



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

DR. TERRY BERGESON OLD CAPITOL BUILDING • PO BOX 47200 • OLYMPIA WA 98504-7200 • <http://www.k12.wa.us>

May 18, 2007

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

At budget time, education and health care are often regarded as competitors. The rest of the time, common sense prevails: educators and health care advocates, hand in hand, move our society toward our shared goals of equal opportunity and social justice for all. We know that we have an arduous journey to achieve our goals, and that we need to work together to overcome the countervailing trends of rising child poverty and deepening division between rich and poor. We also recognize that the legacy of racism must be countered by increasing our efforts to create culturally competent education and health systems.

At OSPI, we're deeply committed to the work of closing the opportunity/achievement gap for all students of color and students in poverty. It's a central part of our mission. Even though we educators tend to think that classrooms are the center of the universe, we know that we can't do this alone. We recognize that class time comprises only six out of every 24 hours, five days a week. And even those precious six hours are compromised when students' health needs (or their needs for cultural relevance, high expectations, and personalized learning) aren't met.

That's why I so strongly supported increased funding for the Nurse Corps, reform of the children's mental health system, and the establishment of ambitious goals for providing health insurance for all children in Washington. In the 21st century, education is not optional; it is vital. So is access to affordable, high quality, and timely health care. Our task is to find ways to weave both into the lives of children and families in ways that are culturally appropriate, easy to access, and mutually supportive.

We want all students to learn to levels that assure them of a long and healthy life. And we want all children to come to school full of vitality, curiosity, energy, and confidence. So as you exchange ideas and information today, I hope that the power of this vision of what ought to be will be strong enough to overcome the inertia of what is.

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After all, education and health care are both huge systems, serving millions of people. If we can create and harness the synergy between these two systems to reduce the inequalities in our society, there is no doubt that we can make an enormous and enduring difference in the lives of the next generation.

I trust that today's conversation is the beginning of a long-term, coordinated effort between our two systems and the families and children we serve. I pledge the fullest support and participation of OSPI in this endeavor. I have high expectations for creative and powerful ideas from this group, and wish you a stimulating and productive day.

Warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Terry Bergeson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Terry Bergeson
State Superintendent