

**Vancouver Public Schools – Board of Directors  
Position Statement on the System Performance Accountability Policy Framework Proposal**

**November 5, 2008**

After careful review of the State Board of Education System Performance Accountability Policy Framework Proposal, we have concluded that the three primary shortcomings of this proposal are disappointingly similar to those identified with the “No Child Left Behind” legislation at the national level.

- 1. Unless the state provides full funding for basic education and education reform efforts, implementation of the proposed accountability policy framework would be unfair to schools and districts and ineffective in raising student achievement to the desired levels.**

The proposed accountability policy framework would add significantly to the cost of operating K-12 schools at a time when the state is not even meeting its Constitutional duty to pay for basic education. Before adopting this proposal, the legislature should consider what this state is prepared to give up so that it can fund state interventions, including the recruitment and appointment of so-called turnaround leaders and the possible takeover of schools and districts placed in “academic receivership.”

To achieve breakthrough results, struggling students and schools need real reform, including early childhood education programs, extended learning time, smaller class sizes, equitable student and teacher access to technology, and improved family access to social and health services. With decades of research and best practice experience, our state and nation know how to increase achievement for all students. The question is whether we are willing to make the necessary strategic investments.

- 2. The proposed accountability policy framework over relies on one test, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning, which defines education too narrowly for our students and graduates.**

The purpose of public education is to develop competent, responsible and compassionate citizens. Our mission therefore extends far beyond the attainment of standards in reading, writing, math and science. The state and local districts should work in close partnership to ensure that all students receive a balanced and relevant education: academics, technology and information literacy, arts, health and fitness, social and cultural understanding, linguistics and world languages, citizenship, leadership, and employability skills. As Richard W. Riley and Terry K. Peterson recently wrote: “The demand for high standards should not be reduced to standardization. Education cannot be boiled down to a single test on a narrow set of skills.” (*Education Week*, Sept. 24, 2008)

Further, students should have opportunities to demonstrate their learning in multiple ways. The state should continue to expand alternative means for students to demonstrate proficiency on the path to graduation. The focus of accountability should be shifted to a growth-oriented model that expects and promotes continuous gains in learning for individual students and cohort groups. Schools and districts also need the state to support the development and implementation of formative assessment tools, including technology-enabled systems, which help teachers diagnose the learning needs of each student and prescribe instruction tailored to those needs.

**3. The proposed accountability policy framework would diminish local control of our public schools by allowing the state to intervene in the governance role of school boards.**

We support the position adopted by the Washington State School Directors' Association that local control over school and district improvement efforts must be retained. As elected representatives of the communities we serve, school boards are appropriately positioned to ensure accountability. School board members also understand the realities and complexities of their communities. State interventions and takeovers would disrupt the steady progress already being made to improve student achievement, and they would have a destabilizing and demoralizing effect on local schools, districts and communities.

Accountability for providing a high-quality education should be shared and reciprocal. Educators, students, parents and families, businesses, community service organizations, government agencies, and policy makers all have important roles and responsibilities in enabling the attainment of appropriate educational standards. A fair and sensible accountability system for our K-12 public schools should promote and expect reasonable growth in achievement over time, while recognizing that all students begin at different levels, have different life experiences, and progress at different rates.

Our public education system can and does need to improve, but we must jettison the hurtful labels promulgated by "No Child Left Behind" and the misguided political rhetoric of "failing" or "chronically underperforming" schools. As school board members, we see little evidence that schools are failing students, but we do see plenty of reasons to believe that our society is failing children and youth. If we do not adequately address the underlying challenges facing our young people and their families today (poverty, mobility, crime and violence, substance abuse, lack of access to physical/mental health care, lack of access to early learning, lack of developmental assets, etc.), we will realize only modest gains in learning. Adopting an accountability policy framework without making strategic investments in our public education system simply will not lead to transformational results.

###