

## **Community Linkage Meeting: November 16, 2010**

### **Exploring the Impact of School Schedules on Academic Achievement**

#### **(Policy E-2)**

The School Board welcomed parents from 12 of the 14 elementary schools in the district: Alderwood parent Israel Hidalgo; Birchwood parent Jennifer McAuley; Carl Cozier parent Sara Knies; Columbia parent Rachel Greenwood; Geneva parent Danielle Burnett; Happy Valley parent George Dauber; Larrabee parent Barry Arps; Lowell parent Anne Welsh; Northern Heights parent Piper Fowler; Parkview parent Darcy Riggins-Schmidt; Roosevelt parent Elizabeth Boyle; Wade King parent Sara Swetish.

School Board President Dr. Ken Gass introduced the other Board members and stated that the purpose of these community linkages is to determine if the district goals are being met. The focus of this linkage is on elementary school schedules and their effect on academic achievement. Dr. Gass asked Superintendent Baker to give an overview of the changes made to elementary school schedules last year. Dr. Baker stated we went from three different end times to one common end time. Pushing back the start time to 9:30 a.m. also allowed for a decrease in the number of bus runs. Another major component of the decision was based on teacher contractual planning time needed as well as equitable PE and music specialist offerings at each school.

The following is a list of parent comments shared during the linkage:

- Parent is saddened by the loss of 2.5 hours PE specialist time every week in the intermediate grades. Though the classroom teacher is supposed to pick up those PE hours, most do not. In previous years, PE instructors spent solid units (3 weeks each) on gymnastics or racquet sports with the opportunity to teach skills and expose all students to different forms of exercise and sport. Now, it is just once a week so exposure and skill-building is decreased. For some kids, this is their only chance at being exposed to sports and fitness. She believes strongly that the PE schedule should be restored. Other enrichment programs, such as the Sasquatch Bowl and fifth grade strings, have been reduced or eliminated. Her older child (an eighth grader) was given opportunities that her 3<sup>rd</sup> grader will not have. She also believes that language should be part of the school day (FLAN is limited and doesn't move kids forward in the curriculum) and she envies the language component at Wade King and Northern Heights.
- An elementary start time of 9:30 a.m. is not a positive. Younger kids wake up early and are ready to go. The bus schedule was too difficult so she ends up driving kids to school. It's been a difficult year. She also witnesses teachers frazzled and frustrated because of the single planning time in the school building. There is competition for copiers in an attempt to get everything done at the same time.
- Parent has adjusted to the new schedule but liked every day kindergarten offering. Thought daily consistency was better for the child. She feels like she 'dodged the bullet' by not having the K schedule as it exists this year. She would have sent child to private school for the consistency. Parent likes that first grader gets time with music specialist.
- The 9:30 a.m. start time is not a big deal because she is a stay-at-home parent, but she feels that the schedule would be better if children get up and get out earlier and start the day. She feels that most studies show that younger children learn better earlier in the day. As for the 3:30 p.m. release, she feels that it might be better to have a 4 p.m. release because they end up waiting for a bus until almost 4 p.m. anyway. Supervision is an issue while waiting for the bus. Overall, she enjoys the IB program at her school and the common world language offered.

- Parent feels that elementary students work better earlier in the day and feels it is a disservice to students and families for them to start so late. She also states that by 2:30 p.m. the younger kids especially are unfocused. Her family has managed to make the schedule work by doing homework before school because by the time the student gets off the bus at 4:15 p.m., it is a squeeze to get to soccer practice. One positive from the new schedule and specialists in primary grades is that she heard her son singing for the first time recently and says that came directly from his music class. She also reiterated the fact that PE is essential for children in light of the childhood obesity epidemic. Getting kids to be active is important.
- Parent states that she would invite any art, language or enrichment into the curriculum. The question should be how do we challenge our kids more? She believes that often the focus is on the ones not yet at standard and that the bar gets lowered for all.
- Parent thinks start time for elementary schools should be earlier, while the high schools should start later. The district should take the lead on this, think out of the box and switch it up. She believes the district shouldn't let athletics and transportation issues shape the academic school schedules. It isn't fair to link the schedules to busing problems. We changed the schedule and busing problems remain, maybe more. Working parents are paying for before- and after-school care now. It used to be difficult on one end of the day, now it is difficult on both ends. Parent thinks music for her first grader is great but saddened by loss of 5<sup>th</sup> grade strings program. If we get our children in art and music early, then it becomes a lifetime passion. Grateful for early grades getting music, but would really like strings back. Some teachers take on the PE component, some do not. It all depends on the teacher.
- With a high free/reduced rate at her school, she believes the current schedule is a worry for many working parents. These parents do not have the flexibility to adjust their work schedules and lose income at an hourly rate. As a PTA parent, she wants to help the entire school community so that it feels like the school is helping these parents solve some of these issues. She would like to echo the need for enrichment programs in the schools. She is surprised that the HCL program is all we have and not sure that the pull-out is the answer we need. At her school, the specialists for music and PE are 'rock stars' so it is great to share that with the younger grades. The kindergarten schedule as it is now offers no continuity, especially for those kids who may not get extra support at home. It is like starting over every day they are in school.
- Parent believes that starting school earlier is important for younger kids. As a community, we should teach them that school is serious and important. Children are sponges in the early grades so we need to expose them to everything we can. Parent concerned by childhood obesity and what is served in the school cafeterias (he has seen Doritos offered in the cafeteria). We need to teach our kids what is healthy, model it and help them to make conscious decisions. Parenting is always a struggle, made up of smaller struggles and some bigger struggles. We should embrace this struggle, because parenting is over in the blink of an eye.
- Parent states she is probably in the minority but her family loves the late start time. She has quality time and conversation with her child(ren) in the morning. It is tough having a shorter academic day and she is missing the additional music, art and PE. PE hasn't been a great experience this year. She would like to see more music at the intermediate level. She feels the loss of 5<sup>th</sup> grade strings and hopes we could bring that back maybe with support of PTA. She would like to see foreign language enrichment in all elementary schools. FLAN is a great start but it is hard to enforce it on them outside the school day and it lasts only a few weeks at a time. She notices less technology with the

loss of librarian time. Math and science instruction has been good but it varies year to year with the teacher. She believes kids need to be challenged from an early age, help those at the bottom, but also help those at the top. Parent appreciates communications this fall, for example Dr. Baker's recorded message. Overall, this shows sense of caring from the district.

- Parent has experienced each version of the kindergarten schedule. She prefers the schedule with the longer days because the half-days just do not give enough time in the day to delve into the work. She dislikes the 9:30 a.m. start time because kids are up early, get bored before the day starts as they wait. It is great that the primary grades are getting PE and music specialists.
- Parent enjoys 9:30 a.m. start time but it is a mixed bag. Her kids go the FLAN program a couple times a week. She appreciates (loves) the same dismissal time for primary and intermediate. The release time, however, has been problematic at her school. There are many supervision issues after school as students wait for buses. She doesn't feel there is any overarching science curriculum at the school. Some teachers can teach it, some can't.
- Parent hopes the kindergarten schedule returns to every-day, half-day with a noon release time. She would like the start time to return to 9 a.m. or earlier as the research shows that an earlier start time is better for younger children. As a member of the Parent Advisory Committee, she learned there are different curriculum/focuses at different schools. She feels that certain things should be taught at all schools, not on a school-by-school basis. The technology cuts made this year were noted with fewer librarian hours.
- Parent would like for her first grader to be more challenged in the classroom but appreciates the help that her struggling fourth grader receives. She believes the PE cuts hurt. Being on PTA, they have tried to help families with the late start time by offering before school activities. She echoed the sadness about the loss of the strings program.

Dr. Baker ended the linkage by noting that everyone articulated the district challenges quite well.

- What do we, as a district, hold in common and what do we let schools develop independently? He stated that all schools have some discretionary FTE, depending on the size of the school, allowing uniqueness in each school. Some schools use their discretionary funds for language instruction, others on the arts, smaller class sizes, and/or literacy support. This small amount of FTE may make it appear that others might be getting more.
- Kindergarten schedules bring up issues on whether the district should fund full-day every-day kindergarten across the system. We would need to decide as a community whether to invest in full-time kindergarten or in other programs.
- As noted in the discussion, there are challenges and benefits to the different start and end times for the elementary school day. One of the unintended consequences of the change in the school schedule is that schools began to develop their own before-school activities. Schools are handling this before-school time differently with some schools offering as many as 16 different activities, some not offering any. We will need to centralize this and build equity among our elementary schools in this area.
- Limited resources will force us to make choices.

The Board will share their 'learnings' from this linkage in a Board Summary Report at the next meeting in December. This summary report will also be posted on the School Board web page.