

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
To: [EPS.Maillist](#)
Subject: Innovation, Creativity, Celebration & Partners in Our Work
Date: Tuesday, March 17, 2015 4:47:43 AM
Attachments: [image002.png](#)

Dear Colleague:

As last week came to a close, I was struck by how well the stars align, sometimes. (Yes, this is a very small pun on the [Thoughtexchange](#) experience ... sorry.) This certainly was the case recently with two significant events.

STAR #1

On Feb. 25, all who attended experienced out-of-this-world energy during the annual [Celebration of Innovation](#). Every year I wonder how this event could possibly get any better, or more robustly represent classroom learning innovation in our schools. Yet, each year it expands – there are more displays, more knock-your-socks-off displays and incredibly impressive students, and more enthusiastic and engaged visitors. This year, the show was so big that most of the robotics displays rocked and rolled (and threw balls, and stacked boxes, and climbed hills, and ...) on the mezzanine high above the Cascade High School gym where the rest of the action unfolded.

Our technology leaders have been working with the district's [STEM Program](#) team to plan the [Everett STEM Expo](#) scheduled for June 8. They have proposed that next year (2016) we should merge the two events so the same teachers aren't presenting twice, and to demonstrate that technology is *not* a stand-alone idea, but rather an *integral* part of our district-wide, interdisciplinary approach to integrating STEM skills throughout our curriculum and instruction. The STEM Expo will be held at Xfinity Center and includes local STEM businesses. Stay tuned for news about a combined event next year!

STAR #2

With our imaginations still whirling with ideas and inspiration from the *Celebration of Innovation*, the school board, superintendent's cabinet, several school principals, and I spent the next two days (Feb. 26 and 27) at the [Microsoft Executive Briefing Center](#) and at a Microsoft demonstration high school. While the proximity of the *Celebration of Innovation* and our visits to Redmond and Bellevue was purely serendipitous, I am convinced the connections resonated with all of the attendees.

We attended the [Executive Briefing](#) to learn how Microsoft recruits, hires, organizes, encourages, evaluates, and supports **creativity, innovation** and **technology integration**. We learn how that is exemplified at [Sammamish High School](#), recipient of an [Investing in Innovation \(i3\) Grant](#) focused on increasing college- and career-ready standards for all

students. Irrespective of varying opinions about the company's market dominance, Microsoft is dramatically successful in part because the company culture so masterfully welcomes, expects, fosters and supports creativity, innovation, and technology integration.

Microsoft is a world leader in innovation. I believe through partnerships with such organizations in our community, we can learn best practices in 21st century skills to meet students' learning needs more quickly and more thoroughly than we can if we "invent" them ourselves.

There is no doubt that we have made impressive progress integrating technology in our instructional and support programs! I am confident in this district's culture of "readiness to learn" and proud of how we are integrating technology in teaching and operations – all of which was evident at the *Celebration of Innovation*.

Every day I visit classrooms, teachers tell me we have further to go. At Sammamish High, our team saw what *one model* of technology integration looks like in a [Microsoft in Education](#) partner high school's classrooms. We saw how a "1:1" school – where every student has his or her own personal computing device – improves student engagement, creativity, innovation and success.

In Everett Public Schools, we have carts of Chromebooks, computer labs, some classroom teaching stations and teacher and support staff stations; staff and students very evidently use a variety of computers. We are enjoying an expanding menu of professional development opportunities (despite substitute shortages) to practice integrating technology into instruction and operational work.

Our hard-won *Learning Improvement Fridays* safeguard collaborative time to learn and work together to improve student learning in countless ways – *including* technology integration.

As wonderful and advanced (*by education standards*) as these technology resources and collaboration time are, our platform and integration level does not rise to the level of what world class organizations must employ to compete in a global economy. They are not enough to ensure our students learn and are fluent in *Future Ready* skills necessary to compete for careers and educational opportunities. *And let's be clear: our students will have to compete in a global economy to prosper in the world they will inherit from us.*

Our district has the commitment. Our district has the talent. Of these things I am certain. What we do not have in this district, or in our state, is a long-term funding system that pays for professional development and hardware, maintenance and upgrades capable of building and sustaining a "1:1" program in our schools.

We owe our current educational technology progress to our community's generous support of Technology and Capital Levies – those ballot measure that provide six years' of funding for "new" hardware, software and the professional development necessary to use them. The last technology levy our voters approved was in 2010. You can do the math; we are very close to the end of the funding approved by our voters five years ago.

Since only 58 percent of our voters approved of the capital bond in February and April last year (a bond requires 60 percent approval to pass), *which would have paid for some technology and a lot of school upgrades, more classrooms, and enhance school safety*, the board has been carefully considering when to ask the voters to approve additional local funding for technology.

Later this month we'll learn more about what our community says about the district and schools in general when the *Thoughtexchange* results are published on the Web. The board will also be hearing more about staff and community thoughts on capital projects and technology at three [Fishbowl](#) discussions this spring. *(The dates and times for these events are at the end of the message, and more details about them will be coming over the next few weeks.)* I really hope numerous staff will decide to join in these discussions.

In the meantime, here are comments from some who took part in the Microsoft Executive Briefing. I hope you catch their excitement and commitment to "doing what it takes" to ensure our students have *Future Ready* skills.

- *The learning we did together, while highlighting our limitations due to our hardware and software, showed the possibilities of what we could be doing in our classrooms and provided a valuable example.*
- *Technology itself will not transform the classroom, but a teacher who is willing to adopt 21st century skills in a classroom can be strongly aided by technology.*
- *Let's get over the "change" and "fear" and the "time" factors – sure it's going to feel different; it's going to require problem solving, and it's going to take time, but this isn't new. Technology, particularly the messaging and inking software, are not one more thing or "add ons;" they are just updated settings and features to personalize the learning experience.*

Whatever direction we go, whatever steps we take to meet staff AND student technology learning needs, we are well positioned for the journey. We are increasingly benefiting from deep community partnerships that leverage our existing resources and talents. We have, without a doubt, the state's finest cadre of teachers, support staff and administrators – and our school board was justifiably named "distinguished" by the state. The road ahead is never fully clear, and it is likely not going to be easy. It is passable, and we can and will travel it on behalf of today's and tomorrow's students. I am so proud to be "going there" with you, for all of our students.

Warm regards, and thank you for taking the time to read all of this “thought piece” ...

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Gary



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As promised above:

This season’s opportunities to speak, listen, observe, learn and reflect with the school board:

1. Watch for announcements of what our community says about schools and the district coming later this month – the launch of *Thoughtexchange* summaries of community comments on the Web. The board plans to review and discuss what we have learned in this first phase of *Thoughtexchange* at the March 24 or April 14 regular school board meeting.
2. April 28, 6:30 p.m. at Cascade High School – a Fishbowl conversation about capital facilities needs.
3. May 5, 6:30 p.m. at Jackson High School – another capital facilities Fishbowl conversation.
4. May 19, 6:30 p.m. at Everett High School – the third in the series of Fishbowl conversations about capital facilities.
5. The [school board meeting schedules](#) for the rest of the year are available on BoardDocs.