

Community Linkage Meeting: Connecting with Business Leaders November 3, 2011

Community Linkage attendees included John Butorac of Barlean's Organic Oils; Jeffrey Callender of ConocoPhillips; Terry Corrigan, Vice President of Haskell Corp; Pete Dawson of Dawson Construction; Robin Halliday of Technology Alliance Group; Reid Frederick and Tom Majerus of Washington Educational Credit Union; Derek Neumann, Vice President of Heath Techna; Bob Pritchett, CEO of Logos Research Systems, Inc.; Ken Ryan of The Bagelry; Doug Thomas, President and CEO of Bellingham Cold Storage; and Shauna Unger, Human Resources Director of PeaceHealth St. Joseph's Medical Center.

President Ann Whitmyer called the meeting to order and, on behalf of the School Board, welcomed business leaders.

Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed the group and thanked them for their time to discuss the education of our students. Dr. Baker turned the meeting over to Director Steve Smith who explained the purpose of the meeting. As Dr. Smith explained, over the past year, the School Board and administration have begun to rethink how we do business.

Dr. Smith explained that the board is increasing its focus on performance metrics of the superintendent and the district, with the ultimate goal that the superintendent's evaluation and the district's performance metrics are perfectly aligned.

The purpose of the meeting was for the School Board to engage in a discussion about the skill sets and personal characteristics that our business community desires in our graduates.

Attendees were divided into four groups with at least one Board member and one Executive Team member with each group. The Board asked the business leaders to explore the following questions:

- What are the critical skills for high school graduates now? 10 years from now? 20 years from now?
- What are the key personal characteristics you see in your successful employees and colleagues?
- Should high school prepare every student to enter a four-year college?
- Should public education train students to directly enter the labor force upon graduation? What skills are necessary and critical?
- Public education can be viewed as a 13-year production cycle, with large variability in the skills of the inputs, and the desire to customize production to maximize the value of each product. What are some key performance metrics school districts should consider for continuous improvement?

Following the small group discussions, each group shared key points:

- Students still need basic skills, whether they attend college or not.
- Don't discount community colleges and technical colleges. For some students, this may be a better fit.
- Instill good habits, such as focus, concentration, study skills, and time management.
- Post-secondary training is an alternative, such as internships and mock interviews.
- Motivation is key.
- Students must understand the importance of preparedness.
- Students must develop a skill that can lead to a career—technical vs. psychology and the arts.
- Students need to develop English skills—writing and professional communication.
- Students should have a passion for learning and the ability to learn and relearn as work and careers change.
- Students should focus on careers that exist by examining the data.
- Students should be taught personal skills—working collaborative, being on time and social skills.
- There are two career paths, vocational and college.
- Skilled workers (diesel mechanics, metal workers, etc) are needed.
- Seems there is a disconnect between the work available and the skill sets of job candidates.
- Students should be aware of attributes and characteristics in a rapidly changing world and be resilient, adaptable, flexible and open.
- The most fundamental skill is thinking.
- Students need to be taught communication skills, awareness of social media and responsiveness.
- Create meaningful “engagement” that promotes and creates responsibility and ownership.
- Students learn success through failure. Need to release support and increase independence.
- Build attributes and attitudes associated with successful people.
- Students should learn basic arithmetic.
- Students should understand economics (fighting entitlement)—we are part of something bigger; we only have what we have because of the efforts of others and we are part of that effort; we are responsible.
- Communication skills, both verbal and written, are needed. There has been a lack of these over the last 30-years.
- Organizational skills should be taught.
- The importance of community service is important. Businesses are looking for nice people; we can train them to do the rest.
- Continuous improvement attitude is important.
- Students should have a sense of teamwork.
- Students should have social skills. The best way to teach this is by having teachers and other adults model this behavior.
- Students need self-discipline.
- Not all students should be prepared for college. Current college graduates are saddled with debt and frustrated at not finding employment.

- Misallocation of resources in terms of allocating resources to students who won't go to or succeed at college.
- Be neutral and provide an opportunity for students to choose their post-high school plans. The system should not decide for them. We should not close off opportunities.