



SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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

June 3, 2005

Ms. Nancy Vernon
Post Office Box 192
Puyallup, WA 98375

Dear Ms. Vernon:

I'm writing in response to your letter of May 24, 2005 and email of June 1, 2005 expressing your judgment that Washington's statewide academic assessment promotes religious or theosophical teachings and the personally-held religious beliefs of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and/or various staff of the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). Per your request in paragraph three of your letter, I would like to address an apparent misunderstanding with regards to development and content of the state academic standards and the assessment used to measure the standards.

The development of the academic standards and the assessment were undertaken at the direction of the state legislature. The process Washington used to first develop its academic standards at the three benchmarks and later its grade level expectations for all grades is one that has involved hundreds of people from all walks of life who care about education and our schoolchildren – educators, business and community leaders, parents and other interested parties – and has extended over a period of more than a decade.

The Essential Academic Learning Requirements and Grade Level Expectations stem from the work of many subcommittees with wide representation of the above stakeholders, all of whom voluntarily offered to participate. Their work has been reviewed by outside entities, both upon the request of OSPI and through independently-generated research.

There is no religious content in the academic standards. At no time have any of the outside reviews identified any concern that our standards contained content that either explicitly or implicitly teaches, influences or promotes any religious philosophy. And because the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is a measure of the academic standards themselves and how well they are being taught in our state's schools, the WASL has no relationship to religious beliefs or teachings in any manner.

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While this may be a simplistic explanation of our state's academic standards and their relationship to our state assessment, it provides enough context for one to understand how it would literally be impossible for the work of hundreds of independent participants to be coordinated to imbue our state's learning standards with religious overtones or to fulfill a religious philosophy.

As always, we are committed to upholding the public disclosure laws of the State of Washington and have complied with your many requests for documents, notes and emails regarding the work of OSPI. However, we will not be responding to your latest series of questions because they do not relate to official documents or materials produced for or on behalf of OSPI.

Superintendent Bergeson has made it clear to me that she is not a spokesperson for any religious organization or theosophical perspective, and she does not believe the WASL determines the humanity of a person. As for the other issues you raise, it appears to me that we may need to "agree-to-disagree" on the validity of the thoughts you express.

Sincerely,



Marty Daybell
Deputy Superintendent
Administration and Operations

MD:sz