

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS)

May 5, 2011

Schools Represented:

Elementary Schools:

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

Middle Schools:

Fairhaven
Kulshan
Shuksan
Whatcom

High Schools:

Bellingham
Sehome
Squalicum

Co-Chairs: Gennie Clawson and Sharon Stahl

District Staff: Superintendent Greg Baker
Director Tanya Rowe, Communications & Community Relations
Principal Steve Clarke, Bellingham High School

Note Taker: Nancy Merry, secretary to the Superintendent

Welcome

Co-Chairs Gennie Clawson and Sharon Stahl extended a welcome to all.

Dr. Baker introduced Steve Clarke, who will be leaving his position as principal at Bellingham High School and joining the District staff as Director of Teaching and Learning.

School Messenger

Tanya Rowe gave an update on SchoolMessenger, a quick alert messaging service that the District and schools use for emergencies, weather-related closures/delays, attendance and general communications. Messages can be sent in multiple languages using phone calls, e-mail and/or text messaging. Steve Clarke has used SchoolMessenger in a variety of ways and for multiple reasons throughout the school year to connect with students, families and staff. Clarke commented that he felt it is the best communication tool schools have to contact families in a more personalized way. Some principals use SchoolMessenger more than others and in different ways. Training is ongoing to help staff be more comfortable with the various ways they can use this program.

Ms. Rowe explained that this first year has been focused on training staff and families how to use the system. SchoolMessenger is automatically active for all families once they register their student. Families have the option to customize how they are contacted by going to the District website and entering their preferences.

Ms. Rowe indicated the next step will take place later in May with efforts to communicate with families who have not entered their email addresses in SchoolMessenger. Parents do not need to register to receive standard phone notification, but are encouraged to enter their email addresses and all phone numbers to improve school-to-home communication. School office staff and parent organizations will be asked to encourage more families to manage their contact information. As new families enter the school system with kindergartners, schools will work with them to manage their contacts with SchoolMessenger.

Suggestions and comments included:

- Work with schools during fall open houses to get families signed up.
- Parent organizations can work through their principals to send out information to families.
- Principals know which families are not registered with SchoolMessenger so they can contact them using alternate methods.
- Parent Advisory Committee members should encourage participation in SchoolMessenger. A suggestion was made to make it clearer that the person registering their contact information must go to the next screen to enter their preferences.

Budget Update

Dr. Baker was recently with other Washington superintendents and state officials. Three separate budgets have been prepared—from the Senate, the House, and the Governor. The House and the Senate have to agree on a budget and then the Governor must approve it. Compared with other districts, we are in a relatively good position, thanks to our supplemental levy and prior fiscal management. The budgets proposed by both the House and Senate have implications for teachers' salaries.

May 15 is the legal deadline to notify staff if their job may be eliminated for next school year. Approximately 60 preliminary notices were sent to certificated staff, however, due to the implementation of programs, leave of absences, retirements and resignations, it is hoped that most will be hired back.

In these difficult budget times, some states, but not Washington, allow districts to reduce the number of school days. To change this would require a change in state law.

Dr. Baker responded to various rumors, including some about [middle school athletics](#). The district will work on communications to clarify next year's programs as decisions are made and information becomes available.

Leadership Changes

Dr. Baker discussed the recent leadership changes. Due to the opening of Whatcom Middle School and Cordata Elementary School and promotions within the organization to existing positions, several openings have been created. As explained in his Entry Plan, Dr. Baker believes in a 'One Schoolhouse' approach and with differentiated support to schools with strong leadership, especially in teaching and learning. Dr. Baker emphasized developing strong leaders is a big part of his responsibility. Moving leaders to different settings, grade levels and schools with different demographics encourages learning and growth and develops strong leaders. Dr. Baker's process

focuses on three “wins”—what is best for the school, what is best for the District, and what is best for the individual.

After announcing school leadership changes to staff, students and families, Dr. Baker asked each school for input on the qualities needed in their leader. Forty-one applications have been received for these open positions. After screening and reference checks, final candidates will be interviewed by a team during the week of May 9. Candidates will tour schools and Dr. Baker will conduct a final interview before making any decisions.

The middle school and high school principal positions have been posted. Parent meetings at Shuksan Middle and Bellingham High to gather input have not yet been scheduled. Dr. Baker encouraged anyone with suggestions on desired qualifications to email his office.

Comments included that parents have not had enough opportunity to share their desired qualities and the parents who were included was too small of a group. The parent input opportunity should be open to more parents. Dr. Baker commented that he would work to improve the process next time. Dr. Baker plans to announce the new leaders prior to the last day of school, but he emphasized that it is more important to get the right person in each position, and he would not rush to make these decisions until it feels right.

Elementary/Middle School Before and After School Programs

Sharon Stahl and Gennie Clawson continued the discussion from last month about before and after school programs. Members sent in information, which was handed out, about what their school offered, including whether it is parent organization sponsored or not, cost and the number of students who participate. The resulting information reflected a lot of inequity among the schools. Ms. Stahl will update the information with the schools that didn't reply and send out to members and principals.

The key points to emphasize include equity, continuity of programs and expansion of programs to lower grades.

Members were encouraged to invite parent organization representatives to attend the Sharing Faire at 6:30 p.m., May 16 at Bellingham High School.

Ms. Clawson is developing information to be included on the district website with information for vendors who could provide before and after school programs. Each school needs an individual to serve as an enrichment chair to coordinate these programs. At the elementary level, the chairs from each school could meet and work to find vendors, volunteers and teachers.

Bellingham Public School Foundation

As Executive Director of the Foundation, Gennie Clawson explained she has been working to revitalize the Foundation. She has updated the mission, recruited new Board members, and made many connections. Watch for more information on the District website and in press releases.

Next Meeting

9:45 a.m. June 2, 2011, District Office Board Room (last meeting of the year)