

**The Bellingham Promise**  
**Emerging Themes and Suggestions**  
(With data received through March 21, 2012)  
Updated: March 23, 2012

Note: This documents represents an overview of the feedback received about the first draft of The Bellingham Promise. You will see that many of these suggestions have been incorporated into Version 2.0.

**OVERALL DOCUMENT**

- **High level of appreciation for the document**
  - Inclusive in numerous ways
  - Represents whole child, not solely focused on standardized test scores
  - A document that is accessible by multiple audiences
  - Captures the hopes of our community in what they want in a world-class school district
- **Strong appreciation for the process and the high level of involvement from all staff.**
  - Board linkages have provided board input that has helped shape initial draft
  - Feedback sought from 22 building staff, maintenance dept, head custodians, transportation, classified staff, food services, labor leaders, parent and student advisory committees; beginning to share with PTAs; will share at future linkages
  - Multiple opportunities for feedback—written documents; personal dialogue; website; emails
  - More than 625 submissions were received

**TITLE AND VISION**

- **More clarity needed in the meaning behind the Bellingham Promise and some confusion regarding the relationship between the title, vision and mission.**
  - Within the vision statement, lots of positive energy regarding the whole child approach, developing “passion” and community action/services, making contributions.
  - Without this broader context, and for some even with it, some are concerned that the promise might be a promise that we can’t fulfill (some things outside of our control, i.e. funding, families, students). For example, can we promise a ‘strong character?’ Others state that while it may never be fully achieved, setting high expectations with no excuses provides a much higher chance of success. Some suggestions for the title include “The Bellingham Commitment”, “The Bellingham Community Promise” and “Together We Promise.”
  - **Consideration:** Provide written context that explains this is a community promise; not just the school district.
  - **Consideration:** Combine the title with the vision statement and clarity around who is promising. Example: “The Bellingham Promise. Together we, the entire Bellingham

- Community, promise to develop passionate, talented, caring individuals who make contributions to a better world.”
- **Consideration:** Give them the ‘tools.’ Phrase it this way: “We commit to an educational experience that provides students the tools, skills and support to...

## ***MISSION***

- **Strong appreciation to inclusive nature of mission statement including use of vocational and educational**
  - People like how this addresses the “whole child”
  - Vocational “as a path to passion”
  - “recognize all post high school options”
  - “the widest range of educational options resonates with me”
  - “range of vocational—good!”
  - Questions around how do we support vocational options?
  - “The list of beliefs is comprehensive, detailed and reflects our community well.”
- **Consideration:** Will graduate from “our schools” instead of “high schools”
- **Consideration:** Switch the order of educational and vocational
- **Consideration:** add self-esteem to list of what we want for students... “We work toward uplifting the self-image of our student, knowing that student’s self-esteem is all-important in their learning and future abilities.” If educators help students feel important, it may well avoid the necessity of students acting out...

- **The word love is very powerful and causes much discussion.**

- For some they are uncomfortable with the word, particularly if it implies each person needs to love all their students. Some think it's too “touch/feely”; wonder if it's appropriate/the district's responsibility; makes some feel uncomfortable. For others, the meaning is broader, implying all our children in our community should be loved by someone.; think it's important; students had positive reaction to use of this word.
- **Consideration:** Either change the word to something such as “cared for, nurtured, valued or respected” or ensure more clarity in document that this is a collective responsibility to ensure that all our children in our community are loved by someone; doesn't imply every person must say they love every child individually. Another approach is to put love either at the end of the sentence, thus “Our students are cared for, respected, and loved” or put *love* into the value statements.

## ***VALUES***

- **The word soul is another powerful word that causes much discussion.**
  - For many, the word soul is strongly associated with religion which causes discomfort in this context. There's a strong sense that this word is too much of a distraction and will cause some people to completely disengage with the entire document. For some, they

are very comfortable with it, as it implies the whole child—physical, emotional and social. Some see soul in a different context, such as in music.

Question: Do we provide experiences for kids that demonstrate ‘soul?’

- **Consideration:** Change the wording without losing the intent of the whole child. Possible changes include “character”, “whole child”
- **Consideration:** Drop “to the whole” in the bullet about mind body and soul; seems redundant
- **Consideration:** ‘Spirit’ instead of soul? “Mind and body” implies soul.

➤ **The belief statement on diversity is a bit confusing; simplify. What is ‘robust growth?’**

- Consideration: “Diversity leads to a strong community” or “Diversity helps build a strong community” or “Diversity helps create a strong community” “We believe in honoring diversity...” “We value diversity as it leads to a connected, healthy community.”

➤ **The belief statement Together we can achieve more than alone—word alone seems a bit odd**

- Consideration: “Together we can achieve more than individually”
- Consideration: Family partnerships are crucial to success.

➤ **Within the beliefs section, questions regarding the intent of “high levels”; can every child achieve at high levels? What about students with significant disabilities?**

- Is the standard the same for every child? How might we explain this better so that it's clear that some students have different abilities, i.e. students with IEPs may have a modified standard, yet not lessen the intent which is all kids can achieve at high levels. Suggestion is to have it read “Every child can learn at their highest level”

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## **OUTCOMES**

➤ **Strong appreciation for the outcomes and the attention to the whole child.**

○ **Considerations:**

- Reword the headings so the flow is easier. For example, "We Develop..." is worded in such a way that each part of the section comes from the prior portion. However, someone's eye goes to "We Develop..." as the start of the sentence for each of these sections. Perhaps change "We develop" to "We Encourage, We Nurture, We Support"
- Change "Resulting in students who:" to "Resulting in individuals who..." (They are "graduates", as stated earlier in the same section, so it doesn't flow to revert back to calling them "students")
- Craftsmen is gender specific, according to the data. Perhaps change to "artisans"? Hard to commit to with funding cuts to the arts and lack of instruction?
- Consider adding “meet” so it reads “Resulting in students who meet/exceed academic standards”
- Add leaders so it reads: Team Players and Leaders

- Add “We develop ‘**resilient**’ students.”
- **Considerations:** Suggestions to add other outcomes that include the following: graduates prepared to undertake rigors of university or college, to make intelligent choices to support themselves and their family, to be comfortable in multi-cultural settings and to explore options with creativity and confidence. Also ‘prepared to be stewards of the earth.’ Add environmentalism piece... prepared to build sustainable communities.

## **STRATEGIES**

- **Consideration:** For the strategies, do not begin the descriptors with “We believe.
- **One Schoolhouse Strategy is complicated; need to refine to provide clarity of intent.**
  - It's hard to capture the philosophical crux of what one schoolhouse approach means (hard to not get caught up in specific resource allocation example to illustrate thoughts about what it means)
  - Want to capture that it is for every child, not just equity for every school
  - Struggle with equity and equality, weren't sure whether people understand the distinction between the two. We talked about how pairing the two words together created a rub for some, perhaps that rub is a good thing. However, ultimately, we decided one schoolhouse is really about equity, and not so much about equality, so we left that word out.
  - We discussed the concept that one schoolhouse is also about "seeking to understand", although we didn't get to the point of figuring out how to work that concept in.
  - **Consideration:** “We collectively provide the resources and services to ensure equity for every student to be successful.”
- **Innovation and Secondary Flexibility Strategy**
  - More clarity, can come when actions steps are highlighted, around what this means at each level. Brings up questions regarding electives, middle school scheduling, vocational offerings,
  - Consideration: Might we take secondary out of title so it's more inclusive and then in actions steps highlight that much of this refers to middle and high school, but leaves room open for elementary.
  - Draft language ideas- “Middle and High schools will adapt to ensure that all students, regardless of their zip code or building, will have vocational and technical, academic opportunities, so that the structure and the schedules are driven by the learners...We adapt to meet the needs of all middle and high students with programs, and curriculum that address diversity in learning styles, scheduling decisions, vocational and post-secondary plans.”
- **Childhood Education Strategy**
  - For some students the playing field is already skewed in kindergarten.
  - Whole child education should include preschool

- Full time kindergarten is essential
- Lower class size needed for kindergarten
- Need early interventions for students-reading specialists
- Belief isn't a strong enough word-strive to develop
- Research supports early childhood education
- **Consideration:** Change descriptor to read, "We invest in a strong early childhood program because of its powerful long-term return for our students and community."

➤ **Powerful Teaching and Learning Strategy**

- This is an area where details will be appreciated; add action steps.
- **Consideration:** Put this at the center and then the four other strategies around it, helping emphasize that this is the core of our work.
- **Consideration:** "High quality instruction occurs in every classroom every day, resulting in high levels of learning. This is supported by purposeful training and development of our staff, and effective leadership throughout the organization."
- **Consideration:** improvement needed for 'purposeful training' across the district.

➤ **Authentic Engagement with Students, Community and Families Strategy**

- Highlight family involvement even more so in the document. Since the Bellingham Promise implies the whole community, find a way to make this even stronger.
- Consideration: Add "Family partnerships are critical to student success." to the Values section.
- **Consideration:** For descriptor, "We actively seek input from and work with all stakeholders to foster new partnerships to deliver the promise." or "We actively seek, listen to and respond to input from all stakeholders and foster new partnerships to deliver our promise. We diversify communication strategies to ensure access to participation for all families."
- **Consideration:** Include student and family accountability with more emphasis.
- **Consideration:** need more extensive translation and interpretation services
- **Consideration:** engaging all families a bold statement...seek to understand and be more fully aware of homeless and poor, for example, is a challenge.
- **Consideration:** community not emphasized or engaged enough. Service builds community.

Other Considerations:

- Use the term "life-long learner" somewhere in document; emphasize word "learning"
- Pictures of students/staff great. Ensure first picture seen is a diverse group of students.
- Try and fit word "safe" or "safety" into document
- Under each heading or bullet, include more explanation. On an electronic document, this could mean a "click" to a new window with more discussion, information, explanation.
- Is this a legal document?
- Add 'work ethic'

- Remember to take a ‘proactive approach with the language that is used in the document, e.g. “family instead of parents.” Families look very different these days.
- Engage wider community in this process if they are part of the Promise.
- To make document stronger, refer to all staff and students reflecting a desire to improve. Self-reflection and improvement is modeled as well as taught.