



News release

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Superintendent retiring after 10 years of district leadership

Dr. Cohn described his time in Everett Public Schools as the most rewarding of his career.

Superintendent Gary Cohn began his work in Everett Public Schools on July 1, 2009. After 10 years at the helm in Everett Public Schools, he is retiring this summer, bringing to a close 39 years in education. He describes the time here as “the best and most rewarding” of his career.

In his retirement announcement to staff today, Dr. Cohn credited the school board, the community, an exceptional leadership team and an unparalleled professional staff for keeping the district steadily on course and focused on key strategic priorities during turbulent times and constant change. “When we worked together as a community to write a new strategic plan in 2010, it wasn’t to change what was going well in the district then. The new strategic priorities were intended to build upon the good work done by others, and to anticipate what students would need to achieve success in the future.”

Board president Carol Andrews expressed appreciation for Dr. Cohn’s vision and strategic leadership. “In addition to seeing the vision and understanding the goals, Gary is able to strategize to accomplish the big goals and pay close attention to the details necessary to achieve that vision. For example, our graduation rate increases are incredible! Ninety-five percent of our students now graduate in four years. That kind of success doesn’t just happen in the senior year or even by starting in the freshman year. With Gary’s leadership, we are working toward graduation by starting in preschool; we are working toward graduation during expansive summer school; we have a voter-approved plan to make sure each student has access to learning technology in the next three years; we are whittling away at the achievement gaps between different demographic groups so each student aspires to graduation. As we know, there is no silver bullet to graduation, so Gary has led efforts to institute a network of supports collectively adding up to more students succeeding in our schools.”

President Andrews notes recent data analysis by the Center for Educational Excellence to illustrate the district’s success helping low income students achieve. “Four out of 10 of our students live in poverty,” she notes. “The Center for Educational Effectiveness has compared the “expected” student learning progress of all the schools in Washington State based upon those schools’ poverty levels. Everett is the *only* district of 6,000 or more students in the state in which *every* school outperforms what the statistics project based upon poverty levels in our schools. This is an example of the power of change and continuous improvement when you have a broadly held vision and clear goals.”

President Andrews points out, “The list of both small and large changes and achievements Gary has inspired, led, and supported is remarkable. We’ve published a [summary of those achievements](#) for those who want more information. It’s an

impressive statement of what can be done when the vision is well known, the strategies are targeted, and good people work together on behalf of children.”

When asked, Dr. Cohn was less interested in the 10-year overview of achievements than in thanking those he believes deserve credit for those achievements. “Two thousand plus staff members deserve credit for this work as do parents who believe in education and entrust us with their children every day. The communities who not only speak of supporting education but *act* on that support with partnerships, volunteerism, and engagement – they deserve credit for the continuous learning improvement of our students.”

He refers to the message he sent staff today when he announced his retirement. “Our achievements are possible only because everyone in the organization played well their key roles – no matter how big or small they might appear to the casual observer. Little things make a big impact: a simple act of kindness like a custodian opening a door on a cold morning, a food and nutrition staff member serving a smile with a salad, a para professional helping calm a nervous child, an office staffer helping find a tissue for a runny nose, a bus driver with the first and last smile of the day, a groundskeeper removing winter leaves so spring tulips shine, a bright, friendly voice on the phone, a quick and thorough response to an email inquiry, a principal welcoming a new family, and a teacher making time to “high five” every student who enters the door.

“The *Everett Way* of making school the best part of each student’s day and continuously improving how well and what students learn is the best part of this work. I’m excited and committed to continuing it over my remaining months. I’m also confident the next superintendent will do as I did – build upon the strong foundations of the past, dip into the wellspring of support for schools in this community, and recognize Everett Public Schools is unparalleled in the state.”

Karen Madsen was a board director when Dr. Cohn was hired. She remembered how quickly he was recognized by parents as a leader who cared and was destined to make a difference. “In 2011, I had the honor of presenting him with the [PTSA Educator of the Year Award](#). At that time, I said of Gary, ‘Dr. Cohn is honored for his exceptional ability to educate people throughout our community about the importance of focusing on each student’s success in our schools. His award is based on his ability to connect with students and adults, his unparalleled work ethic, his focus on efforts all across the district to optimize the achievement of each of our students, and his consummate ability to leverage what is happening on the state and national level to the benefit of the district. Though he does not work daily with students, Dr. Cohn is recognized by the PTA members as an educator of excellence.’ Those words are as true today as they were all those years ago.”

Ed Petersen, now Housing Hope’s chief strategic officer, was on the school board when Dr. Cohn was chosen as the district’s new superintendent. “A changing community with growing racial and ethnic diversity, homelessness challenges, and the importance of educating for the 21st century were all on my mind in 2008 as we selected a new superintendent. We needed a new strategic plan and a facilitator who could bring

consensus building and collaboration to this vital task. In Dr. Gary Cohn we found the right leader. He has delivered phenomenal results.”

Sue Cooper, also a board member when Dr. Cohn was chosen, said he stood out in the selection process because of his laser focus on student learning and his emphasis on teamwork. “His high energy and passion for improving student learning was evident from the first time the board met him in spring 2009. He immediately recognized and welcomed the district’s clear focus on student learning and gave credit to district staff for the significant work done toward that goal before his arrival. Even with a number of unanticipated challenges during his tenure, Gary and his leadership team have always managed to do what is best for kids; that is, provide the necessary support for each child to succeed. That laser focus, problem-solving, community support and determination by all involved have resulted in amazing academic improvements for our students at all levels through Gary’s leadership. The statistics on ESD student achievement and the awards the District has received throughout Gary’s tenure speak for themselves. He would be the first to say that it has been a team effort.”

Past board member Ted Wenta emphasized the benefit of having had a decade of leadership stability. “Organizations and those they serve are better off when leadership and vision are clear and consistent. With six-year board member terms and a superintendent in place for 10 years, our community has enjoyed school leaders pulling together as a team in the same direction. Even when we disagreed on methods, we all agreed on the end goals, and we had time to learn the complexities of governing one of the largest school districts in the state.

“It was an honor and pleasure to serve as school board president when he was recognized as Superintendent of the Year in 2017 – out of 295 districts in the state. This award was richly deserved and a recognition of his commitment to the students of our state in his 39 years in public education.”

“We’ve been fortunate to have had the stability and leadership of a long-time superintendent,” said President Andrews. “Now we must launch a process to recruit another, and we know it’s important to do so early. That process will be an agenda item for upcoming board meetings. I believe Everett Public Schools’ reputation will draw many high-quality candidates, and we know there will be strong community interest in how we make the selection.”

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For more information:

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BACKGROUNDER – Dr. Cohn’s bio

Dr. Gary Cohn was selected superintendent of Everett Public Schools in 2009. During his leadership, Everett launched a districtwide continuous improvement process to generate significant increases in student achievement along with four- and five-year graduation rates, and to diminish achievement gaps among student groups. Dr. Cohn has led a group of superintendents in creating a standards-based superintendent

evaluation model that mirrors the growth-focused evaluation used to evaluate and foster professional growth of Washington teachers and principals.

Dr. Cohn serves on the boards of YMCA of Snohomish County, Snohomish County Health Alliance, Washington Alliance for Better Schools, and the Governor's Council for the Healthiest Next Generation at the invitation of Governor Jay Inslee. He formerly served on the boards of United Way of Snohomish County and the state's Professional Educator Standards Board at the appointment of former Governor Chris Gregoire. He was recently appointed to Mayor Cassie Franklin's Transition Task Force and County Executive Dave Somers' Snohomish County Aerospace Task Force.

Dr. Cohn served as superintendent of the Port Angeles School District for eight years before coming to Everett. He was vice president at Lake Washington Technical College, where he also served as interim president. He taught marketing and business education for the Northshore School District and was inducted into the [Washington DECA Hall of Fame](#) in 2015. Prior to becoming an educator, he worked for nearly three years for an international manufacturer and marketer of computer systems.

Dr. Cohn completed a doctor of philosophy degree in education at the University of Washington, earned a master of business administration degree at Seattle University and a bachelor's degree with majors in economics and business administration from the University of Puget Sound.

Within his first two years in Everett, Dr. Cohn was recognized by the district's Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) for his work to improve student learning with the PTSA Educator of the Year Award in 2011. Dr. Cohn was recently named [2017 Superintendent of the Year](#) by the Washington Association of School Administrators, and awarded the Order of Merit by Everett's Central Lions Club.