

## **Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS)**

February 19, 2014 – 9:55 a.m. to 11:10 a.m.

Northern Heights Elementary

**Parents:** Parents attended representing 8 schools - 5 elementary schools, 1 middle school, and 2 high schools.

### **Executive Team/District Staff:**

Superintendent Greg Baker

Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

Communications Manager Jacqueline Brawley

Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Family Engagement Isabel Meaker

Assistant Director of Teaching and Learning Bethany Verner

Northern Heights Principal Wendy Barrett

Wade King Principal Analisa Ficklin

### **Note Taker:**

Sheri O'Day, Executive Secretary to the Department of Teaching and Learning

### **Welcome:**

Joanna Nesbit welcomed everyone to the meeting. She mentioned that her position as Co-Chair of this committee will be ending in May, and she asked that anyone interested in serving as a Co-Chair for the next school year with Trisha Walton should contact either Joanna or Trisha.

### **Superintendent's Update:**

Dr. Baker thanked those in attendance for taking the time to be at Northern Heights to learn about the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. The IB program will likely be growing. Six years ago is when IB was first introduced in our district (the Bellingham School District had the first IB elementary schools in Washington state). Will more of our elementary schools, or middle or high school level schools, become IB schools? It is possible, but it is not in the plan for next year. There is not a district mandate to become an IB school, but elementary schools are encouraged to learn about IB (Alderwood, Birchwood and Carl Cozier are currently exploring the opportunity). There are many connections between IB and The Bellingham Promise. World language is a key component that many elementary schools are incorporating into classrooms – with or without the IB designation. Dr. Baker received some questions from meeting attendees:

- **Question:** Is there is a cost to the district to become an IB school?
- **Answer:** There is a cost, and those costs are supported by district and school funds (similar to how an AVID program is funded).
  
- **Question:** Are there are any middle schools that are interested in becoming an IB school?
- **Answer:** Not at this time, but it is possible if more elementary schools become IB schools that a middle school may express interest.

- Question: Is it possible to request a transfer for a student so that they may attend one of the schools with an IB program?
- Answer: The transfer process would be available for all families, and requests for this reason would be considered along with other requests that are received.
- Question: Can portions of IB be used in non-IB schools (such as world language)?
- Answer: Yes. Alderwood is not currently an IB school, but they do have Spanish instruction.

### **Introduction to the Primary Years Program (PYP) – Leanne Finlay**

Dr. Baker introduced Wendy Barrett, Principal of Northern Heights Elementary, who in turn welcomed everyone to Northern Heights. Wendy introduced Analisa Ficklin, Principal of Wade King Elementary. Northern Heights students and Wade King students are also on hand to assist with the presentation, as the best way to demonstrate what IB means in a school is to see it in action with the students. Wendy introduced Leanne Finlay, the IB Coordinator for Northern Heights.

Leanne presented a [power point](#) about the IB program, including its approach to teaching and learning and the second language component (Northern Heights is learning Spanish, while Wade King is learning Mandarin Chinese). The program embeds curriculum standards including Common Core and also uses a structured inquiry approach.

The Exhibition is the “crowning jewel” of the program, and is similar to the culminating project at the high school level. The IB Exhibition is a group activity, not an individual project. Family members and community members serve as mentors for the exhibition groups.

Analisa added that collaboration among staff is an integral piece of the program, both by grade level and across grade level.

Wendy and Analisa answered some questions from parents:

- Question: Are units at Northern Heights different than the units at Wade King?
- Answer: The PYP provides a framework, but the school gets to personalize and customize the framework. There are commonalities in the curriculum and outcomes for students, but there are differences as well. IB schools teach to the same standards as non-IB elementary schools. We teach the standards, but grow them into more, from a global perspective.
- Question: How integrated is the second language component?
- Answer: It varies by school. At Wade King, each student participates in group Mandarin instruction for 40 minutes per week. At Northern Heights, kindergarten and 1<sup>st</sup> grade students receive some Spanish instruction in the classroom, while 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> grade students currently use Rosetta Stone. Wendy noted that she is investigating how to provide more in-classroom second language instruction.

Students from Northern Heights and Wade King shared examples of the PYP in small groups:

1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Unit of Inquiry (NH 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students shared their current Unit of Inquiry, including Transdisciplinary Theme, Central Idea, Lines of Inquiry, Connections to Key Concepts, Attributes and Action. They shared examples of their work and talked about their learning engagements, etc.).
2. Intermediate Grade Unit of Inquiry (WK students shared a Unit of Inquiry, including Transdisciplinary Theme, Central Idea, Lines of Inquiry, Connections to Key Concepts, Attributes and Action. They showed examples of their work and talked about their learning engagements, etc.).
3. Student-Initiated Action (NH students talked about student-initiated action and shared personal examples of action as related to their units of inquiry).
4. Exhibition (WK students talked about the Exhibition (IB culminating project), and shared their process and projects).
5. Reflection (NH students shared their reflective processes, including personal reflection and self-evaluation of attitudes, attributes and other learning within the units of inquiry).

### **Opportunity for Questions**

Wendy and Analisa asked if there were additional questions that they could answer:

- Question: Are there teachers who would prefer to not be teaching in an IB school?
- Answer: Analisa shared that when Wade King was preparing to open as a brand new school, Rob McElroy (who was principal at the time) shared with the community that he was investigating the IB PYP program. When teachers applied to be considered for a Wade King position, they knew that it was going to have an IB program. Wendy shared that in past years at Northern Heights, there had been a “ping pong” approach to what the focus was (math, reading, writing, etc.). After staff discussion and investigation, it was decided to move forward with the IB program. There was a lot of time and energy invested by staff, and she also noted that Northern Heights has not lost a single staff member because of the IB program.
- Question: Is there a way to know if IB students have benefitted from a prolonged exposure to the IB program?
- Answer: Wendy has heard from Jay Jordan, Shuksan Principal, as well as teachers and parents from Shuksan, that there is a definite difference in students’ confidence level, the types of questions that students ask, and the way they handle themselves. As far as test scores, Northern Heights is seeing a slow and steady incline, and the staff attributes this to critical thinking. Analisa added that she also believes students demonstrate a high ability to advocate for themselves.
- Question: For students who leave Northern Heights and enroll as 6<sup>th</sup> graders at Shuksan, is there concern that the IB experience will not be continued in middle school?

- Answer: Wendy said she believes it would be great to have an IB middle school program (MYP), but she also does not think students are at a disadvantage because there is not an IB program at Shuksan. She believes students leave Northern Heights with skills and attributes that will make them successful. She added that there are some great things that are being done at Shuksan. Analisa added that the PYP is one way of helping to fulfill The Bellingham Promise, but each school has their own personality and focus.

A parent reflected back to when Dr. Vedra was the Superintendent and first introduced the idea of IB at a PAC meeting, there was a lot of concern about the program, some of which was the cost. She noted that it is interesting to see how far it has come and to see the affect it has had on students as they have progressed into middle school and high school.

Dr. Baker reiterated that IB is not mandated by the district, as it is not something that every school wants or needs. If a school is interested in looking deeper into the IB program, the district will support that school in the investigation. Each school has some choice in how to use some funds (IB, Leadership in Me, Counseling, Art, AVID). He emphasized that many elements of IB are reflected in The Bellingham Promise.

Dr. Baker thanked everyone for coming, and also thanked the staff and students of Northern Heights and Wade King for taking time to share their IB experiences.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

**Next Meeting:** March 19, 2014