

From: [Cohn, Gary](#)
To: [EPS.MailList](#)
Subject: Our Next Chapter
Date: Friday, January 11, 2019 8:04:30 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

Dear colleague:

About this time 10 years ago, a very good friend and mentor, Dr. Paul Sjunnesen, urged me to consider becoming a candidate for superintendent of Everett Public Schools. I was intrigued, and after considerable research and thought, did as he suggested. I've never regretted it, not even for a moment.

The more I learned about the strength and values of this district, the communities' support for schools, the astounding staff, and the incredible board and leadership team, the more I knew it was the right fit. I was deeply impressed by the district and communities' pervasive commitment to act on behalf of kids. That community-wide commitment is alive and well today, and I remain impressed by it and grateful for the opportunity to be a part of it.

Those compelling emotions and pride in this district's students and staff welled up this morning when I announced to our Superintendent's Leadership Team and the CRC staff that I will retire as superintendent at the end of this year.

This summer will bring to a close over 41 years of professional work, and 39 years as an educator in four Washington school districts and Lake Washington Technical College. It will conclude a 10-year chapter of the richest, most meaningful and rewarding work of my life in Everett Public Schools.

Of all that I've done in other places, in concert with other wonderful colleagues, I will forever be most proud of what we've accomplished together here in the last decade as we acted upon our core values of learning, equity, integrity, passion, respect, diversity and collaboration.

Last year 95.7 percent of our students graduated within four years. That's an accomplishment in any district. What's more, you have helped more students graduate in the face of rising poverty rates (38 percent this year). This is remarkably outstanding performance and a testament to our exceptional commitment to equity.

More English learners and students of color are graduating, and more are succeeding in highly challenging courses than ever before. The work we've done to achieve equity for our students is by no means done, and we are truly making a difference for the richly diverse students who learn and grow in our schools each day, thanks to you!

Each year we help more students meet or exceed *standard*. Thanks to your diligence, our students consistently outperform the state and most of our neighboring school districts on those standards, even though our students' poverty and language challenges exceed most around us.

Did you know the Center for Educational Effectiveness has compared the "expected" student

learning progress of Washington state schools and school districts based upon their students' poverty? This past year **we were the only district of 6,000 or more students in the state** in which EVERY SCHOOL outperformed the "expected" levels of student success based on the effects of poverty. What a difference you are making in the lives of children!

Over the next several months, you can be sure I'll be asked what I'm most proud of during my 10 years here. And you can bet I'm not going to remember all that has brought me joy and feelings of accomplishment in more than 3,600 days. So, here are a few of my favorites – all tied to how you have embraced the power of our core values and how you've helped augment and reshape the district in so many ways:

- Full day kindergarten for all. Everett remains ahead of the curve with Foundation help and our intensity of focus to provide every student a level playing field in kindergarten.
- An outstanding [early learning](#) program networked with preschools in the region, our strategic partner the Opportunity Council, and researchers at the University of Washington, the Gates Foundation and other school districts.
- Learning Improvement Fridays to support staff who craved more dedicated time to work together collaboratively on student learning.
- Our now-routine 8-step instructional improvement process that depends upon collaboration and professionalism and gains momentum with continuous improvement in student learning.
- Our 1:1 project that promises every student in the district will have [access to a computing device by 2022](#) to support daily learning. This [Integrated Technology](#) Plan is a prime example of our focus on equity, our emphasis on STEM skills, and on flexible, resourceful, student-connected learning.
- Our decision to be a [STEM district](#) rather than limit STEM opportunities to certain grade levels or some schools. We are positioning our students to succeed and thrive in jobs right here in their neighborhoods where we have one of the nation's highest concentrations of STEM-related career opportunities.
- Growing the performing arts with the re-establishment of orchestra and strings programs in the south and north regions; growing athletics and activities through soccer clubs and teams in all our elementary and middle schools; and growing world languages by expanding into middle schools.
- Surge in the number of students opting into and succeeding in challenging Advanced Placement and College in the High School classes. The district made the College Board *AP Honor Roll* twice – the first time in 2011 and again in 2018 – for boosting the number of students in AP classes, taking and succeeding on AP tests, and for enrolling more students from diverse backgrounds. Perhaps the change in culture is best explained by an Everett High student who said, *"Before, I thought AP classes were for people who didn't look like me. I thought it was for people who are white and really, really smart."* Together, we have effectively opened more opportunities for more students and eliminated barriers of poverty and ethnicity which used to keep some students from these classes.
- Implementation of our well-regarded four-tier Teacher Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP) model, used from the classroom to the principal's office to the cabinet room and superintendent's office. This is one of the most significant improvements I've seen in four decades of work in and around schools.

Time with students in this role as superintendent has been precious and deeply rewarding. Heading into the 2019 legislative session, I'll have one last time to work with student leaders from our high schools as they advocate for our district and their futures with legislators. These annual trips to Olympia with students are a highlight for me – and for the legislators who get to meet with the students you've helped ready for these impressive sessions. Our kids do us and our community proud as credible advocates for K-12 education. During Student Summits, students' waffle breakfasts, time with our student school board reps and ASB leaders, and my 10 years of Wednesday visits to classrooms, I see your contributions helping to ensure bright futures. You and they have "made my day" so often.

I remain as deeply committed to our work as I was that first day in 2009. I am looking forward to the last months of my time with you in our Everett Public Schools. I hope for the opportunity to personally thank you for making such a powerful difference in students' lives and for helping make my time as superintendent the very best and most rewarding of my career.

This [link](#) takes you to a bird's eye view of the last 10 years. It will be a walk down memory lane for some staff and a lot of new information for others. This 10-year summary of achievements is 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 paraeducator 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* is tangible, alive and powerfully visible in our schools and support facilities. It is making a world of difference for our students' futures and for the economic and social stability of our communities.

Whatever you know or remember about the last decade, I know you are on the same path and dedicated to the same vision as I am – doing what it takes to ensure we *inspire, educate and prepare each student to achieve to high standards, contribute to our community and thrive in a global society*.

In the next six months, our [school board](#) will conduct a process to recruit and select a new superintendent to begin in July. I have no doubt that person will be drawn to the strength of our community and the power of this staff, as was I. And I am confident that person will rely on you to build upon the good work of the past, just as I have.

Here's to that future; to a strong finish to 2018-19, and to new beginnings and continuously improving what we bring to our kids each day they look to us for a brighter tomorrow.

Warmest regards,

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Dr. Gary Cohn
Superintendent

superintendent@everettsd.org

425-385-4009 | 425-385-4012 Fax