

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS)

December 2, 2010

Schools Represented:

Elementary Schools:

Birchwood
Carl Cozier
Columbia
Geneva
Happy Valley
Lowell
Northern Heights
Roosevelt
Wade King

Middle Schools:

Fairhaven
Kulshan
Shuksan
Whatcom

High Schools:

Sehome
Squalicum

District Staff: Superintendent Greg Baker
Director Tanya Rowe, Communications and Community Relations
Note Taker: Nancy Merry, secretary to the Superintendent
Co-Chairs: Gennie Clawson and Sharon Stahl

Welcome

After introductions by all members, Co-chairs Sharon Stahl and Gennie Clawson welcomed members and explained the purpose of the meeting.

Questions and Feedback – Greg Baker

Superintendent Greg Baker reviewed several items:

Budget Update: The governor is forecasting a deficit in the state budget. The governor and legislators have yet to determine exactly what this deficit means for education, but it is expected there will be additional significant reductions to school districts. One possibility is a reduction in funds for K-4 class sizes. Dr. Baker anticipates the 2011–12 school year will be worse and expressed appreciation to the Board of Directors for being proactive in asking voters to approve a supplemental levy. With the successful passage of the levy, the district will be protected from more significant cuts, but it may mean the district will not be able to add back some hoped for programs. As a result of continuing to visit schools, Dr. Baker said the “wish” list from each school grows. His big question is how to deliver a quality educational program and meet the high expectations we have for all our students with a limited budget.

Elementary Program: Dr. Baker said it is clear families want the elementary schedule shifted to an earlier start time with high schools moving to a later start time. Accomplishing this is a major process involving transportation, schedules, staffing, etc. but work is underway to figure out how to accomplish this.

Kindergarten Schedules: Dr. Baker is also hearing from families that they prefer a daily kindergarten program, either in the morning or the afternoon. Long term, families would prefer an all day, daily kindergarten program. Research also clearly shows full-day kindergarten is best for children, but how to fund such a program is unclear. There are a variety of ways to establish a daily, full-day program, including having kindergarten hubs for early childhood learning that would include Head Start and kindergarten. Another option would be to have a prekindergarten in each elementary school. If done well, kindergarten children do well in a full-day daily program. Dr. Baker acknowledged everyone wants this, but it will take money and/or a shifting in the budget.

Springboard Facility Proposal: Dr. Baker has presented a “springboard” proposal to provide a platform for gathering information from staff, families and community to help shape a decision on the future of district facilities. The proposal includes temporarily housing all of Birchwood Elementary School staff and students at the new Cordata Elementary School in the fall of 2011 and rebuilding or remodeling Birchwood. Funds that were slated for the District Office seismic improvements and state construction assistance funds would be used. Feedback from the Birchwood community has been positive with some expressing concern that the school would not reopen. Other concerns included the safety of the entrance to Cordata and inadequate parking for drop off and pick up of children, family nights or in the event of an emergency. The question was asked if there would be enough buses to transport students from Birchwood to Cordata and Dr. Baker assured them that the district would make sure there are enough buses to transport students.

Concern was expressed by a Sehome High School parent that Sehome is not being considered next for remodeling; however, Dr. Baker explained that there would not enough funds from the District Office seismic funds to do anything significantly to Sehome. There are enough funds, along with state construction assistance funds, to rebuild Birchwood. Dr. Baker offered to speak to Sehome parents. One of the biggest concerns with Sehome that needs more immediate attending is the inadequate heating in the classrooms, with many classrooms at 55 degrees. Dr. Baker will follow up during his scheduled visit to Sehome on December 13.

Changing the purpose of bond funds requires Board action and is not a decision that is taken lightly. There was general support to provide for students’ education in the best way we can and that with the limited resources we have available, the district cannot do everything.

Thanks were extended to Dr. Baker for spending time at each school.

High School Schedule Alignment: Families discussed the pros and cons of the high schools being on the same schedule. Benefits include allowing students to take classes at a school other than their home school. There are a lot of issues to consider but, in theory, it would allow both students and staff more options. Another idea being considered include offering classes before and after school, and possibly into the evening. Dr. Baker wants to consider

online learning, either in a computer lab or at home. It was also suggested that the district should look into more videoconferencing for meetings and educational opportunities.

Middle/High School Alignment: Dr. Baker indicated aligning the middle school schedules so students could take classes at high school is another long-term goal.

Family Provided School Supplies:

Superintendent Baker is interested in studying how school supplies are provided. Currently, families are asked to provide some school supplies. The list of supplies, and therefore total cost, varies greatly by school and by class. Two schools, Columbia and Geneva elementary schools, have school “stores” in which families can purchase the required supplies at great savings. Dr. Baker would like to review other options such as bulk buying, coordinating purchases, having the district coordinate and provide basic educational supplies, etc.

Marta Sullivan, Columbia Elementary School parent, reviewed how Columbia handles school supplies by purchasing in bulk through KCDA. There are several options for families. They can pick up a bag of required supplies on the first day of school, at a cost of \$12 to \$14; they can visit the school and select their supplies, paying an additional \$1; or they can purchase their own supplies through local stores. Parents receive information in the spring and they can pay in advance. Sullivan wrote a grant to the Department Ecology for \$2,500 to start funding the purchases. About half of the Columbia families have taken advantage of this opportunity and they expect this number to grow. Sullivan worked with teachers to standardize supply lists by grade. Teachers who work in teams consolidated their lists into one.

Geneva also did a school store for the first time this year. They preordered supplies and had everything packaged and outside each classroom.

Sullivan responded to questions, including that schools do provide supplies, but it is not enough, causing teachers to request additional supplies. The data that was provided was based on the supply list on the district website, not store lists. It was also noted that some schools do their major fund raising in the fall, which is a difficult time because parent spending at that time of year is already high.

Dr. Baker would like to work with some parents and principals to come up with a budget for supplies. He would like to see the district provide basic school supplies. It was suggested high schools should be included in this study.

Conferences Round Table Discussion

Ms. Clawson and Ms. Stahl introduced the topic of conferences. The group broke into smaller discussion groups to discuss and answer several questions:

- How were you notified
- Is attending a priority for you? Others?
- Did you get progress reports prior?
- What are the most valuable aspects?

- What are your frustrations?
- How do you prepare for conferences?

Each group summarized their conversation. A key point mentioned is the need to determine and clearly define the purpose of the conference. Other points:

- Need more information on the acronyms
- Some teachers don't buy in to the student-led conferences
- Inform parents of conferences in some way other than sending notices home with student
- High schools need to have conferences
- Suggest holding conferences on Saturday
- Teachers need to post information in Zangle (scores, schedules, homework assignments)
- Student-led conferences were hit and miss depending on the student and the teacher
- Need better follow-up with teachers after conferences
- Timing of conferences may be wrong. Need to consider the right time for conferences, should it be revised based on semesters instead of trimesters
- Opportunity for evening conferences is limited
- Elementary report cards have improved greatly and give families more information. The middle school report card needs to be revised to include more information and test scores.

Greg would like to see conferences adjusted to better meet the needs of families and students; however, he feels he has not had enough time in the district to make any recommendation yet. He wants to observe and experience more before recommending any changes.

Next Meeting

9:45 a.m. January 6, 2011, District Office Board Room