

Community Linkage Meeting: February 24, 2011

Strategic Mission (Policy E-1)

Academic Achievement (Policy E-2)

Academic Competence (Policy E-2.1)

Life and Learning Skills (Policy E-3)

Personal Attributes and Ethics (Policy E-4)

The School Board welcomed community members, statewide experts, and early learning teachers. President Ann Whitmyer stated that the purpose of this community linkage is to discuss and explore early childhood education and the role of early childhood learning to help the District meet the desired ends or outcomes for students.

The attendees were:

Linda Crawford, Program Coordinator, Child and Family Studies, *Bellingham Technical College*

Dee West, Director of Early Learning and family Services, *Opportunity Council*

Sally Holloway, Coordinator of Education Programs, *Whatcom Community College*

Dave Finet, Executive Director, *Opportunity Council*

Kris Smith, Coordinator of Parent Education, *Whatcom Community College*

Vicki Hubner, Consultant, *Early Learning Partnership*

Sandra Berner, Executive Director, *Whatcom Center for Early Learning*

Wilanne Ollila-Perry, Child Care and Family Resources, *Opportunity Council*

Eileen Hughes, Associate professor, Early Childhood Education, *Woodring College of Education*

Susan Johnson, Director, Early Learning, *OSPI*

David Matteson, Consultant, Early Learning, *NWESD 189*

Sheila Clark, kindergarten teacher, *Happy Valley Elementary School*

Susan Plummer, kindergarten teacher, *Roosevelt Elementary School*

Debora Haney, preschool teacher, *Alderwood Elementary School*

Cheryl Isaacs, preschool teacher, *Northern Heights Elementary School*

Paula McGrath, kindergarten teacher, *Parkview Elementary School*

Nicole Talley, *Geneva Elementary School interim assistant principal*;

Nancy Smith, *teacher on special assignment*;

Sue Thomas, Director, *Special Education*

Gina Nye, preschool teacher, *Happy Valley Elementary School*

Karin Otterholt, kindergarten teacher, *Roosevelt Elementary School*

Greg Baker, Superintendent

Tanya Rowe, Director, *Communications and Community Relations*

Tom Venable, incoming Deputy Superintendent/Principal, *Carl Cozier Elementary School*

Nora Klewiada, Executive Director, *Human Resources*

Ron Cowan, Assistant Superintendent, *Business and Operations*

Doug Kyles, Executive Director, *School Administration*

After introductory remarks by Superintendent Greg Baker, Dee West, Sally Holloway and Linda Crawford, President Whitmyer asked the group to break into small discussion groups to discuss three essential questions and to submit written comments at the end. A summary of the comments follows. The three questions are:

How does early childhood education help Bellingham Public Schools achieve the School Board’s Ends/Desired Outcomes for all students?

- a) Partnering with existing early learning resources to reach families and children early with common goals and messages toward school readiness.
- b) How does early childhood help us achieve ends?
 - a. To get the outcomes, we must start early. We can’t ignore the first five years of life.
 - b. Our students start kindergarten with achievement gaps at age 5 and with a variety of needs. The more ready they are, the better.
 - c. Family education is key. Parents are constant role models. Children learn all the time.
 - d. Love, talk, play—a holistic view.
 - e. Many students have oral language deficit. Families play a key role in addressing this.
 - f. Our students become parents. We must teach students how to be future parents.
 - g. We appreciate how the Board is trying to make the policies our own.
 - h. There is so much possible to improve.
 - i. Kindergarten teachers need to connect with the early childhood community more.
- c) Early learning specialists work on Life and Learning skills. (E-3)
- d) All learning works best when a learner can attach new concepts to prior knowledge. Preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers talk about instruction and how to align instruction.
- e) Families who are in early learning programs are learning important skills. Barriers to good parenting are dealt with early, issues such as environmental and personal challenges.
- f) Families can understand that even a simple thing like feeding your child is an opportunity to teach.
- g) Early learning helps identify students who have special needs earlier for interventions.
- h) How can we, as a community, look at interventions for families in order to see the gaps?
- i) How do we look at quality of care in child care and the quality of instruction in preschools and K-3 classrooms?
- j) How can we make sure child care providers have access to skilled consultants to get access to services and resources for families? It is more than babysitting.
- k) Full-time kindergarten is critical because it gives children time for free play to work out issues dealing with life and learning skills. It sets the stance for critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We have the time to do this. (E-3)
- l) Linking work and play into one concept. “Free Choice = Work time.” (E-4)
- m) How do we connect readiness skills to classroom function and have time to teach skills in preschool to connect to kindergarten?
- n) Teach basic skills as a foundation for more sophisticated skills, both age appropriate and increasing sophistication.
- o) Need to set a foundation of dispositions of learning.
- p) Address the achievement gap at the earliest stage. Connect to the preschool programs and to education for parents and families. Use standardized measures to track changes—academically, behaviorally and emotionally. (E-2.1)

- q) Early learning teaches how to be safe; self control; to be clean is to be healthy; how to make good choices; how to trust adults and the learning environment; how to be a friend; internal focus of control; assess risks and make good decisions.
- r) Build on and maintain curiosity. Curiosity is a foundation for lifelong learning.
- s) Start at the beginning to affect the end (graduation/dropout).
- t) If the foundational piece is stronger, the outcome is better.
 - a. How can students be two years behind starting kindergarten? Previously, we just “hoped” kids would catch up but hope is not a strategy. Have to take responsibility.
- u) Alignment between kindergarten and early childhood includes gross and fine motor skills, and oral language. There is currently a disconnect between kindergarten and early childhood.
- v) An educated child is filled with inequitable experiences from birth to three. Families make the greatest impact during this age.
- w) Thinking about the quality of instruction in K–3 classes is less overwhelming than trying to address pre-kindergarten families.
- x) Partnerships with the school system is critical in order to align pre-kindergarten.
- y) Every year is important from preschool to grade 12, but investing in kindergarten to grade 3 is key.
- z) What are we doing for those children in the early years (K–3) that are ahead of their peers? How do we maintain their growth and development?
- aa) What is the continuum pre-kindergarten to grade three?
- bb) How do we increase the quality of instruction?
- cc) Need professional development.
- dd) More kindergarten without high quality teaching will make no difference.
- ee) All this will eliminate the achievement gap before it even begins.
- ff) In preschool, the adult to child ratio is higher and allows self control to be taught.
- gg) If we support pre-kindergarten, the equity will even out their opportunities as they move to higher levels.
- hh) The trajectory has changed from the beginning.
- ii) Early childhood is a spring board which helps children in school. Who wants to strike out and keep striking out?
- jj) Early investment allows us to invest the money saved into enrichment.
- kk) Many children don’t have hope. An attention to early childhood development provides a supportive place for hope to develop.
- ll) All children will have an early advocate.
- mm) This enhances a child’s commitment to learning.
- nn) This may change the family’s perception of education as a positive thing.

From your early childhood perspective, how might Ends/Desired Outcomes be refined or adjusted to better match our community’s values and needs?

- a) Awareness and alignment between and among agencies, families and schools. Need to look at how to get expectations of development and skill in school to those who can prepare and support children.
- b) Do we have any mention of family engagement?
- c) It’s important for parents to read to kids, but what if they can’t read?

- d) Schools don't have to teach life-long and life-wide learning concepts alone. Schools can "leverage" the work of other community agencies. (E-3)
- e) Some push for cultural responsiveness and sensitivity. Definitions of success differ culturally.
- f) How do we hold these outcomes collectively across cultures?
- g) How do we support middle school boys of color in middle years? How do we support them in re-engaging support for teachers and staff?
- h) What facilitates the belief students have in themselves?
- i) Alderwood: Child – "Why is this Cheeto so hard?" Teacher – "This is a carrot, not a Cheeto."
- j) Early childhood and early parenthood go hand-in-hand. Helping the parents be supportive with parenting classes enhances early education opportunities for the child.
- k) We have a list of value statements that don't incorporate early childhood development.
- l) We have a foot in each school but other than the PTA there is no support for families.
- m) Health clinics at schools would be a supportive part of early childhood development.
- n) This is the time for brain development.

What do you recommend as our next step(s) in visioning for preschool/early childhood education?

- a) Begin with a small work group that aligns with attainable steps. Let's take the next steps to begin a process to plan how to make this happen.
- b) Continued communication with partners.
- c) New kindergarten teachers need professional development now. Need to continue professional development, especially with High Scope.
- d) Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten staff need collaboration time together.
- e) Why don't we register children at birth? Why wait until kindergarten? Invite them early to be involved with schools.
- f) For E-2, we need to support teachers in music and arts with time with specialists. If not time with a specialist, then ensure teachers have professional development to provide art, music, etc.
 - a. Need technology equality among schools. Don't make teachers go through hoops. Provide them with digital cameras and document cameras, as needed.
- g) World language can be challenging for a non-English speaker. If a student is a Spanish speaker, then their 2nd language could be Spanish (not Mandarin). Need to be flexible.
- h) We used to have a district administrator who was a link between the teachers and the District. When we lost her, the teachers lost their voice. We need an administrator who provides this link.
- i) We must work with families more than we currently do. We send things home, but we need more than that.
- j) The District needs to go to the parents, to their homes. Don't expect they will come to us.
- k) Hold events at churches, boys/girls club, homes—places other than schools.
- l) We need support to help accelerate learning.
- m) Need more than just full-day kindergarten. Some children will need more support.
- n) The District is waking up to the rich, comprehensive early learning community they are surrounded by. How can they build this connection to close the opportunity gap?

- o) Bellingham School District can be a leader in this partnership.
- p) A little step could be to align curriculum and connect professionals.
- q) Solidify partnerships in thinking about funding for preschool.
- r) Opportunity Counsel can partnership with the District. Need to learn what is currently offered in the community (Head Start, ECAP, license childcare)
- s) Preschools should align with our kindergartens.
- t) The ESD is a key in alignment and professional development. Must have vision for what kindergarten is. Often kindergarten is the barrier when it comes to looking at what comes before kindergarten and after.
- u) Leadership and professional development is important.
- v) Learning is a teacher problem, teachers not teaching is a leadership issue.
- w) Leadership needs to understand early learning. Most leaders don't have this background.
- x) The ESD model has developed early childhood partnerships in looking at common benchmarks and accountability.
- y) Test results reflect the years before 4th grade testing.
- z) Partnership with ESD and David Matteson's program. Preschool, kindergarten through grade three must have professional development and alignment.
- aa) The District is only 1 of 2 not participating in this work that has been occurring over the last 3 plus years.
- bb) We need to work to provide consistent parent education and support classes at school sites, central and community locations to make it safe for parents to attend. Don't assume schools don't need parenting support.
- cc) The District doesn't have to do this alone. Link with partnerships, especially for parent education; the ESD for alignment; and Bellingham Technical college for parent education.
- dd) Ideally, the goal should be a preschool at every elementary.
- ee) Consider a levy to focus on the pre-kindergarten piece.
- ff) YMCA could be expanded at all schools.
- gg) There are some restrictive laws in Washington but that doesn't preclude sharing resources of the existing programs.
- hh) We could work collaboratively instead of recreating the wheel.

After the small group discussion, each participant was asked to share one key point.

- a) It is important that community agencies and schools work together, not in isolation.
- b) It is important to intervene early, before children get to school.
- c) Professional development for teachers and early childhood partners is needed.
- d) Leadership is important. The district must look at professional development for leaders.
- e) Increasing the amount of time in kindergarten doesn't matter unless it is high quality.
- f) Hearing about the partnership the district has made with the ESD is important.
- g) We need to support both high achievers and low achievers.
- h) Be mindful about resources that are available to support children in their environment.
- i) Need to improve alignment from pre-natal through preschool and support families.
- j) Many children need higher expectations set at early age.
- k) Focus attention on students who need support to allow them a chance to achieve.
- l) How do we support early learning for parents.
- m) Not all families have the opportunity to send children to preschool. It would be great to make preschool available to everyone.

- n) Parents need support as children move to full-time kindergarten.
- o) Every parent wants the best for their child. Teach them how to teach and love and play with their child.
- p) Mentors for young children provide an important way to learn.
- q) Every child needs to have areas where they excel and where they are challenged.
- r) Need common curriculum in kindergarten.
- s) Some parents in non-Title 1 schools have expressed concern that their child does not have access to full-day kindergarten.
- t) Why don't we enroll a child on the day they are born? Create a parent academy to educate parents to a higher degree on how to be an effective parent.
- u) Full-day kindergarten will not just address the achievement gap but the opportunity gap.
- v) Professional development for teachers has to be the highest quality. Bellingham leadership is strong and Bellingham must take the lead to raise the bar for others.
- w) Professional development for care providers is important. Must advocate for high quality child care for all.
- x) Curiosity is so important for children.
- y) Moving to full-time kindergarten will make a big difference for students.
- z) Teachers must support parents in being aware of community support and events that are available.
- aa) It is exciting that young people are coming forward with a desire to work with preschool and kindergarten children.
- bb) It is exciting to be part of this evening to see the direction the District is moving.
- cc) We have everything we need to take the next step—public, private, non-profit and business.
- dd) Our schools should not be K-12, but pre-kindergarten to grade 12.