

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

April 16, 2014

Parents: Parents attended representing 15 schools – 11 elementary schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 high schools.

Executive Team/District Staff:

Superintendent Greg Baker

Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke

Director of Teaching and Learning Charisse Berner

Director of Teaching and Learning Michelle Kuss-Cybula

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

Executive Director of Human Relations Nora Klewiada

Teacher on Special Assignment/Assistant Principal Jeanette Grisham

Preschool Teacher Tammy Koch

Executive Director of Bellingham Public School Foundation Gennie Clawson

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:

- **Promise Kindergarten:** Staff has worked hard to find qualifying children for the Promise K program. Promise K students are next year's kindergartners who meet certain entry criteria. Four classrooms (one each at Alderwood, Carl Cozier, Happy Valley and Roosevelt) opened on April 10.
- **Walking in the Shoes:** Dr. Baker has been walking in the shoes of students consecutively from each grade level, starting with preschool, and last week completed his day as a 7th grade student at Whatcom. He shares summaries of his learning with school staff at the end of those days. His experiences from a child's perspective are valuable, and he believes those experiences assist him as he makes decisions. Preschool teacher Tammy Koch is walking in the shoes of Dr. Baker today and will accompany him throughout the day. Dr. Baker has encouraged other staff members to consider switching places with another staff member in order to broaden their perspective about our whole system.
- **Principal Positions:** Currently there are principal openings at Geneva and Sunnyland elementary schools, as well as an assistant principal opening at Squalicum High School.

- Family Partnership Program: It was recently announced that the Bellingham School District is developing a [Family Partnership Program](#). It is hoped that this will be a resource for the approximately 400 students who live within our district's boundaries and choose to homeschool. A question was asked if the goal is for the program to break even financially. Dr. Baker answered that the reality is that most of the programs in our district are not self-sustaining, and families who choose to homeschool are also taxpayers and should have access to some resources.
- Math Committee: The [Math Committee](#) is continuing to meet.
- Facilities Update: Construction at [Birchwood Elementary School](#) is going well and the school is on schedule to open in the fall. The [Happy Valley Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee](#) has started meeting and will be visiting and gathering information from schools around the state in order to start planning the design for the new Happy Valley building. The [Lowell Design Advisory Group](#) has had three meetings, and an architect has begun working on the design (which will include a new gym, cafeteria and elevator). A fields landscape engineer will be working with a committee to plan for the replacement of the high school athletic fields. The district just received a \$300,000 energy efficiency grant to be used along with bond dollars to increase energy efficiency across the district. We just submitted a safety/security grant to maximize bond funds. The grant is focused on maximizing our communication with law enforcement.
- [Calendar Update](#): The 2014-15 school calendar is under development. The school start date, breaks and holidays have been determined. The end date has not yet been set, nor have graduation dates or an early dismissal schedule for staff professional development and family engagement. It is a complex process.

Math Update:

Dr. Baker introduced Charisse Berner, Director of the Dept. of Teaching and Learning, and Jeanette Grisham, Teacher on Special Assignment (Jeanette was formerly the regional math coordinator for our part of the state). Charisse and Jeanette have been working with our staff on math professional development as well as leading the math committee. Charisse stated that the culture of math is shifting, and our goal is to develop mathematicians and problem solvers who challenge themselves.

Jeanette passed out blank pieces of paper and outlined a math problem, then asked that everyone work to solve the problem using a visual presentation rather than by just computing the numbers. She then asked them to share how they went about solving the problem. There was discussion about the possible ways to solve the problem. She then passed out the [lesson](#) as it will be presented to 4th and 5th grade students in a Teaching Channel [video](#). The video demonstrates how math instruction has changed to help students understand not only how to do math, but to deeply understand how it works through high level thinking. Jeanette then shared the video, which was followed up by discussion amongst the group reflecting on their observations. Jeanette noted that the [Teaching Channel website](#) is an excellent resource for parents. Jeanette encouraged parents to check out the website.

Charisse passed out standards [information](#) regarding high school mathematics, which addresses math acceleration. She noted that when a student leaps over a whole set of math standards, they end up with “soft spots” down the road. It is a better idea to compress math instruction. Charisse then passed out a document that outlines the middle school mathematics [course sequences](#) and went over what the new pathway will look like. Charisse spent some time answering questions:

Q: How will the new course sequence affect this year’s 6th graders who are taking the advanced math?

A: Charisse stated that the Dept. of Teaching and Learning is working with teachers, and those students will go into the Compacted Math 7/8. If 6th graders get a solid math foundation, they can then accelerate as they continue towards graduation.

Q: Two-thirds of the country has Financial Literacy as a graduation requirement. The Bellingham School District only offers AP Stats. Will students who are not particularly interested in statistics have other options?

A: Financial Algebra is currently offered. (It was noted by a parent that students who take AP Stats as a junior will likely have a gap with no math instruction during their senior year prior to entering college.)

Q: Will there be other options for those students who have advanced math skills?

A: Yes, but they will not be testing all 5th graders as has been done in the past. Most students will be taking 6th grade math in 6th grade. We do not want to rush kids through math. Michelle Kuss-Cybula, Director of the Dept. of Teaching and Learning stated that there are very few kids who are truly capable of skipping the 6th grade math course. If a student is in the Highly Capable program, staff will be looking at what content area a student is highly capable in. Charisse stated that this year’s 5th grade teachers will identify those students who appear to be in this category.

Q: When a student gets to where they are able to get Geometry, will they take Algebra II and Geometry at the same time?

A: Yes.

Q: What if students in 6th grade aren’t advancing in math? There is a focus on students who are highly capable in math, but what about the students who aren’t in that category?

A: On grade level math is on grade level and solidly prepares students to move on to college. Middle schools will have interventions tailored to math to help struggling students.

There was some discussion about students who are struggling at math and what supports are available for them. Charisse noted that the district is a little restricted with state funding and is required to address literacy as a priority. Charisse commented that she and others are taking their comments seriously. Charisse will welcome email questions from parents and encouraged parents to look at the [math committee's website](#). (Please see [Middle School Math Q&A](#) for more information.)

There was a request that more time be reserved within future meetings for follow-up questions. Dr. Baker stated that we are not able to go as deep on each subject as some people may desire due to time constraints.

Reducing Fees/Charges Update:

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke gave an update on our work to continue to reduce fees and charges for public education. Much work has been done over the past couple of years to reduce and eliminate costs for students and families. Steve asked that people pair up to discuss why we are putting money towards this cause. The following was shared out after that discussion:

- We should invest now in our kids to make them capable contributors to society.
- A free public education is our highest state mandate.
- Under the One Schoolhouse philosophy, we should be striving to make sure all students in our district will have an education with similar quality and equity.
- Some schools have asked families to pay for things that other schools did not.
- A student's talent is not based on what neighborhood a student lives in, and every child should have exposure to opportunities that will enhance their talents and interests.
- Providing for the basic needs for all students will take the pressure off of families, and hopefully will minimize the distraction of figuring out how to provide those needs for students.

Steve asked for everyone to pair up again and discuss what we are doing – what have you seen that has been a benefit over the past two years as we are moving towards providing a free education? The following was shared from that discussion:

- It has been a relief for 5th grade teachers, PTAs and families who no longer need to determine how they will fund Mountain School.
- School supplies at the elementary level are now being provided. Steve noted that he is happy that we are doing such a good job at elementary; middle school is getting close; Steve will give an update on high school in a moment.
- There has been a reduction in athletic fees.
- This is allowing PTAs to think critically about why they are raising money, what the PTA's role is, and what should be covered by the district vs. parents and/or PTAs.

- Pioneer school (at the Gordon Carter Conservation site) seems to not be operating (Steve noted that the bond funds will enable the district to make some needed repairs/upgrades so we can start using that site again).
- The healthy snack program has helped kids.
- Some PTAs have received many requests for art supplies and music needs.
- Steve noted that the district has eliminated course fees (lab fees, CTE fees, etc.). The fees for Advanced Placement (AP) tests and extra-curricular activities are big pieces that will require more work.

Steve stated that information that was generated from the October 16, 2013 Parent Advisory meeting was categorized, as was information from the Student Advisory Council, and information has also been gathered from each level (elementary, middle and high school). The next steps that are being looked at are:

- High school supplies (very different structure than elementary and middle), including calculators that can be checked out by students.
- PSAT testing.
- Field trips (6th grade Snow Goose, as well as other 6th, 7th and 8th grade field trips).
- Recorders for elementary music.
- Access to programs and enrichment opportunities (looking at stipends for enrichment opportunities at all elementary schools).

Steve pointed out that we have a real opportunity here. Some students are served extremely well, but some students are not able to participate to their potential because families and schools can't afford it. Steve asked Mike Copland to read a letter from an Alderwood parent which provides some insight into how the lack of opportunities can impact children. Steve noted that we have kids in this same situation all over this community. He stated that we don't have it all figured out, but we want to give every kid an opportunity to receive the benefits of being a student in our district and in our community.

Announcements:

- This is Joanna Nesbit's last year as Co-Chair. Trisha Walton and Dawn Brand will serve as Co-Chairs for 2014-15.
- Upcoming Events:
 - [Bellingham City Club](#) meeting at Northwood Hall - April 23, 11:30-1:30.
 - Town Hall meeting on underage drinking at St. Luke's Education Center – April 30, 4:00-6:00.
 - [Hungry Minds Breakfast](#) (supporting the Bellingham Public School Foundation) at Whatcom Middle School – April 29, 7:15-8:45.

- Marijuana Symposium at Sehome High School - May 6, 6:00-8:00
(Bellingham Police Dept., Catholic Community Services, Parents Matter and other community organizations will be participating).

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

Next Meeting: May 21, 2014