

## **Community Linkage Meeting: Connecting with District Employee Groups March 8, 2012**

Linkage attendees included:

Service Employees International Union Local 925: Matt Read, Mike Kirby, Dean Carpenter  
General Teamsters' Local Union 231: Dave Vanderyacht, Steve Wight, Gloria Barnes, Vicki Bradford, Jim Williams

Bellingham Education Association: Shirley Potter, Stan Kreft, Jaylani Evans, Carolyn Heywood, Tim Stricklett

Bellingham Administrators' Association: Amy Carder, Andy Mark, Steve Morse, Bill Stuckrath, Ann Buswell

Bellingham Association of School Employees: Connie Kelly, Peggy Shepherd, Heidi Wassan, Rebecca Pendergraft

Non-Representative Group: Marilyn Grams, Ken Russell, Brian Rick

President Kelly Bashaw called the meeting to order and, on behalf of the School Board, welcomed members of the employee groups.

Superintendent Greg Baker also welcomed the group and thanked them for their time to discuss the future of Bellingham schools and our collective commitment to students.

President Bashaw explained that policy governance guides the Board. The purpose of the meeting was for the Board to engage in a broad-based discussion about the direction and goals of the district as it relates to the mission, values and outcomes for student learning.

Attendees were divided into groups. Each group had one member from each employee group, one Board member and one Executive Team member. The Board asked each facilitator to explore the following questions about The Bellingham Promise:

- What resonates?
- What doesn't?
- What would it take to make it stronger?

Following the small group discussions, Executive Team facilitators shared key points:

- Deputy Superintendent Ron Cowan shared the following from his group:
  - The group liked the idea that this is a collective commitment, acknowledging artist, craftsmen, and musicians.
  - The group felt the Promise was not inclusive enough. It is great for students who excel but might not make sense to a student who is not a high achiever. Suggested changing wording to make it achievable for all students, perhaps "achieve at their highest level," or "strive for."
  - Promise is a very strong word. Suggested using commitment instead.
  - Passion is listed twice – confusing.
  - Liked the way "we" was defined in the preamble, very inclusive.
  - Electives are being reduced so how can we deliver on the Promise?
  - Where will the funds come from to provide all of these opportunities?

- Concern with the words “love,” “soul” and “passion.” Prefer the words caring and respect. Soul touches on religious. How can we use soul if we can’t define it. Not all students find passion in K-12.
- Do the sentences under mission truly describe a mission? Perhaps, reword?
- The Promise clearly states a goal to strive for, even if it may be a bit idealistic.
- Suggested a smaller, simpler version next time.
- Some, but not all, parents will sit down and review this with their children. Many parents would be intimidated to provide input. How can they be incorporated into the process? Maybe have a place to sign indicating they have reviewed it?
  
- Human Resources Executive Director Nora Klewiada shared the following from her group:
  - This group liked that the document was a commitment to the whole child, not just a test score. They also liked the inclusive commitment of “we” in the beginning.
  - Supported adding a focus on “safety” as children must feel safe before they can learn.
  - Also liked the inclusion of vocational education as it feels more supportive for students who are not college bound.
  - They had concerns with the words “promise,” “love” and “soul,” but overall they liked the changes to the preamble. It could be made stronger by adding a community connection to what students learn in school.
  - The group expressed that they would be proud to be part of this collective commitment.
  
- Executive Director of Teaching and Learning Steve Clarke shared the following from his group:
  - The word “promise” is a concern. It is more inclusive but are we over committing by including businesses when they haven’t agreed to be part of this?
  - If we “promise” and succeed, it become an honor!
  - What does it mean to break a promise vs. a commitment? Suggest changing promise, which seems personal, to commitment.
  - They also had concern with the words “love” and “soul.” Suggested moving them to a different place in the document.
  - Suggested removing everything before the word “empower” in the preamble.
  - Each student has a different path so education and vocational feels more appropriate for what we want for our students.
  - The term “love” is a strong word and caused some concern. Using “we” helps share the sense of love. Suggested moving love from the mission area and including it in the values section. It was felt that it should be kept, as it is needed to achieve this work!
  - The word “soul” was also discussed. It is what makes us human but to some it felt religious. On the other hand, should the community value what touches the soul?
  - When listing who our graduates are, are we taking into account students who are life-skills students?
  
- English Language Learners Program Administrator Amy Carder shared comments from the group facilitated by J.Marie Riche, interim director of Communications and Community Relations.
  - The group liked the changes proposed in the revised version.

- Suggested using “commit” instead of “promise.” Promise is a strong and intimate word and, perhaps, not appropriate for this document.
  - They also felt there is no accountability factor to ensure everyone—businesses, citizens and families—do their part.
  - The group liked that each student is given responsibility and will be held accountable but recognized that we cannot promise that each student will graduate. They also had concern that resources must be provided in order to carry out these promises.
  - Several words were of concern to this group. The word “soul” implied a spiritual meaning that doesn’t belong in a school setting. Perhaps “emotional health” or “spirit” could be substituted. Additionally, “love” and “promise” are both intimate words and perhaps not appropriate for the school setting.
  - Overall, the group felt it would be better to have a strong commitment that is achievable than to make an over-arching promise and fall short.
- Deputy Superintendent Tom Venable shared these key points made by his group:
    - This group had concern with the words “soul” and “love.”
    - They liked the preamble as it defined the “we” as being students, families, staff, citizens, businesses and organizations. A key question is how can we ensure others take responsibility for the collective work?
    - Empowerment is contained in the vision statement.
    - What are the next steps? What action should be taken to make this happen?
    - This group felt the area of strategic action was vague.
    - It is important that our children develop self esteem.
    - The word “soul” generated different reactions from members of this group.

President Kelly Bashaw thanked the group for their participation and indicated notes from the discussion will be compiled and included on the district website.