



Bellingham
Public Schools

a collective commitment

Family Partnership Program

Recommendation Presented to Dr. Baker
January 2015

Project Background and Alignment with the Bellingham Promise

In the spring of 2013, the Bellingham School Board and Superintendent Greg Baker held a Community Linkage Meeting focused on connecting with parents of homeschooled students. During the linkage meeting, several attendants expressed that a partnership program in Bellingham would be a welcome addition to the community and that many would consider participating. The following spring, the district committed to fund the startup of a family partnership program. A site was identified and an administrator was charged with developing a vision and implementation plan.

A new family partnership program for Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) is designed to ensure The Bellingham Promise supports all kids in our community. Approximately 300 families, representing 350 students within the BPS boundaries, are identified as homeschooling; many are working with other districts with similar family partnership programs. The Promise has some central tenets regarding serving all families in our community and espousing innovation and flexibility; a family partnership program will support these goals and desired outcomes.

An advisory group was initiated to start the visioning process in the fall of 2014. A representative committee of families, community representatives, staff (both classified and certificated), Department of Teaching and Learning Director, Options Principal and two co-chairs convened to deepen our understanding of the alternative learning experience (ALE), family partnerships in particular and develop a set of recommendations. The Family Partnership Advisory Group had three main charges:

- I. Develop a vision and plan for implementing a family partnership program.
- II. Identify the needs and interests of the Bellingham community in establishing a family partnership program, and be inclusive of stakeholders.
- III. Recommend a starter program model and long-range plan.

Advisory group members attended site visits to exemplary programs, facilitated discussions at a public forum, assisted in the development of a survey and identified possible groups that could be served by a family partnership program. Through the course of our work, the advisory group has come to believe that a family partnership program can be developed to support The Bellingham Promise. A tentative vision statement was developed by the group stating, "We promise to *inspire* learning and *support* families because *together* we *achieve* more! INSPIRE-SUPPORT-TOGETHER-ACHIEVE." This strong statement shares many ideals and core beliefs espoused in The Promise.

APPENDIX "Family Partnership Advisory Group"

Scope of Our Work

Review exemplary family partnership models:

To develop an understanding of family partnership programs, advisory group members visited exemplary sites around Washington State; programs on both sides of the mountains, rural and suburban, large and small. Many lessons were learned on these site visits, which turned out to be our richest source of information for deeper understanding and paths for developing our program. The successful ALE programs reflect the dynamics and demographics of their communities from which they sprung, and the advisory group believes this is important for the Bellingham family partnership program.

The group visited nine sites in total that ranged in size from the enrollment of 27 K-6 graders all the way to two programs serving 900+ K-12 students. Some of the main considerations from these visits that informed administrative decision making and programming include: grade levels served, course offerings and configurations, instructors (both certificated and non-certificated), food and transportation services, requiring or not requiring families to be on site with children, the issues of state testing and various other program characteristics. Some of the advice and lessons shared by program administrators include: listen to the families and adjust programs as needed, gain familiarity of the ALE law and be able to translate it to key stakeholders, know the playing field and "Go play!," and to build community and connections for families (provide a program where families, school and the community support the whole child).

APPENDIX "Site Visit Key Factors"

Review legal parameters:

The Bellingham Family Partnership would be established under the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-121-182: Alternative Learning Experience (ALE). The ALE is a Washington state law that guides and informs programming.

The WACs have changed significantly in the past few years, but there is a general sentiment that things may be stabilizing. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has a support system to inform and support our initial program and continued development. They have resources that will be utilized, both on-line and in-person, for example, sample documents, a robust "Question and Answer" section and an ALE Liaison staff member.

Again, the site visits provided a deeper understanding of the current state of legal parameters and guidance for compliance. Each of the advisory group's site visits acknowledged the importance of this structure/law. Key observations from each site were:

- Documentation:
 - A compliance system to document Parent Partnership Programs processes and evidence of decisions
 - ALE was uniquely interpreted through each site's lenses (by site council or governance entity) and in response to changes in the law
- Program requirements:
 - Written Student Learning Plans - weekly contact and monthly progress (documenting adequate progress), with a certificated teacher of record

- Staffing - course offering and who is the primary instructor and teacher of record and meeting "substantially similar" requirements
- Site based courses - incorporating community resources and partners
- Administrative Policies - Instructional materials, ALE, etc.

Seeking to understand needs and interests of our community:

The advisory group gathered public input to determine what supports, classes or services potential families want in order to consider enrolling in a family partnership program in Bellingham.

The group brainstormed the most likely populations for the program, i.e., current home-schoolers, "unschoolers," faith-based, those enrolled in our public schools who are looking for an alternative, etc. We developed parent/student profiles to consider what would be important to these distinct partnership populations. Advisory group members with contacts within these communities then had discussions with families and brought that learning into the process.

The group reached out to those distinct populations and more broadly to invite families and community members to an evening forum to give input on the partnership program. At the forum, we gave an overview of family partnership programs and spoke of our intentions of creating a program related to the Bellingham Promise.

After the presentation and general questions were answered, advisory group members broke into small groups with community members to learn what services or classes would help them consider enrolling in our family partnership program. After the small group brainstorming, we used value voting to surface the ideas most important to the community.

The public input proved invaluable in revealing specific program needs and wants that we, as an advisory group, would not have realized. As an example, science courses and resources are a strong draw for many current home-based learners. Another example is high interest in physical education or sports resources. The insights from the forum also assisted the advisory group in developing a survey with the intent of broadening the audience of contributors.

APPENDIX "Themes from Public Forum"

Once a survey was developed, it was administered to the attendants of the forum, parties who have expressed an interest in learning more about our program and those who were enrolled in another partnership program. We also encouraged people to forward the survey. There were 54 total respondents and the key findings were:

- About half of the respondents have children in public schools
- Majority of students are currently of elementary and middle school levels
- Over 80% wanted a 2-3 day per week program
- There was a mixture of interest in both thematic/project based learning and single subject academic offerings
- The top 5 subjects requested - world language 65%, science 63%, math 49%, technology 47% and music 47%
- Potential for 20 families to start this spring, with more in the fall of 15/16
- Other services requested included: Autism Spectrum Disorder support, HCP

Committee Recommendation

The advisory group recommends the development of a program that inspires student learning, and supports families and partners, because together we achieve more. The Promise calls for us to serve all families. The family partnership program would strive to serve families who choose to provide home-based education for their children.

Recommended Considerations:

Based on their learnings from site visits, readings, the forum and survey, as well as their individual perspectives, the advisory group was asked to identify the major key decisions and factors that need to be considered for starting a family partnership program. They identified the following operational and program categories: course offerings, staffing, family services, calendar/scheduling, community partners, early learning, materials, equipment and technology. The advisory group also identified some core values or philosophical recommendations such as: being rooted in the district, flexibility and creating a learning community. These categories were then discussed and developed into the following list of recommendations. The Bellingham family partnership also has a unique and exciting opportunity to set itself apart from other programs and set a "gold standard" of innovation and current best practices.

Recommendation #1: Course Offerings

Course offerings will be developed based on family interests. Input from families will be solicited prior to each term to develop a list of course offerings. Final courses will be selected based on actual registration numbers. A blend of both certificated and non-certificated staff will instruct the courses. For example, based on the family input gathered, the program will initially offer courses in world language, science, math, technology and music. Consideration will be given to developing trans-disciplinary, project-based learning opportunities.

Recommendation #2: Staffing

The advisory group recommends using a blend of certificated and non-certificated staffing. To meet ALE requirements, the written student learning plans and instruction will be overseen by certificated staff. Courses requiring a highly qualified staff will have a certificated teacher of record. Some courses and consultation may be offered by non-certificated staff. There may be additional staffing needs to support general school functioning and duties.

Recommendation #3: Family Services

The family partnership program will offer both on-site courses and consultation for home-based instruction. The current physical site, the Larrabee building, will be configured to be a welcoming setting that allows families to be present while courses are in session. The classrooms will be set up to allow for flexible use and a high level of engagement. Designated family areas and general building spaces will be open and welcoming. Ongoing support for families will include on-site services to support their children's learning needs (both academic and social); a curriculum and materials library; and resources and staff. Opportunities for families to engage in leadership and advisory roles will be

developed. Additional family supports would be developed such as an intake and orientation process, supports and services on site, including consultation.

Recommendation #4: Calendar/Scheduling

An ALE program offers the opportunity to consider alternative scheduling and calendaring. For example, the daily and weekly schedule can be altered to the families' expressed needs and interests. Further, an alternate calendar will be considered to offer courses throughout the year.

Recommendation #5: Community Partners

The Bellingham family partnership has a unique opportunity to set the "gold standard" for ALE partnerships in working with the community and integrating program and services. The Bellingham community is rich with possible resources, many eager to work with schools, families and students. Potential partners include Western Washington University, or agencies that support performing arts, technology, the environment, music, or grant funding. In particular, many of the families express a need and desire for support with their children who have been identified with Autism Spectrum Disorder. There are local agencies that work with families to provide therapies and ABA instruction; we may explore ways to integrate some of their services and supports.

Recommendation #6: Early Learning

The advisory group recommends exploring the opportunity to add a preschool program. Many of the programs we visited expressed a need to offer supports for whole families, including the youngest members. While most of them had some designated space for children of preschool age, only a few offered specific preschool programs.

Recommendation #7: Materials, Equipment and Technology

Materials and equipment used to support classes will be selected based on course offerings and needs of the families for home-based instruction. The administrative policy regarding curriculum should reflect the program's need for flexibility in considering materials and may need an exemption clause for selecting materials outside of the instructional materials committee process. Materials for home-based instruction will be reviewed and collaboratively selected with consultation between staff and families. Materials and equipment purchased for home-based instruction will be on loan to the family for the duration of their use, and then returned to the program. Significant consideration should be given to the use of technology in the program. For example, some family partnership programs offer a one-to-one student tech package in which certain grade levels have the opportunity to have technology issued to them during the duration of their enrollment. We feel it is important that students and families connect virtually given the home-based learning component of the program.

The next set of recommendations is representative of some core values or philosophical considerations that the advisory group felt important to the development of the program.

Recommendation #8: Rooted in Bellingham Public Schools

It is recommended that the family partnership program and district leadership continue to work with other in-district programs to adjust offerings to ensure families and students have options and opportunities that fit their needs, such as continuing to investigate on-line courses and expand into high-school. The family partnership should be embedded in the larger picture of supporting the

Bellingham Promise and the community it serves. Families expressed a desire in having access to opportunities that other district families experience, including field trips such as the Snowgoose and Mountain School excursions. Further, staff should participate in district professional development opportunities.

Recommendation #9: Flexibility

A common theme among family partnerships is the desire for flexibility. This desire is espoused in wanting a flexible schedule, course offerings, services and site. We will establish a culture that embraces change and flexibility. In terms of staffing, we will hire staff who are ready and willing to adjust to the ever changing landscape of the program. The family partnership will continue to explore the needs of the community and adapt to the changes in population, needs, interests and opportunities. For the site, we will need to be ready to adapt the shared spaces and classrooms to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the program. We will build flexibility as we look at an alternative calendar and schedule.

Recommendation #10: Creating a Learning Community

We feel it will be paramount to build a strong learning community and culture. The population enrolling will include a variety of educational perspectives ranging from “unschooling” to traditional homeschooling. By enrolling in the program families will be a part of a learning community. We will work to build opportunities to connect and utilize our collective resources to build the best program possible to support a range of needs. In doing so, our community and culture will emerge from our collective and shared commitments to create the “gold standard” program. There will be opportunities for engagement and leadership, for both families and students, developed in support of this goal.

Recommended Starter Program Model: Spring 2015

Based on our survey current data, approximately 20 families expressed an interest in starting in the spring of 2015. A “soft opening” of the program would allow us to learn as we go and experience “a launch to learn.” We will learn what works and doesn’t, figure out the “pitfalls” and barriers, as well as the successes and celebrations. A spring 2015 launch will provide the few months needed to develop some of the essential program structures.

The current model would offer on-site instruction. The grade levels served would include K-8. The classes would include multi-age settings, partial day and various content areas (based on the current family input). Trans-disciplinary, project based and thematic courses will be considered. We would offer consultation only to the families interested in this service/support.

Hiring will be based on the specific course offerings and meet the requirements for highly qualified staffing as well as the ALE requirements. A general model for staffing used by ALE programs is 16 student FTE = 1 teacher FTE. This would be through a combination of certificated and classified staff. Certificated staff would be hired to support the development of student learning plans, consultation with families and teach or oversee the courses. Additional classified staffing will support course offerings and provide general school support with student supervision and general duties (such as library, playground, office, etc.).

Recommended Program Model: Fall 2015-16

We plan to implement a more comprehensive opening in the fall of 2015-16. We will continue to seek input from families and offer tours and information nights. We will develop communication materials such as flyers, brochures and a handbook, and focus on developing the registration elements such as paperwork, an intake process and orientation activities. More family leadership and advisory opportunities will be developed throughout the spring.

Other administrative elements we will continue to look at include on-site food service, transportation and school year calendar.

Summary

The Bellingham family partnership is a program that will aspire to meet the commitments made in “The Promise”. We will be innovative and flexible to inspire student and adult learning through great teaching on site and with home-based instruction by building authentic partnerships that support families, because we believe that together we will achieve more. This is our promise:

We promise to *inspire* learning and *support* families
because *together we achieve* more!

INSPIRE-SUPPORT-TOGETHER-ACHIEVE

As one of the top five priorities for progress under the Key Strategy of Student, Family and Community Engagement, the family partnership program will meet this goal.

Budget Implications

Our goal is to establish a family partnership program model that is mostly financially self-sustaining. Initially, there are some startup costs, but eventually it may shift to a more neutral budget. As the program grows, and more students enroll, it will generate enough FTE and state revenue to self-sustain.

Some of the initial costs are outlined below:

Staff – certificated teachers, non-certificated staff, administrative, secretarial, custodial

Curriculum – for course offerings and families for home-based instruction

Library – both curriculum and circulation materials

Equipment – science, physical education, music

Technology – for classroom and general usage

Facility – entry, furniture, equipment