

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

March 19, 2014

Parents: Parents attended representing 15 schools – 10 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 2 high schools.

Executive Team/District Staff:

Superintendent Greg Baker

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke

Director of Teaching and Learning Trina Hall

Director of Teaching and Learning Steve Morse

Early Childhood Education Coordinator Kristi Dominguez

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

Communications Manager Jacqueline Brawley

Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Family Engagement Isabel Meaker

Note Taker:

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

Welcome:

Trisha Walton welcomed everyone to the meeting, and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Superintendent's Update:

Dr. Baker thanked everyone for helping to accommodate each other in this smaller room, and explained that there is an International Baccalaureate (IB) workshop in the Board Room this week.

- Dr. Baker provided a budget update. The state is far from meeting its mandate to fully fund K-12 education by 2018. The Legislature completed its work last week and adopted mostly a "hold steady" budget. We will receive additional funds for reducing class sizes in kindergarten and first grade at our highest need elementary schools. Additional funds have also been designated for fees and supplies to continue to reduce expenses for families. We will also receive additional funding for transportation. Starting with this year's juniors (the class of 2015), the state is no longer requiring a culminating project for graduation. Our district will need to determine whether to maintain this requirement. As funding has dwindled from the state, the students have not been able to receive as much support in preparing and completing their projects. There was a parent comment that perhaps it could be a project during junior year for students; Steve Clarke indicated that this was also suggested in the Student Advisory Committee meeting. The state has modified the instructional hours requirement; we will need to determine how this impacts our

calendar for 2014-15 (considerations will need to include early dismissal schedules, the length of the school day, when professional development for staff will occur, bargaining implications).

- There are two principal positions currently open for 2014-15, at Geneva and Sunnyland elementary schools. We are currently in the interview process for those positions.
- We are in the midst of a significant infrastructure upgrade to improve the function of technology at all schools. There will be major strides made during the 2014-15 school year to update technology hardware. Training and development for new technology will also occur.
- With Birchwood Elementary School opening and Larrabee Elementary School retiring, many families are experiencing attendance area changes for next school year. All families have received this information. Larrabee teachers have been notified of their new assignments, and teachers who will be coming to Birchwood have also been notified of their new assignments.

Early Childhood Update:

- Dr. Baker introduced Kristi Dominguez (Early Childhood Education Coordinator) and Trina Hall (Director, Department of Teaching and Learning). Kristi discussed the Bellingham School District's collaboration with numerous community partners to support children from prenatal through grade three. Details from Kristi's early childhood presentation can be found [here](#).
- Dr. Baker talked about the "Promise Kindergarten" project, beginning with an overview of the different preschool opportunities and experiences students have prior to entering kindergarten. Some students are able to enroll in private preschool; some students can't afford private preschool but qualify for programs such as Head Start or ECAP; and some students fall in the middle and are not able to access a preschool program at all. Head Start this year turned away 68 students because the program was full. There is an opportunity gap for many students who have not been able to participate in a preschool program. "Promise K" will serve students who have this need and meet criteria. It is not the intent to take over preschool in our community, only to identify those students who have not been able to access preschool so far. Last Wednesday, 4 children had been identified; on Thursday there were 12 identified; on Friday there were 18; and today there are 34 who have been identified and likely will start the program when it begins in April. Staff across the district are working together to make space. There are currently enough students for two classrooms, with a teacher and a paraeducator for each classroom. It is a big challenge mid-year, but the Bellingham Public Schools are up to the challenge. Dr. Baker stated he is not sure what will happen with this program next year. It was asked if the program will be different than the preschool program. Yes, it will be a kindergarten program with adjustments made by the teacher for those students enrolled in the class. It was asked if it's known how many children might be in the community that fit the criteria for entry into the program. It is very hard to track. It was stated that the opportunity gap for students runs consistent

from birth to graduation. Dr. Baker stated that identification of students will be targeted. It was asked if students will have access to counselors, etc. We are working with principals regarding access to music, PE, library, etc. There was a question about how kids are identified. The Opportunity Council is working as a partner with Kristi and Trina, Isabel Meaker is reaching out to families that she believes may have children who qualify, and principals are recommending potential families as well. It was asked if the intent is to expand the program for a longer period of time. It is likely if this were to be successful that we would wait until Head Start and similar type programs were full before identifying students who would be good candidates for the program. It was suggested that a presentation be made to the health care community, as they may also be able to identify potential students.

Parents Matter – Building Community through Networking:

- Steve Morse, Director of Teaching and Learning, introduced Geoff Morgan and Amy Hockenberry of the Whatcom Family Community Network, and Kate Foster from the group Parents Matter. Kate talked about the formation of the Parents Matter group, and indicated that they are working to connect families with community partners who are supporting students' health – including relationships, drug and alcohol prevention, and much more. Parents have more influence over their adolescent's choices than they may think. There is a lot going on in the community for youth, and people just need to know that it is happening. The Youth Matters group meets every month with a coalition of community members (Whatcom County Health Department, Washington State Patrol, etc.), and the meetings typically are just prior to the monthly PAC meeting. An overview of the group's focus of work can be found [here](#).
- Steve Morse talked about alternatives to suspensions and expulsions, which will prevent students from being disconnected from their education. He stated that there are times when dangerous behavior will need to be addressed through an off campus suspension and/or expulsion. Suspensions can ultimately impact a student's ability to graduate. Kate presented discipline data gathered by Steve, which shows a decrease in the number of students out of school per day due to discipline problems. The district wants to support students and find out why they are acting out, not just react after the fact with discipline. Steve passed out a [flyer](#) for a Parents Matter workshop "Resilience in Children", which is scheduled for March 26th, 6:00-8:00 p.m. in the Whatcom Middle School Auditorium. He also indicated that there will be a Family Resource Center opening soon at Roosevelt, with the hope that it will be expanded into other schools. The Bellingham Herald has published a Bellingham Families magazine that will soon be going home to elementary families with resources about events and opportunities.
- Geoff Morgan and Amy Hockenberry gave an overview of the Whatcom County Family Network. Kids need to feel they belong, have a sense of purpose, and have a connection to their passion. The schools do an enormous amount for kids/families. Most kids don't need a counselor, they need someone who listens to them and cares

about them. Amy handed out a [flyer](#) which outlines some of the work that the Whatcom Prevention Coalition provides.

Announcements:

- Our Tree House has an upcoming [presentation](#) “Helping Adolescents Cope with Loss” on April 10th at St. Luke’s Education Center.
- There is discussion regarding district procedures if a child passes away in the summer.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.

Next Meeting: May 21, 2014