

"The difference between involvement and commitment is like ham and eggs. The chicken is involved; the pig is committed."

Martina Navratilova

Dear Fife School District Community,

As we set out for another exciting school year in Fife School District, I take this opportunity to speak candidly with you about the challenges that lie ahead for the coming year. I feel compelled to take a larger than usual part of the newsletter to explain and interpret the assessment data that has just come out in the media. Data is good to have but only when used in full context with all of the supporting and subgroup data, and that takes a little digging and communication time and effort on my part. Even though this is the last year of the WASL, we take the data seriously and I would like to share what it looks like broken down into usable information that can actually improve our program and educational practice. I would anticipate that this is what you would expect us to do if we are going to ask your children to spend so much time on so many assessments. I think you will better understand our challenges as a school district with the changes here in Fife, and also feel much better about the overall performance of our students, especially based on how the data is presented in the media.

The goal of Fife School District is to graduate 100% of our students each year. **We are very proud to report that this past June we graduated 100% of all Fife High School seniors.** This is outstanding news and validates the hard work our teachers have done to identify the concepts our students are finding the toughest to tackle and redesigning work that will engage them in these tasks. It is also a representation of the amazing efforts our students demonstrate each day.

Despite this overwhelming success rate, our Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results show us that, as with all school districts, we have a few demographics toward which to continue to concentrate our efforts.

- English Language Learners (ELL)
- Special Education students
- Low income students

In fact you may have read in the media recently that, like most districts in our region, we have been moved into Level 2 Improvement. You can visit our website at www.fifeschools.com for more information from the state on this issue that all districts face.

Here is what we are planning to either implement or continue doing to address the specific needs of these students:

- Implement a new core reading curriculum in kindergarten-fifth grade. This curriculum has a specific strand of strategies to use with struggling students such as ELL and Special Education students.
- Continued professional development for all staff around best practices in teaching ELL students.
- Continue district design academies. These Working on the Work academies take teachers through a specific design template to create engaging work around tough to

teach and/or difficult to learn concepts. These are the specific concepts our testing results show us our kids are struggling with.

- Our interventionist team meets together regularly to ensure that all kids in the district receive the same quality support in reading and mathematics.

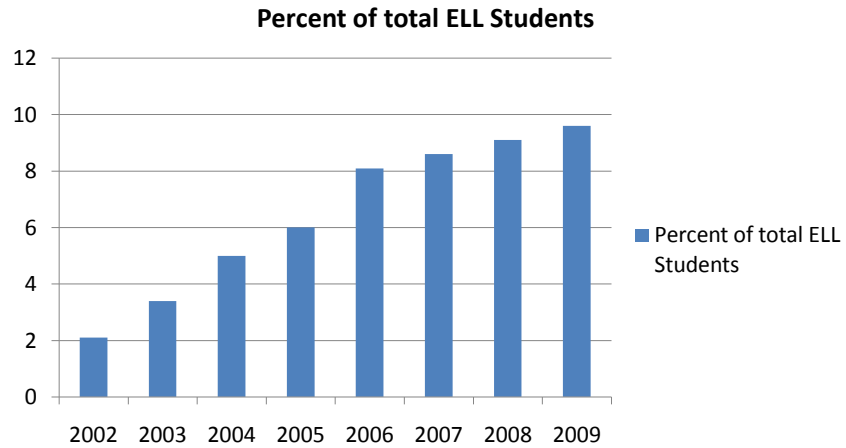
In November of last year I communicated a very similar message and prepared our community for what we predicted would appear as flat WASL scores for the final administration of this testing system. Data such as the WASL is useful when you truly use it to assess the education your specific child is getting and when a school district can break the data down to see the areas that really need to be addressed in curriculum and instruction. If we do not see what the actual challenges are and simply look at overall data, it can be very misleading as you will see.

As we continue to strive to meet the needs of all of our students, I feel compelled to give you some interesting, informative, and even inspiring data. In Fife schools, we have witnessed that the demographic of our little school district is changing and in fact, has changed dramatically over the past five years with regard to the overall population of students that we serve. Let me be very clear that I think that this is a wonderful thing and that we are a better and richer district for seeing an increase in diversity. That diversity does bring with it some obvious challenges that our little school district has not faced before. Seven years ago, the percentage of students that did not speak English as their primary language was under three percent. Today that number is over thirty percent at Discovery Primary alone and growing dramatically throughout the school district. There is in fact no other district in our area growing at such a pace.

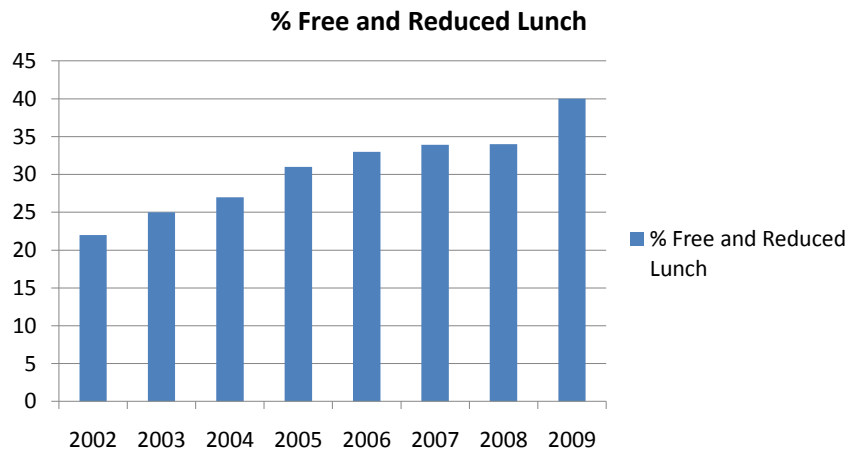
Research, as well as common sense, indicates that when a rapidly growing segment of your student population is learning basic English while they are learning our curriculum and the assessment that you give is in English, you will see an impact in test data. In fact, a recent issue of *The School Administrator* journal reports that "because of lack of teacher preparedness and watered down curriculum across the nation, between 69 and 90 percent of English Language Learners in middle and high schools who were born in the United States and have been in U.S. schools have not achieved the academic proficiency to succeed in the all-English mainstream program." We think that this is unacceptable and avoidable here in Fife and, as you can see in the plan that I have identified in the above message, we are dealing with this challenge head on to ensure that all of our students learn at high levels regardless of language acquisition challenges. This is hard, but important work. I have put together some assumed questions and answers regarding not only this challenge but also that get to the heart of what the data really shows us about the education that children in general are getting in our district. You may be surprised since the data represented in the news media does not get to the challenges and successes that are truly in that data.

How much has the number of English Language Learners or ELL (students who speak very little English and it is not their primary language in the home) grown district-wide over the past several years? Also, how is our demographic changing with regard to low income students over the past several years?

Growth in % of English Language Learners or ELL Students in Fife Transitional Bilingual Program since 2002

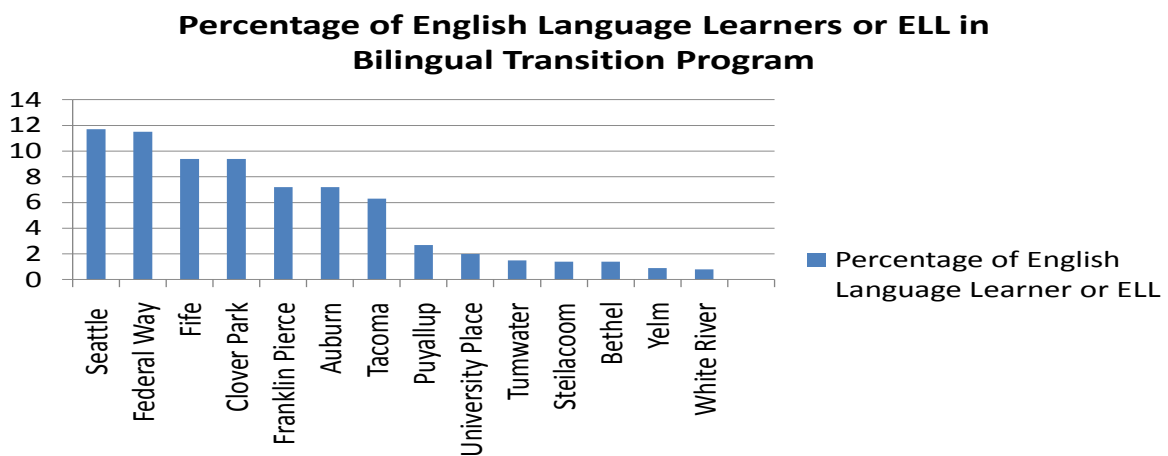


Change in % of Low Income in Fife School District since 2002



Even though it is obvious that the population and demographics in our district is changing, isn't this the same for all districts in our area? If I look at the data and compared Fife to state averages and to our neighboring districts, isn't this accurate to do as all districts have the same challenge? Actually, this is not the case and here is the actual data from the OSPI site. Again, this is not an excuse for flat overall performance but rather an earnest look at the challenges we face in a subpopulation of hard working kids that are going to face huge challenges on state assessment until the test is indeed given in their native language. (We are told this may happen in the next two years.)

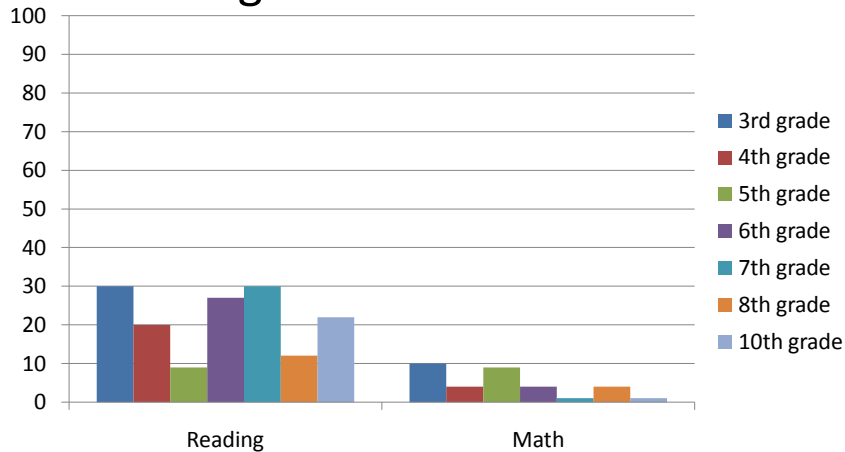
District Comparisons of 2008-2009 ELL Populations



As you can see in this data, we compare only to Seattle, Federal Way, and Clover Park in the challenge of ELL populations and the data is very clear. If you must compare districts based upon demographics, the day has passed to compare our overall performance with districts that border us. Our challenge, quite frankly, is quite different than it used to be.

What is the actual performance of this population of ELL students? It must be very challenging to pass the WASL when you not only need to know, for instance, how to do the math but also must explain your answers in English? Here is what our data shows and it is important to note that our ELL kids are performing at the same levels as all ELL kids in the area.

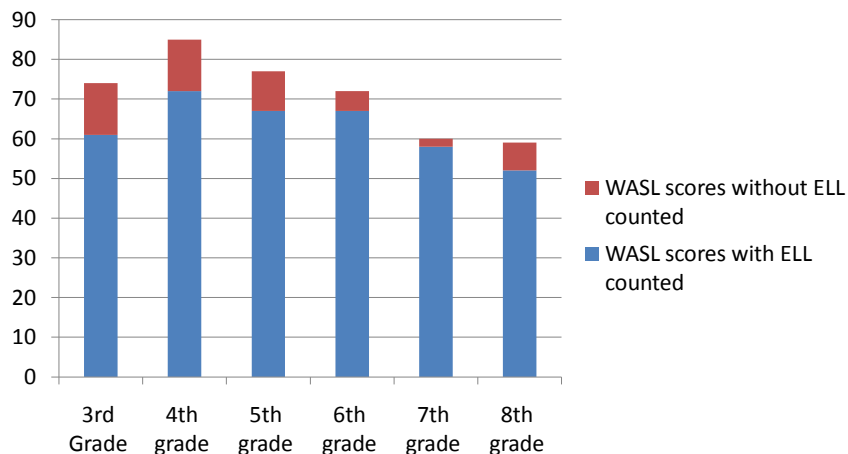
Percentage of ELL Bilingual Transition students meeting the standard by grade level in Fife



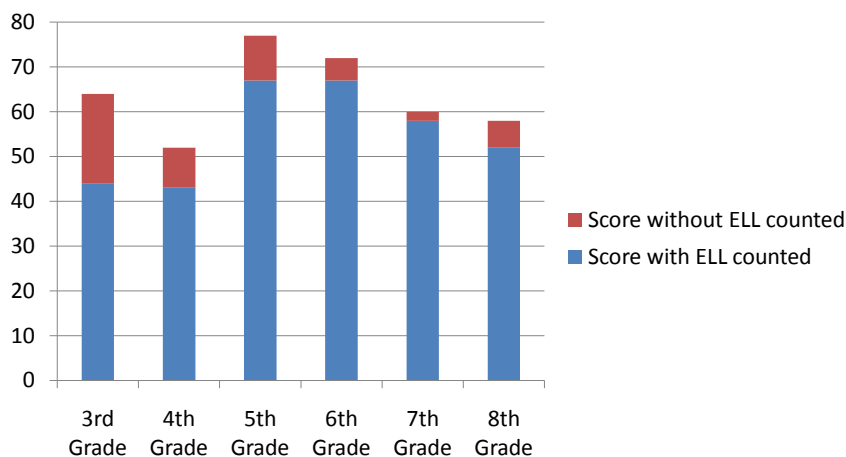
Over time, our WASL increases have slowed a little as one would expect due largely to this new challenge and due to the fact that our demographics are changing with regard to ELL and poverty levels. It is important to break the data down and to see how our core program is doing when you factor out other programs which are great challenges. In our school district we talk about “no concept left behind” rather than simply “no child left behind” because we feel that no educator would ever purposefully leave a child behind; however, there is something we can do about the concepts that we teach on a daily basis. The goal here is that we get very clear about the concepts that our students struggle with and provide teachers the time as well as the process needed to collaborate in designing engaging lessons that will address those concepts and ensure profound mastery learning. Although nearly 100% of our students graduate on time based upon the WASL, we feel committed to go the extra mile to ensure that our students are truly learning what they are taught concept by concept.

How are our kids doing in our core program? These are students that do not face a language barrier and, therefore, face a higher expectation for meeting the state standards. In the following graphs in just reading and math, I have provided for you that data. The blue cell indicates the scores as they appeared in the media and the red addition to the cell indicates what those scores are when you factor out and separate the ELL data. Again, this is done to demonstrate not only the challenge but also a realistic picture of the effectiveness of our base curriculum and instruction.

Impact of ELL scores on overall 2009 district WASL data in Reading



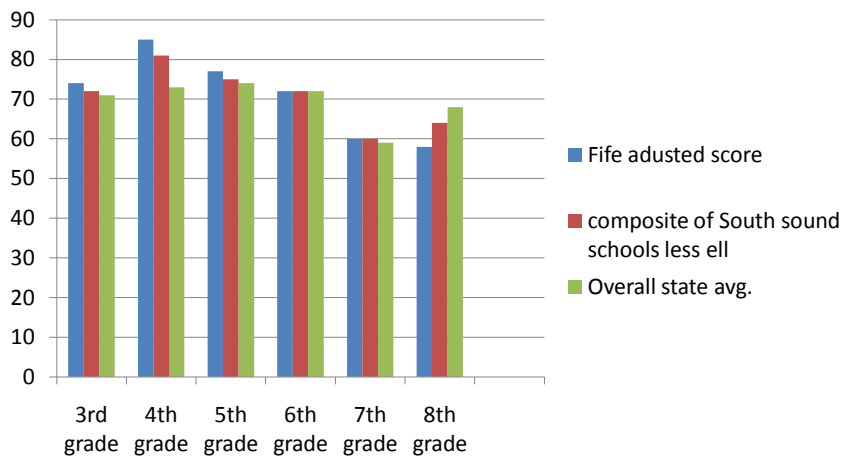
Impact of ELL scores on overall district 2009 WASL data in Math



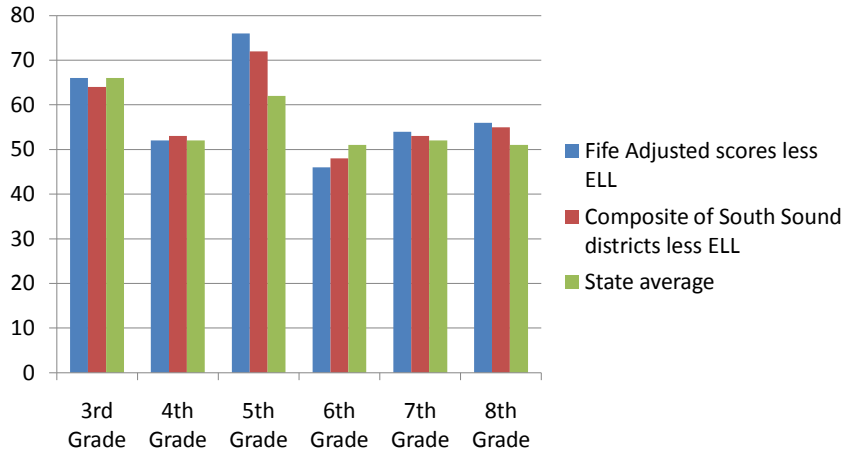
What would our data look like when compared to the overall state averages and other districts around us when you break out in those districts the same bilingual transitional subpopulation?

These two graphs reflect that our basic education program is not only solid but also demonstrates that when like data is actually compared, our students are getting one of the finer educations in Western Washington. The blue cell represents our data without ELL scores and the red cell shows an average of many school districts in the South Puget Sound with the same data adjusted. The green cell is the simple state average. It is clear in comparison that our program is solid even though the recent data reported would give a different perception. It is upon this specific data that we must make our decisions about our work for the future. We certainly have our challenges in reading, math, writing, and especially science. But, our challenge in the basic program is no greater than that of any other district and we have a solid plan in place to address this. My commitment to you is that we will redouble our efforts for our ELL children and our children of poverty as well. This is a great challenge but again, we are up to it for sure and we are already a few years into the implementation of those good plans which can be viewed via our school improvement plans on our district website.

**“Apples to Apples” Comparison of Fife ELL adjusted
Reading scores to area school districts
i.e. How is our basic education program really stacking up?**



**“Apples to Apples” Comparison of Fife ELL adjusted Math scores to area school districts
i.e. How is our basic education program really stacking up?**



As you can see by this adjusted data, our students are doing quite well. We are fully aware of the areas that we will need to continue to work on. We are not happy with those results and will do better in the future. We use data the right way in this school district. We specify the concepts that our kids struggle with and actually provide our teachers time to redesign the lessons and the work that we ask our kids to do in order to further engage them in their school work. Fortunately this does not change with the introduction of a new test, as the data will be the same, and we will be all set for the coming years with regards to our improvement efforts.

Finally, I am very proud of the fact that our teachers and students are working hard to teach and learn at high levels. In Fife, we truly believe that if we focus on taking the extra effort to design work that is engaging for our students, the test scores will be one measure of our success. While we deal with new challenges, changing populations, and more frequent testing for our kids, we are proud of our results and certainly in our approach that ensures authentic learning and not simply teaching to one test.

We are very excited about the start of the new school year and are ready to meet our challenges head on. Thanks, as always, for your steadfast support of our important efforts in Fife School District.