



IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING AT SCALE (ISLS) PROJECT

Final Report

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PROJECT EXTENSION AND KEY OBJECTIVES

The Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) requests an extension through December 1, 2015, and additional funding from the NGA in the amount of \$25,000 to accomplish the following key objectives:

- Coordinate implementation efforts between educational sectors regarding the Smarter Balanced assessment.
- Prepare for the determination of the high school graduation threshold.
- Align communications efforts between sectors and other organizations to produce a common message about Smarter Balanced scores to teachers and families:
 - Develop specific messaging for students and families who receive lower scores (i.e. 1 and 2); create a graphic depiction of paths for each Smarter Balanced score.
 - Produce a clear, common message regarding the postsecondary placement agreements and the differences between them (public four-year, private independent, and community and technical colleges).
 - Create a video of student voices: “What I wish I knew in high school.”
 - Maintain a strong focus on the career piece of college and career readiness.

NARRATIVE REPORT

Communication

The Improving Student Learning at Scale (ISLS) Collaborative has been extremely effective in coordinating Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Smarter Balanced (SB) implementation efforts between various educational sectors, agencies, and organizations in Washington State. Although the K-12 and higher education sector leaders work together often, it is less common that we have a group with representation from the Governor's Office and State Legislature. That broader perspective allowed us to engage in meaningful conversations and work to collaboratively align policy.

ISLS has also made progress in developing clear and consistent messaging regarding the CCSS and SB assessment. When the group first convened, there were no statewide communications materials available regarding the SB assessment. The ISLS group contracted with Strategies 360 to develop FAQs for [guidance counselors](#)¹ and [postsecondary educators](#)² and an [infographic for students and families](#).³ The guidance counselor handout was distributed at two large statewide guidance counselor

conferences, while the postsecondary handout was passed onto various higher education institutions.

The ISLS group leveraged existing work by building a stronger relationship with ReadyWA. In conjunction with ReadyWA (and with additional funding provided by State Farm to cover printing and mailing costs), the ISLS group sent the infographic to all Washington schools, along with a letter signed by WSAC's executive director and a [video narrative](#)⁴ to accompany the infographic. The infographic was designed to be a tool for counselors to communicate with students and families regarding Smarter Balanced scores; counselors could provide copies for the students to take home. The infographic has been so successful that Oregon has asked to use it as a baseline to create an infographic for their state.

Through our partnership with ReadyWA, ISLS team members also helped develop two [interactive videos](#)⁵ about the Smarter Balanced assessment for students and families.

Easing Transitions

As mentioned, the ISLS group has been a helpful forum to bring sectors together and allow for informal communication. Partially as a result of this communication and largely due to efforts by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC), postsecondary sectors (community and technical colleges, four-year public baccalaureates, and private independent colleges) have established agreements for use of the SB assessment in college placement. Students who earn a score of 3 or 4 on the SB can now skip standard placement tests at colleges and enter directly into credit-bearing coursework. The following agreements are in place with each sector:

- [Public baccalaureates](#)⁶
- [Community and technical colleges](#)⁷
- [Private independent colleges](#)⁸

Work Plan Focus Areas

In our original ISLS work plan, the team identified three areas of focus relating to the implementation of CCSS or SB assessments and a specific plan for each one. Below we will provide a summary of progress completed on each topic:

- 1) Dual Credit
- 2) High School and Beyond Plan
- 3) High School Transition Courses

Dual Credit

Dual-credit programs offer high school students the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school, saving students time and money. With the implementation of SB agreements, students who score a 3 or 4 on the assessment will be encouraged to enroll in dual-credit courses.

Last year, WSAC convened a dual credit workgroup to recommend legislative language that would streamline and expand dual-credit and dual-enrollment programs. On May 8, 2015, [House Bill 1546](#)⁹ was signed into law by the Governor. The bill clarifies the differences between College in the High School (CHS) and Running Start (RS); expands CHS to 10th graders; provides funding for small, rural schools and low-income students in CHS; and allows use of existing funds to assist RS students with transportation, books, and program fees.

To supplement the work of the dual credit workgroup, in 2014 WSAC hired two graduate interns to write a [report on dual credit acceptance policies](#)¹⁰ at various public and private institutions in Washington State. The report outlined the variation in acceptance policies by type of institution and exam, the type of credit awarded, and some of the challenges for students. The report was well received by members of the workgroup and by a representative from the state Legislature.

In addition, the ISLS group supported the development of an interactive tool for students transitioning from high school to college with exam-based dual-credit coursework. The resources provided by the grant helped Washington to develop an innovative [dual credit lookup tool](#)¹¹ that is included with other outreach materials on WSAC's ReadySetGrad website. The tool allows students to search and compare how their high school Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Cambridge International exam scores will apply as college credit at various public and private independent institutions in Washington State.

High School and Beyond Plan

The State Board of Education (SBE) is the entity responsible for establishing graduation requirements in Washington State, one of which is the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The purpose of the HSBP is to allow students to set postsecondary and personal goals, explore future careers, and select coursework that will best prepare them for their goals. The HSBP is a student's personalized pathway toward college and career readiness. HSBP implementation is up to local control, and therefore SBE has [provided guidance](#)¹² on what plan components should be included in a high-quality HSBP, including is a recommendation that students consider dual-credit courses.

Students, families, and educators will now be able to use the HSBP as a resource to chart a student's pathway based on their SB scores, as depicted in [this infographic](#).¹³ The goals a student sets in their HSBP should be informed by their SB scores and reflect areas they need improvement, and also build on students' strengths. WSAC staff will be presenting sessions at upcoming conferences for educators based on this theme.

High School Transition Courses

SBCTC has led the development of [Bridge to College transition courses](#)¹⁴ for students who score a 2 on the Smarter Balanced Assessment to get them on the pathway to college and career readiness. Implementation of these courses is now being brought to scale.

The Bridge to College Mathematics course is grounded in the Southern Regional Education Board's Math Ready course. Intended for students heading for college pathways not requiring calculus, the curriculum emphasizes: modeling with mathematics and the Common Core Standards for Mathematical Practice; a variety of essential standards from Algebra I, statistics, and geometry; and the Algebra II standards agreed to as essential college- and career-readiness standards for most students. The course emphasizes student engagement based heavily on conceptual teaching and learning.

The Bridge to College English Language Arts course is grounded in building critical reading, academic writing, speaking and listening, research and inquiry, and language use as defined by the new state English Language Arts (ELA) learning standards for high school (CCSS). By the end of the course, students will use strategies for critical reading, argumentative writing, and independent thinking while reading unfamiliar texts and responding to them in discussion and writing. The course will also develop essential habits of mind necessary for student success in college, including independence, productive persistence, and metacognition.

RESPONSES TO THE FOLLOWING REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What factors in your state make advancing college and career-readiness standards particularly challenging? How have you used this project to address those challenges? What challenges remain and how have you planned to address them?

Washington State is in a time of change. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and Smarter Balanced (SB) assessments resulted from a need for increased academic rigor and equity in schools across the nation. Although the more challenging standards will benefit students and society in the long term, they have created many short-term challenges. Washington State is in the process of addressing these challenges, and the ISLS group has been able to identify issues and plan proactively for the future.

An important challenge related to SB in Washington is preparing teachers for the new standards and preparing administrators at 295 separate school districts for the new standards and assessment system. Although there are many resources available, reaching all educators is daunting. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is doing great work to support teachers. For example, in addition to the Washington State Fellows Network and ongoing face-to-face professional learning opportunities, OSPI provides a full suite of informational and instructional support materials on their [Teaching and Learning web page](#).¹⁵ The Smarter Balanced Digital Library provides additional instructional tools and resources for educators. One member of the ISLS team is a senior policy analyst at the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), which has incorporated Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in their pre-service program standards for educators. And WSAC administers a federally funded professional development program called *Educators for the 21st Century* under Title II of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Currently, WSAC is collaborating with OSPI to administer two professional development projects designed to help 6th-12th grade educators implement the CCSS and the state's science standards.

Educators would also benefit from resources that would allow them to clearly communicate pathways to college and careers to all students and parents. Currently, there is no clear messaging to describe the pathway for students who score a 1 on the high school SB assessment. The ISLS group will address this communication need through an infographic or handout explaining specific paths for each of the four scores.

Washington State's exit exams and graduation requirements are also changing, and the SB will be added as a graduation requirement for students graduating in 2016-2019. The State Board of Education (SBE) will set the SB exit exam cut score for high school graduation on August 5, 2015, which will be lower than the college and career ready cut score used for 11th grade accountability.

There is some confusion among students, families, and schools about the new requirements and exams, especially because they are changing each year. To remedy this, SBE has created an [interactive webpage](#)¹⁶ that shows the changing graduation requirements each year.

There are additional challenges for students with disabilities, who may be exempt from statewide testing and have alternative options for graduation. More communication is needed for these students and families with the changes in graduation and testing requirements.

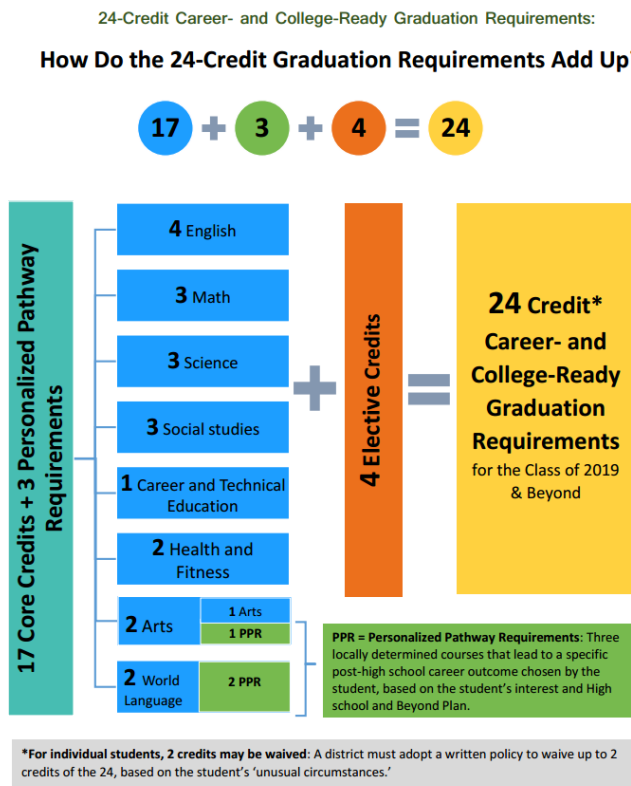
In Washington State, community colleges serve students who need Adult Basic Education classes or remedial coursework to prepare for entry-level college coursework. We are hopeful that with more rigorous standards at the K-12 level, the number of students needing to take these courses will decrease. However, for those

students who are over 18, and scoring at the level 1, an option to continue their Basic Education on the higher education campus may be fitting. If so, it may be helpful to have a broader lens for what qualifies for the Basic Education Allocation.

Another challenging factor for Washington is that the state is not yet as far along on the career readiness aspect of the standards as the college readiness aspect. Much has been accomplished to improve college readiness and transitions from K-12 to postsecondary education, including expansion of dual-credit courses, creation of transition Bridge to College courses, and SB placement agreements at postsecondary institutions. Future work for ISLS will include a stronger focus on career readiness, and possibly creating a statewide definition for career readiness.

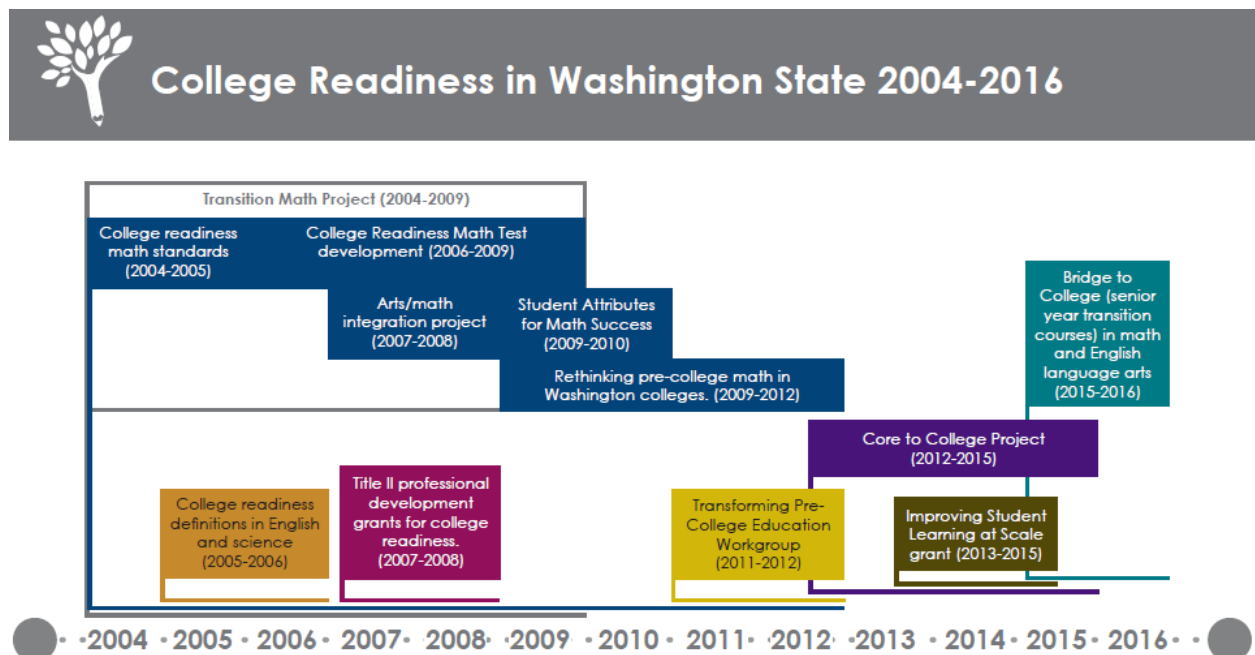
What factors in your state are advantageous to advancing college and career-readiness standards? How have you used these advantages to leverage support for improving college and career readiness?

Washington State has many strengths that help advance college- and career-readiness standards. Washington adopted career- and college-ready graduation requirements and diploma for the class of 2019. These more rigorous standards include a new 24-credit framework and more Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. Below is a visual depiction of the requirements.



Source: State Board of Education website¹⁷

Another strength is Washington's history of cross-sector collaboration among state education agencies and organizations. Washington has a number of entities working on various education initiatives and policy, which can be difficult if efforts are not coordinated. Washington has succeeded in joining our efforts in the past, especially related to college readiness. Below is a list of some of Washington's college readiness efforts since 2004. Many of these projects were led by SBCTC, and had input from all educational partners.



Washington also has a strong early learning system, overseen by the Department of Early Learning (DEL). The Early Learning Advisory Council is a cross-sector group with the goal of providing input to DEL. The Council includes early learning providers, statewide regional advisors, K-12, higher education, and the Governor's Office. This broad representation ensures that our early learning system is always focused on the whole continuum of education, and not solely birth to five years of age. DEL also offers a number of educational assistive programs for eligible children and families, such as [ECEAP and Head Start](#).¹⁸

In the arena of teacher preparation, Washington created the Teacher Principal Evaluation Project in 2010. Through eight pilot projects, districts developed criteria for evaluations, created evaluation forms, and identified appropriate measures of student growth. Statewide implementation began after the pilot projects. This represented a transformation in how we evaluate teachers and principals. Anecdotally, some

principals are saying this new framework allows for some of the best conversations they have had with teachers.

Lastly, Washington State has developed outstanding capacity to link data across sectors. The [Education Research and Data Center](#) (ERDC)¹⁹ “conducts analyses of early learning, K-12, and higher education programs and education and workforce issues across the P-20 system.” As a state we need to continue to improve our ability to analyze these rich data sources to provide better information to policymakers and practitioners.

What are the steps your state needs to take next? How will your state address these steps OR What is your state's sustainability strategy? What forms of assistance will be helpful to your state going forward?

To prepare for the upcoming Smarter Balanced score release in August, much more internal and external communication will be needed. Some of this work is being done by the [ReadyWashington \(ReadyWA\) coalition](#),²⁰ which is composed of some of the same members as ISLS. ReadyWA has created many communications materials for students and families related to the CCSS and SB assessments (some in collaboration with ISLS), including handouts, FAQs, videos, and more. Many of the resources have been translated into multiple languages. Some of the future work includes tele-town halls and putting information in students' back to school packets. ISLS plans to continue coordinating efforts with ReadyWA and building more of an infrastructure around their communications materials.

Specifically, some of the communications materials we would like to create are:

- A student voices video: “What I wish I knew in high school”
- A visual depiction of the paths/options for students who receive lower SB scores (1 or 2)
- A handout, document, or graphic that provides information and explains differences between the Smarter Balanced postsecondary placement agreements
- An informational insert about dual credit options to be included with the score reports for the SB assessment.
- A document that provides resources for parents, explaining the SB assessment, the system of testing, and how they can better communicate with and help their kids
- A document/graphic depicting the changing exit exams and/or graduation requirements

We will also need to deepen and broaden our communication within educational sectors, particularly postsecondary education. In the past, Washington higher

education institutions have been hesitant to get involved in K-12 issues. Higher education institutions in Washington have taken a great step by establishing postsecondary placement agreements for students who demonstrate they are college ready on the SB assessment. However, higher education could do more to take a stronger stance in support of the new standards. One way to encourage this would be to get more colleges to sign in support of [Higher Ed for Higher Standards](#).²¹

In addition, we need to align communications efforts between sectors and other organizations to produce a common message to educators about Smarter Balanced scores. We plan to accomplish this by creating joint messaging among team member organizations at upcoming conferences. That is, as ISLS team agencies present at the wide range of conferences over the next year, each presentation could include key messaging about the SB assessments, Bridge Courses and SB placement agreements. Conference examples include: Washington Educators' Conference, Washington State School Directors' Association Annual Conference, Washington School Counselors Summer Institute, and the Parent Teacher Association Conference.

In all efforts, the ISLS team will seek the support of K-12 teacher partners who can serve as advocates or spokespeople in a community. Materials will also highlight the districts where testing and communication goes well.

Financial assistance from the NGA will make these communications ideas a reality. In addition, it would be helpful to have one more cross-state meeting to share lessons learned amongst the early adopter states.

What benefits did your state realize from participation in this project? What were the project's successes and challenges?

It has been extremely valuable to have a space where all sectors and groups are represented in a single forum, and where open conversations about challenges, bumps along the road, and strategies for successful implementation can be shared. Cross-state meetings have allowed state participants to learn from other states facing the same challenges, have dedicated team time, and build relationships.

Tangible products of the ISLS work include the materials developed with the optional \$10,000 communication funds. The ISLS group contracted with Strategies 360 to develop FAQs for [guidance counselors](#)²² and [postsecondary educators](#)²³ and an [infographic for students and families](#).²⁴ The ISLS group coordinated with ReadyWA to send the infographic to all Washington schools, along with a letter and a [video narrative](#)²⁵ to accompany the infographic.

Another success has been that the ISLS forum has allowed for the various postsecondary sectors (community and technical colleges, four-year public

baccalaureates, and private independent colleges) to have an open space to communicate. SBCTC also led the workgroup (Core to College Project) that helped each sector establish postsecondary placement agreements:

- [Public baccalaureates](#) ²⁶
- [Community and technical colleges](#) ²⁷
- [Private independent colleges](#) ²⁸

Of the meetings, support, and financial resources provided to your state, what was most helpful? What could be improved in future projects?

Team members found it helpful that WSAC staff were able to provide facilitation and convene meetings, since our agency's mission has a lot of overlap with this work. Please note that we used some of our contractual funding to help with staff salary for the project leads, Anne Messerly and Noreen Light.

Technical assistance from NGA staff was also quite valuable. Kate Nielson and Sarah Silverman were both proactive and responsive in their communications with the ISLS team and WSAC staff, and they attended many of our team meetings. It was also helpful that NGA staff provided us with resources and research along the way that they thought might be helpful.

For future projects, it may be useful to have more funding dedicated specifically to communications. The \$10,000.00 was certainly appreciated, however we found the need to supplement this amount through other sources. ReadyWA sought and received funding through State Farm Insurance to distribute the final infographic product to all schools.

In all, we would like to express our gratitude for the financial support, technical assistance, and skilled facilitation provided through the funding partners. Much of the work accomplished through the ISLS team would not have been possible without this support.

CONTACT THE AUTHORS

For more information about this report, contact Anne Messerly at 360-753-7855 or annem@wsac.wa.gov.

SOURCES

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