Transcript of 15-minute telephone conversation between Nan Bunnow (AASD Assistant Superintendent - Elementary Level) and Jessica Anderson (All Things Appleton) – 08/15/2022 (Transcript has been lightly cleaned up.)

Nan: So, would you like me just to go through each of the questions?

Jessica: Yeah. I guess. Well, you know my first question is: it sounds like the targeted growth is not necessarily associated with proficiency, you know, in either forms—either just, you know, regular targeted growth or stretch growth. So, I don't understand why it was presented as being associated with proficiency if that's not actually the case.

Nan: I would say that Karen Brice used the incorrect word. When we look at our students, we look for grade level proficiency, but we also want to see a year's growth. So that's where that targeted growth comes in. And I know from what I saw there that there's a bit of confusion. So, we want students that are at or above grade level to still, you know, move forward a year's worth of learning. And so those are two things that we watch: the grade level proficiency and the growth. But, yes, I agree with you that proficiency probably wasn't the best term. I think Karen used it incorrectly. A note: but we worked with the Board in the past so I'm sure that's why they didn't ask about it, because they understood. We've talked and taught them about targeted growth and stretch growth before.

Jessica: Yeah okay.

Nan: In her mind, I think in Karen's mind she was relating proficiency to accomplishment, but because we use the term "grade level proficiency" it got muddy. I agree with you.

Jessica: Okay. I guess I also just don't really understand why i-Ready scores are kind of—it seems like the main thing you're using to track students. You know, those are the things you're reporting on throughout the year to the Board, but they're a very subjective measure. They're based on, you know, where the students are individually. So, I can understand why it would be helpful to have that information, but for it to be the main thing that you're repeatedly reporting doesn't seem to be useful. It seems like you should have an objective standard, that "These are the things we want students to achieve; where are they in relation to this?" Because I mean like the i-Ready scores, you know, you can get a year's worth of growth and still be really far behind and still not be proficient. You know or you could get less than a year's worth of growth and be still ahead. So how are you able to, like, judge where students are at based on, you know, an actual unmoving target? And why are you using i-Ready as opposed to just using, you know, actual objective measures of the where you want the kids to be at at certain points in time?

Nan: Actually, when we looked at where AGR has been with their scores, we've purposely moved to i-Ready because before it was more subjective, because we were using rubrics for grades for math at the end of the year and then we were using the instructional reading level assessment that teachers were administering. And because i-Ready is standardized we felt that we were getting—we're taking a little bit more of the subjectivity out of it, and that's why we look at the Forward Exam or i-Ready. Where i-Ready we can get scores three times a year, with Forward it's one. So, but know that i-Ready—those are the big targets we're reporting on but our teachers are working on with classroom assessment data, their observations. They're meeting as a professional learning community and progress monitoring all of the students. And they have grade level—they work together to do common assessments which then

would be used in class with the students to gauge, as you're suggesting, you know, where they are in comparison to that proficiency on the standard that they're working on.

Jessica: But I guess, you know, as far as like measuring the achievement gap between AGR schools and non-AGR schools, why are you using i-Ready? Because, you know, you could be having a whole bunch of AGR students failing and it wouldn't show up in the measure, you know? And like, you even said in an email that you were not separating out the percentage of students who achieve proficiency from AGR schools versus non AGR schools, and that seems like a much more objective measure then i-Ready scores.

Nan: The reason that we break the data down the way we do—and as I had mentioned in the email, we are going to be adding additional layers of assessment now that we've got our baseline to make sure that students are making their growth but also achievement, and we're not only going to be looking at it from program analysis from first grade one year to first grade the next, but also by cohort. But the reason we report the data the way we do is because when we were using the other measures that I talked about, that was an evolution of what the Board asked us, a way to report it, thinking that, in general (because [the purpose of] AGR lower class size is to assist achievement of students of poverty) that if we would compare it, compare our scores at AGR schools to Title I schools that aren't AGR and have larger class sizes, and then also compare it to non-Title I schools, that we'd be able to see, in general, are we closing the gap that research has shown is there between students—low income students as well and then non-[low income students]?

But it's messy because what you've got in there in that data is students that are low income and students that are not because our AGR schools are—yes, they're very high poverty, but we have students that are not. So, we didn't at that point—because we've given this presentation to the Board multiple times, we haven't gotten into the weeds each time to explain that, but it isn't a full proof measure of is it closing achievement gaps or not.

Jessica: I guess it just still just doesn't make sense to me. It just seems like you would have a better understanding of how close you are in closing those gaps if you know one year 30% of AGR students are not proficient and 20% of non-AGR students aren't proficient and then you see that gap closing from year to year, you know, where the AGR students now it's, you know, 29%, now it's 27%, and they're getting closer to the percentage of non AGR students who are also not proficient. And hopefully both of those are closing also. But, like, this way it seems like you have no—in your reports, you have no way of showing, you know, these are the number who are one year behind, these are the number that are two years behind, and these are the ones who are ahead, and how that compares between AGR schools and non-AGR schools. And, I mean, it would be very possible for the AGR schools to be completely, like, two years—I'm not saying that they are but I mean it's like—they could all be two years behind and that wouldn't show up in the measures that you're giving out.

Nan: One of the things that I—because of the same concern that you have that I had as well, when I finished my doctoral program that was my dissertation. I looked at our data and I wanted to compare apples to apples. Because not only are you mixing in different socioeconomic statuses, you're also mixing in kids coming and going out of our schools, some that have received lower class size kindergarten through third and some that received it maybe for half a year. And they're all mixed in there and that's where it's very hard to really understand is it the lower class size that is making a difference? And so, my dissertation related to comparing our students that have been in lower class size kindergarten through third at AGR classes versus low income students at our non-AGR Title I that did not

experience. And the study showed that we were making a statistically significant difference in ELA but not math, and so my hypothesis is as we have changed how we teach reading and not changed how we teach math as far as differentiation. So that's one small study, but it feeds into exactly what you're saying. There's different measures, and we always have to make sure we really understand what we're measuring.

Jessica: Yeah, and I guess it just is not clear to the public—I mean, you know, to look at this and see what is said that is not clear and then to see how subjective the measures are and those aren't clear either and so it seems like there's no...

Nan: I wouldn't say that they're subjective because...

Jessica: I mean, it is. It's based on each individual student, isn't it? Which is a subjective thing. And the amount of growth expected per year also seems like it would be a subjective thing because that is based on sort of the average growth of all students taking the i-Ready score, which could change from year to year and you wouldn't necessarily—like, if you've got like wide-spread across the country students becoming less proficient, becoming less competent, you know, that would change the score that you would expect for the students, and that would change, you know, what you would expect at the school level then. You know, what it is that yearly score? It's going to be changed, and you wouldn't see that because it was averaged across everybody and everybody was doing worse, you know?

Nan: Well and that's why, as I reported to the Board, we--you know, this is our first--we're dipping our big toe into the i-Ready pool. But the results that we received were not sufficient to us as a workgroup, and that's why I shared that we would be expanding the number of data points so that we could get a better picture. But I also--when we speak about assessments, they're subjective and objective, but I also--you know, we would put this in the category of being norm referenced and more objective in the educational world. But we also understand that if a student came in and didn't feel well the day they took the test, it may not be a great measure of where they're scoring or where they're performing. So those are things that we work with our teachers on to retest if they feel that it's not coming out the same way as they're seeing in the classroom. But, again, this is a twice a year report. There's a lot more going on behind the scenes that the teachers are doing with each student, and then looking at grade levels as well. Each building has a score card and they're tracking their information as well and making changes for continuous improvement along the way.

Jessica: Okay, and then my last question was you've got a fairly low number of students in each grade who are achieving that one year of growth and yet and then the number of students apparently achieving proficiency is much higher. I don't understand what the dynamics are there if they're not you know achieving one year of academic growth and yet they're still proficient, what's going on there? Like you know for kindergarten in reading only 48% of the AGR schools met their targeted growth in reading, and yet then across, I guess all schools (you didn't have them separated out), you know, you had 81% percent of kindergarteners being proficient. And that just seems like a very strange mismatch there between a really low number getting their targeted growth and yet they're still proficient. It just seems like these aren't matched up properly.

Nan: Yeah, I'm trying to remember what I sent you because I believe that was the whole district.

Jessica: Yeah, and I had asked you if it was possible to separate it out, you know, by the AGR and non-AGR but you said you didn't do that—that it wasn't done, you know. That it was just...

Nan: No, we don't do that 'cause that wasn't—we will be looking if it's possible to do it with the new scores that we have, but I'm not sure it will be. Because with AGR we look at the fact that they've been there for the full academic year and we have to set up certain assessment groups. You know in speaking with Steve Harrison, and from my understanding of i-Ready, what could be happening is that, you know, students aren't coming in behind, they're coming in, in fact, ahead and we're still expecting a year's growth. So, they can reach proficiency, but we're not giving them a full year's growth. So, I think you had an example in here. You said if a third grader starting out with the reading level of a student entering fourth grade, their targeted growth is still a year and it's not based on proficiency.

Jessica: Right.

Nan: So, there's that. There could be a disconnect there where they were able to reach proficiency but they didn't make a full year's growth based on the i-Ready schematics.

Jessica: Is it possible to measure that to kind of give people an idea of like how many kids are ahead and still just not reaching a full year's growth? Or not? Because, I mean—but then again, I mean it's still kind of concerning when you look at these scores. In like third grade, you know, less than seventy percent are proficient at reading level and, you know, second grade it's only fifty five percent.

Nan: Agreed. Agreed. And that's why I wanted you to see the national comparisons because we are better than the national, but we're still not happy with where we're at.

Jessica: Well, and I guess I also just for, you know—I guess for i-Ready, that's like national norms and then also the proficiency results those are just compared to the national levels, but I would expect those national levels to, in some respects, be dragged down by a lot of underperforming schools, you know? Like where would AASD be compared to just other similar towns of the same size and similar socioeconomic status, you know? I mean when you take out Chicago and Los Angeles, and places like that that have really atrocious scores?

Nan: And we haven't received that data. This is how it's given to us from i-Ready. Certainly, with the Wisconsin Forward we do look at that and compare ourselves to other large school districts in the state.

Our 15-minute meeting slot ended.