a huge administrative burden to chase down the absent students, contact families, and determine whether the absence is excused or not she said. Summing it up, the principal said the BECCA law requires a lot of manpower and is not effective.

Kent School District: Kent-Meridian High School, Grades 9 –12, Principal David Dorn,  
10020 SE 256<sup>th</sup> Street, Kent, WA 98031

The Kent-Meridian High School was originally established in 1951. Located on a busy intersection in Kent, the high school is adjacent to two bus terminals and low-income housing. The high school consists of two main buildings, two support buildings, and portables spread across a large campus. The campus also houses a public pool and other public facilities.

In the 2004-05 school year, ninth graders began attending Kent-Meridian High School for the first time. To accommodate the new students, the district remodeled the former Kent 6 Cinema One to provide new classrooms and a large auditorium-style instructional place.

Kent-Meridian students are ethnically diverse and most come from poverty. More than half of the students are Hispanic, African American, or Asian. With almost 60 percent of the students qualifying for a free or reduced price meal, Kent-Meridian’s rate of students in poverty is well above the state average.

The drop out rates and the WASL performance levels in Kent-Meridian are troubling. Kent-Meridian’s annual drop out rate in 2003-04 was more than three times the state average. Almost 65 percent of the students in the class of 2003-04 dropped out before graduating. The percentage of 10<sup>th</sup> graders who passed the WASL test in 2004-05 is less than the state average in each subject tested.

### Kent-Meridian High School Student Demographics

<b>Enrollment</b>	<b>Kent-Meridian</b>	<b>State</b>
October 2004 Student Count	1,918	-
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Kent-Meridian</b>	<b>State</b>
Hispanic	14.2%	<b>12.9%</b>
African American	19.7%	<b>5.7%</b>
American Indian	1.6%	<b>2.8%</b>
Asian-Pacific Islander	21.1%	<b>7.9%</b>
White	43.3%	<b>70.7%</b>
<b>Special Programs</b>	<b>Kent-Meridian</b>	<b>State</b>
Free or Reduced-Price Meals (May 2005)	55.6%	<b>35.9%</b>
Special Education (May 2005)	13.3%	<b>12.3%</b>
Transitional Bilingual (May 2005)	19.0%	<b>7.1%</b>
Migrant (May 2005)		<b>1.5%</b>
<b>Graduation and Drop Out Rates</b>	<b>Kent-Meridian</b>	<b>State</b>
Annual Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>1</sup>	16.4%	<b>5.8%</b>
On-Time Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>2</sup>	34.7%	<b>70%</b>
Extended Graduation Rate (2003-04) <sup>3</sup>	37.5%	<b>74%</b>
Cohort Dropout Rate (2003-04) <sup>4</sup>	64.9%	<b>21.5%</b>
<b>2004-05 10 Grade WASL Results<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>Kent-Meridian</b>	<b>State</b>
Reading	61.5%	<b>72.9%</b>
Math	33.9%	<b>47.5%</b>
Writing	57.3%	<b>65.2%</b>
Science	23.0%	<b>35.8%</b>

Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State Report Card, <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/>

1Percentage of students in grades 9-12 who dropped out of school in the 2003-04 school year.

2Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so on time after a four-year period.

3Percentage of students expected to graduate in 2004 and did so regardless of how many years they spent in high school.

4Percentage of students who began school in fall of 2004 and who dropped out during their high school years.

5Percentage of 10th graders who achieved the proficient level or better on the indicated test.

The Principal of Kent-Meridian High School is primarily focused on meeting the academic challenges of a diverse student body. He is succinct in describing this challenge: “48 percent of the students are two or more years behind their peers; 4 percent are on target with their grade level; and 48 percent are two or more years above grade level.” Of particular concern, said the principal are the new 9<sup>th</sup> graders at the school, many of whom are severely deficient in their academic skills and pose a big challenge to their teachers.

Many of the struggling students come from impoverished backgrounds and the principal said that one program that greatly benefited them and the school as a whole was about to come to the end of its funding. This was the Washington State Achievers Program (WSAP), a partnership among the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Washington Education Foundation, and Costco. In 2001, the school received a five-year WSAP grant for \$795,000. The goal of the program was to help Kent-Meridian design and establish small learning communities and to provide mentoring and scholarships to motivated low-income students. Kent-Meridian has since established five small learning communities that are to house 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders by the fall of 2006 and eventually 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders.

To help offset the loss of the grant money, Kent’s Executive Director for School Improvement said that the district in 2005 had applied for, but did not receive, a five-year Smaller Learning Community grant for \$3.45 million from the Department of Education. The grant would have focused on improving literacy and promoting college readiness in the district’s four high schools.

The principal said children coming from poverty needed the extra support that the Washington Education Foundation mentors provided and that if anything, he would like to extend this type of personal relationship to 8<sup>th</sup> graders to help prepare them for the rigors of high school.<sup>23</sup>

*June 2006 Update:* The district recently received a two-year extension of the WSAP grant that would allow the school to continue its restructuring efforts and its partnership with WEA. The grant total is for \$300,000, with \$150,000 to be paid for school year 2006-07 and \$150,000 the following year.

### Negative Impacts of Budget Cuts

Beyond losing the grant funding, the principal also acknowledged that his school, similar to all of Kent’s schools, has had to deal with restricted funding for general operations. Although one positive development is that, with the addition of 9<sup>th</sup> graders to Kent-Meridian in 2004-05, the principal said his school’s enrollment increased enough to warrant additional administrative and support staff. The additional staff has allowed the principal more time to deal with some instructional and safety issues. For example, the principal said this year he had more time to visit classrooms and do hourly walk-thrus of the school.

---

<sup>23</sup> The Washington Education Foundation, established in 2000, is an independent, non-profit organization that provides mentoring and college scholarships to low-income, high-potential students.

Despite this development, the principal identified six areas that still lacked funding and needed improvement. These were curricular development, professional development, class size, textbooks and classroom furniture, custodial services, and security.

#### Lack of Curricular Development

Kent-Meridian's Principal said staff need time to develop their curriculum and better align it with the state's grade level expectations (GLEs). The principal is referring to the attempts all public schools are making to ensure that their students meet the state's Essential Academic Learning Requirements, a set of high expectations initially developed in 1993 and written in broad terms for grades four, seven, and ten. Since then the state has written GLEs to specify what students should learn in each individual grade.<sup>24</sup> Based on his classroom visits, the principal said "Staff are not consistently teaching what they need to be teaching to be in alignment with the GLEs. This effort would require training, time, and resources for staff."

#### Lack of Professional Development

Reflecting on the challenges of teaching a diverse student population, the principal said that colleges do not prepare secondary teachers for the demands of teaching an urban student population. "The district tends to hire new, inexperienced teachers who need training in literacy and reading strategies," said the principal. At Kent-Meridian, we just added 9<sup>th</sup> grade to school, so we have 36 new teachers to the mix who need training." The principal said that teachers who constantly deal with the challenge of academically deficient students risk burn out and that any teacher, young or old, needs to be nurtured in this situation. He said the district has been trying to reduce the turn-over in teachers.

#### Some Classes are Too Large

Some core classes have as many as 35 or 36 students. Too many for teachers to settle their class down and adequately cover their lessons in a 50-minute period. The numbers of students in classes drop off in spring as students leave Kent-Meridian for other schools or drop out. The school has a good number of transient students.

#### Too Few Textbooks and Old Furniture

Although the age and reading level of the school's textbooks are appropriate, classes do not have enough for every student to have his or her own. The district does not buy enough textbooks because of their cost, which ranges in price from \$50 to \$75 said the principal. He added that the problem runs across all subjects and grades and that because the school cannot afford to lose any, students cannot take textbooks home. The principal also said that some classroom furniture is 50 years old, including desks with ink wells, and should be replaced.

#### Insufficient Security and Custodial Services

---

<sup>24</sup> GLEs in reading, writing, mathematics and science have been developed. Grade-level expectations in all subjects will be completed by 2009.

In addressing the impacts of budget cuts on security and custodial services, the principal said “I think you need three conditions for learning: 1. leadership, 2. a safe environment, and 3. an orderly and clean environment.” Budget cuts in security and custodial services have affected the last two conditions.

With regard to maintaining a safe environment, the principal noted that it was impossible to close Kent-Meridian’s large campus. The high school consists of several buildings on a large campus that also houses a public pool and other facilities and is located on a busy intersection in Kent near public housing. Gang activity in the area ebbs and flows, but it is always present said the principal. Currently, he noted that gang activity had recently increased coinciding with the influx of the new 9<sup>th</sup> graders at the school as gangs sought to recruit new members.

Regarding the need for more security, the principal said “I have two security officers and need a third. The school has no internal security cameras and it needs them. Cameras are a great deterrence and make my job in tracking down culprits much easier. The investigation takes 30 seconds. The cameras would reduce the costs for maintenance, repair, and repainting, (and for the 95 percent to 97 percent of the students who don’t cause problems and won’t have to worry about watching their back). If the students feel safe, they are more ready to learn.”

The principal said that budget cuts over time have reduced the number of the school’s custodial staff as well as their needed training and resources. “We have lost a pool of trained, competent, knowledgeable custodians,” said the principal. Current custodians, said the principal, need to be better trained and supervised, and have a difficult time maintaining and servicing equipment and keeping the entire campus clean. The school must now wait for the districts to send a maintenance person to repair air conditioning units, furnaces and other equipment break downs that occasionally occur.

The principal said he believed the district assigned an inadequate number of custodians to the school given its square footage. However, he also said it was difficult for the district to compete with nearby colleges and institutions in hiring custodians and that the hiring process itself may be too cumbersome.

The lack of custodial care interferes with the third condition for learning: maintaining a clean and orderly environment for students. In the principal’s own words: “Too many of Kent-Meridian students come from chaotic, messy environments. Being in a clean and orderly environment elevates their behavior, helps them to shift their attitudes to be more productive, and gives them the message that we care about them.” The principal said the school also enforces a dress code and educates the students to keep the halls and classroom clean. He said the school strives to develop a culture of cleanliness.

#### Principal’s Views on Needed Improvements

In line with the areas affected by underfunding, Kent-Meridian’s principal saw the need for improvement in the following areas: curriculum development, intervention strategies for struggling students, textbooks, security and custodial services, scheduling class time, and the BECCA truancy law.

If the school had sufficient funds, the principal said he would:

1. Develop and align curricula with the appropriate grade-level expectations. Teachers need professional development to accomplish this goal.
2. Provide more intervention approaches to help students whose academic skills are deficient. For example, the principal recommended a Head Start type of a program during the summer for 8<sup>th</sup> graders transitioning to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Before students begin high school, some, the principal said, need to be taught the rudimentary skills of learning, such as taking ownership of their studies, organizing their work, and learning how to process and communicate information. He said parents needed to be included in this effort. He acknowledged that such a program would require additional staff training and staff.

The principal was adamant about providing mentors for poor students and students of color, similar to the approach that the Washington Education Foundation uses. In his own words, the principal said “We need to teach students the purpose of an education; convince them to stay in school, lock them in at the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, get them to see the purpose of a post-high school education, and provide wrap-around support for students coming from poverty.” The principal said these ideas are based on Ruby Payne’s model for helping students who come from poverty be successful in public schools which are predominantly middle class institutions.<sup>25</sup>

3. Provide more textbooks. (See text book comments.)
4. Improve the security and custodial services of the school. (See previous comment on security and custodial services.)
5. Reconsider how district schedules class time. The principal said that by district policy the school has six periods a day, which he said were probably too short – especially for math and reading remediation. He said children coming from impoverished backgrounds value their social time and tend to take a while to settle down.
6. Take a more comprehensive approach in dealing with students who are chronically truant and provide more meaningful consequences for truant students. According to the principal, the BECCA Truancy Law is a waste of money, energy, and time. He said the school uses three office staff to chase down absent students to determine if their absences are excused or not, sometimes calling a family as much as 20 times. He also said judges really don’t want to enforce a court order on students who are 16 years or older because state law does not require parents to compel children of this age to attend school. (RCW 28A.225.010). The principal said that students who are truant usually have multiple issues dealing with their families and substance abuse and simply forcing them to come to school doesn’t deal with all their problems. Finally, he suggested more meaningful consequences for students, such as suspending a student’s driver’s license or putting pressure on families by withholding Medicaid assistance.

### Assistant Superintendent’s Views On Needed Improvements

---

<sup>25</sup> Payne, Ruby K. A Framework for Understanding Poverty. Texas: **aha!** Process, Inc., 1996.

The Assistant Superintendent of Learning and School Improvement in the Kent School District made the following comments about (1) the district's process for aligning education with the state's academic standards, (2) intervention strategies, and (3) truancy intervention.

### Aligning Education with the State's Academic Standards

Kent's Assistant Superintendent for Learning and School Improvement is very much in agreement with the principal on the need to ensure "deep alignment" in the district. Deep alignment is ensuring that the curriculum, instruction, classroom resources, and assessment are aligned with the state's academic learning standards as expressed in the specific grade level expectations. The district began its deep alignment process in reading and recently undertook this process in math. The assistant superintendent said that teachers need training in this process and that not all college teaching programs prepare their students to do this.

### Intervention Strategies

The Kent School District uses diagnostic testing and considers students' GPA, attendance, behaviors, and WASL scores to help identify students who need intervention services. Beginning in 2004, the district began using a multi-level approach for intervention. This approach is similar to the core intervention model now recommended by OSPI. The model is very labor intensive, calling for additional staff, consultants, and training. Overall it is very costly and especially takes more effort and resources to reach the students who are farthest behind.

The Assistant Superintendent described the district's approach to intervention in the following way:

Intervention begins in the classroom where students are learning the core subjects. At this first level, it's important for teachers to differentiate their instruction to accommodate the wide range in abilities and aptitudes of their students. Not enough teachers, especially entry level teachers, have the training that allows them to differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs of all students. Teachers have endorsements in content, but not in pedagogy. The greater the differentiation in student needs, the greater the need for intensive services and professional development.

Students who demonstrate a greater level of need are provided remedial instruction that targets basic skills and uses curriculum that is linked to the core expectations. The remedial courses take the place of the students' electives during the school day. Special education students and English language learners, especially new comers, usually take remedial courses, which mean the learning must involve specialists.

Outside of the school day, the district also offers extended-learning opportunities before and after school. The district also offers summer school. The district has specially designed these courses to target the skills and the content that the students need. These smaller sized classes have proven to be effective in improving students' performance.

Having smaller class sizes for the intervention courses is costly, but important said the assistant superintendent. Holding classes outside the school day adds to the cost, in part due to transportation, especially for students from poor families said the assistant superintendent. Currently, there's no break for the smaller class sizes in the state staffing formulas. The district finances summer school with I-728 money and federal and private grants.

Intervention requires appropriate resources that match the needs of students, particularly those of special education students and English language learners said the assistant superintendent. However, he also said the district has a shortage of professional speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and psychologists.

Commenting on the number of students who need additional assistance and the approaching deadlines for passing the WASL, the Assistant Superintendent said: "The problem is growing faster than we can bring intervention strategies to bear. The gap is growing, the need is getting greater, and staff qualifications are fewer. We are falling behind while trying to address the problems. The difficulties of teaching such a challenging array of students is causing a greater level of staff retention problems. Teachers opt to go to a less impacted environment."

#### Truancy Intervention

Regarding the BECCA Truancy Law, the Assistant Superintendent said that the district receives a low return for its investment. He said that schools or some social agency need to do intervention earlier, before the students are referred to courts. He added that the district has handled hundreds of cases, but few have resulted in real intervention where students turn their performance around. The Assistant Superintendent said the consequences should be more than just requiring the student to show up for school; and intervention should address the wide range of issues associated with the student and the student's family.