

From: [Superintendent](#)
To: [EPS.MailList](#)
Subject: Happy Thanksgiving, Congratulations & Thank You!
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Good morning, colleagues! It's just two days until Thanksgiving! What better time is there than this wonderful November day to wish you the very best of this fall holiday, and to thank you for the tremendous accomplishment we've just achieved as a district-wide team of 2,215 people working together for our students.

Once again, our work has resulted in more students earning high school diplomas in four years than ever before in Everett Public Schools. With the Class of 2018, we reached an all-time high four-year graduation rate of 95.7 percent! This is truly remarkable, and a level of attainment well worth congratulations. ***None of this success is possible without passionate and professional staff focused on each student's success. Your passion and your focus made it happen.***

<i>Four-year</i>	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
graduation rate	84.4%	89.3%	90.2%	90.9%	92.9%	95.7%

<i>Five-year</i>	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
graduation rate	88.5%	91.2%	94.5%	94.7%	95.2%	94.6%

Some critics of our schools and our hard work to raise our rates from the low 50s over the past 15 years have dismissed our practice of "doing whatever it takes" to support each student's success as making graduation too easy, or helping students too much. Lance Bella, our Everett High principal, gets "fired up" when he hears this disparagement. Recently, he described why such criticism is **uninformed and disrespectful** of your work. He explains far better than I why such criticism is an **irresponsible** dismissal of students whose potentials, through no fault of their own, have been limited by the zip codes in which they live or the cards life has dealt them.

I encourage you to take a moment to read how Lance phrased his thinking in a message to EHS staff. I found his words resonated deeply with me, especially as we approach this traditional holiday of Thanksgiving. Lance's message is a gift to all of us, and it's worth sharing with anyone in our community who joins in our belief in *each* student's abilities, and who is passionate about *equity* in education.

"We are not the only district with high graduation rates. In fact, many affluent districts across the country often achieve similarly high rates. The correlation between the level of affluence in a district and its graduation rates has long been known. What is often not mentioned are the myriad supports in affluent districts that remain hidden and out of conversation.

These are available to people with means. For example, a cottage industry of tutors-for-hire

*run hourly sessions costing anywhere from \$50 an hour to over \$200 an hour. Many families can't afford those tutors but use them on a regular basis. There's nothing wrong with that, as every family wants to do whatever they can to help their child succeed. However, that is somehow seen as more acceptable than a teacher coming in during the middle of the summer to sit side-by-side with the student who perhaps needs only her algebra credit to graduate. **To ignore one support while questioning the merit of the other seems odd.***

Another cottage industry available to people of means are "college guidance specialists." These people know the application and college system deeply; they work with families to ensure students have the right resume to get them into exactly the college they wish to enter. I briefly worked with an English teacher who recognized this opportunity. She left the classroom, and within three years was making more than the district superintendent. Such specialists often charge \$1,500 to \$5,000 to "counsel" students and their families on what exactly they need to do to get where they want to go. Again, I am not arguing against this kind of support. I am merely suggesting that it is an example on the other end of the spectrum of how far families of means will and can go to help their students find success.

We live in a culture in which those who have access to wealth also have access to supports that the rest of us simply do not share. My point is this: at EHS we have a staff who works hard to mitigate imbalance in our culture that, at its root, rises out of these inequities. We are doing great work, and we are changing the trajectory of the lives of students whose only support lies in the classrooms in which they sit, with teachers who refuse to ever give up on a single kid. Thank you all for the hard work you do every day to make Everett High a place that proudly does whatever it can to make sure that equity and access to the promise of the American Dream is afforded to all.

Thanks to Lance for speaking out and for standing up for each student and every staff member at Everett High. I'm honored to be able to share these words, to extend that advocacy to each staff member, and to each family and community partner who helps us with this work.

Colleagues, I am humbled, thankful, and proud of your commitment to ensure more students earn diplomas which are key to their futures beyond high school.

This week is regarded as the gateway to the holiday season, and how appropriate it is that the season begins with Thanksgiving and its emphasis on gratitude. In the spirit of what each of you contributes to the success of our students, thank you for choosing to be a team member in this school district, for your commitment to improving the future, and for holding fast to our mission to inspire, educate and prepare each student to achieve to high standards, contribute to our community, and thrive in a global society.

Please take time to relish another year of graduation success. Enjoy a safe and celebratory Thanksgiving holiday. Savor the tremendous value of your work and our accomplishments together as we give thanks for the gifts that are ours this holiday. Happy Thanksgiving!

Warm regards,

Gary



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