

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent

May 21, 2014

Parents: Parents attended representing 14 schools – 9 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 2 high schools.

Executive Team/District Staff:

Superintendent Greg Baker

Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke

Executive Administrator Rob McElroy

Director of Teaching and Learning Steve Morse

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

Communications Manager Jacqueline Brawley

Bellingham High School Principal Jeff Vaughn

Bellingham High School Student Success Coordinator Peter Hutchinson

Sehome High School Principal Phyllis Textor

Sehome High School Student Success Coordinator Jade Jones

Options High School Principal Byron Gerard

Options High School Counselor Chris Cochran

Squalicum High School Principal Keith Schacht

Squalicum High School Dean of Students Nikki Johnson

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 and Budget Update:

- **Leadership Update:** Steve Ruthford has been hired as the new principal at Geneva Elementary; Trina Hall has been named the new principal of Sunnyland Elementary. Nikki Johnson will be the new assistant principal at Squalicum High School. The school district is currently conducting searches for new principals at Parkview and Alderwood elementary schools. Parent input will be taken at upcoming meetings.
- **[Calendar Update:](#)** The calendar is still being worked on. Our school calendar needs to be reflective of state laws and is also part of labor negotiations. Future options include extending our school day (in response to the upcoming requirement of 24 credits for graduation and the ability for students to take more elective classes) and having seniors' last day be the same as the other grades. An extended school day would not be implemented next school year. It's a complicated issue with snow

days, graduation ceremonies and the culminating project (which has been eliminated as a state graduation requirement).

- Dr. Baker has been meeting with the senior and junior classes at our high schools, and the topics for those meetings are the 1080 hour requirement, graduation requirements, and seniors' last day. Historically, seniors have been getting out 5 days earlier than all other students. The implications of that are that most high school classes consist of students from multiple grade levels, and that can leave a classroom with several fewer students for the last 5 days. Also, if there are snow days to make up, the seniors will not meet the 1080 hour requirement. Another topic of Dr. Baker's meetings with students is the culminating project. The feeling at this point is that it should no longer be a district graduation requirement. In talks with the high school principals, there is still interest in students participating in a project that would benefit the community and provide an opportunity for students to perform community service hours. Our high schools typically schedule their graduation ceremonies on a Friday or Saturday. Dr. Baker asked if it feels OK to have graduation ceremonies mid-week, or do they need to be on a weekend? The input received was:
 - Avoid the ceremonies being on a Tuesday or a Wednesday.
 - Sehome has had their ceremony on Monday in the past, and that has worked out for families.
- Grants Update: The school district has been awarded two state grants that are related to our facility improvements and will help maximize our voter-approved bond funding: \$437,000 in matching grant money to maximize safety and security improvements for schools and \$310,000 in additional grant funds for energy efficiency projects.
- [Math Committee](#): Communications have recently gone out to families about the Math Committee's recommendations and the math curriculum changes happening next fall. New materials will be ordered this spring and will be arriving in classrooms for September.
- [Visual and Performing Arts Committee](#): This group has been meeting since February, reviewing the current state of the visual and performing arts program in the Bellingham Public Schools. This group may present to PAC next fall.
- [Bond Projects](#): Education Specification committees related to the improvements and rebuilds of Happy Valley and Lowell elementary schools are meeting with architects on visioning. Both groups have held community meetings, seeking input. The new Birchwood Elementary is on track to open in the fall and is looking great.
- Shuksan Middle School: Dr. Baker acknowledged the great things are happening at Shuksan and the recognition that some of its staff has received. Teacher Katie Brown was named State Teacher of the Year in the fall; Theo Mills was named State Classified Employee of the year on May 12; and yesterday, Jay Jordan was named District Leader of the Year.
- [Budget Update](#): Dr. Baker shared the draft budget highlights for 2014-15 and fielded questions:

Q: With the high number of homeless students, it is surprising that more money is not being spent on school resource officers. Were additional officers considered?

A: Several years ago there were more resource officers across the district. As a result of budget cuts, we now have one District Resource Officer (DRO) supporting all 22 schools. The district has applied for a federal grant for an additional DRO. In addition, counseling support is being increased for next year.

Q: Will potential Alderwood principals be interested in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, and what is the financial commitment for the IB program?

A: Yes, principal candidates for Alderwood will be aware that Alderwood will be an IB school. Both the IB and AVID programs are schoolwide programs. We currently have the AVID program in 4 of our schools (Kulshan, Shuksan, Sehome and Squalicum). Two of our elementary schools are IB schools (Northern Heights and Wade King), and three are investigating becoming IB schools (Alderwood, Birchwood and Carl Cozier). Each of these programs operates with a .4 or .5 FTE (full-time equivalent) coordinator at the school. The district provides funding for .2 of each coordinator position, and the school's building budget provides the remainder (each year each of the schools receives a building budget and some flexible FTE which can be differentiated depending on the needs of that particular school). In addition, the IB program has a world language component, and the cost for that is similarly apportioned. AVID staff participates in professional development over the summer, which is funded by the district.

Q: Is there an update on the athletic fields?

A: The recent bond provides for turf athletic fields at our three comprehensive high schools. A consultant is currently looking at the fields in anticipation of the work to be done.

Bellingham Promise High School Success Update:

Steve Clarke introduced a panel of administrators, counselors and other staff from Bellingham, Sehome, Squalicum and Options. The panel spoke about the different comprehensive programs in place at our high schools that help our students graduate. Bellingham Public Schools' four-year graduation rate is 78% (five-year graduation rate is 81%). Dr. Baker challenged our high schools to look at dropout rates, graduation rates and to determine what can be done to help students be more successful. High school success coordinators have been key to helping increase graduation rates. Some other ways our high schools are trying to catch struggling students include student-to-student mentorship programs; Compass to Campus (which includes college students from Western Washington University helping our secondary students); Communities in Schools partners; parent and community volunteers; and an after-school tutoring program. Some high schools have special pullout or support classes to help students who are not scoring on state tests at grade level. There are many options for struggling students – high schools work hard to match students with the appropriate program – in and out of, before, during and after school. The school district helps support after-school tutoring programs.

The panel then answered questions:

Q: Is the lack of graduation due to ability, motivation or drugs?

A: All of those and more. There is work being done to address student motivation, apathy and social tenacity, and for students to work through difficulties (working through a wall rather than going around it). Having more electives may help to get kids connected.

Q: How can we increase parent education as it relates to addiction?

A: The success coordinator tries to connect with parents of students who appear to be at risk. Not all parents have the skills to follow through with their child. There is a critical need for parent education and support groups.

Q: Does the school district have a budget for parent education?

A: The Parents Matter group is taking that question on. Kate Foster stated that the Parents Matter group will have a full day retreat this summer to determine how best to move forward. Squalicum High and Bellingham High each have full time Prevention Specialists, and there are a number of community agencies that are connected to our schools.

Q: How are students identified to receive services?

A: All schools use data, and some students are self-referred (by themselves or by a parent/guardian).

Q: Do middle schools identify students at transition time?

A: Yes, 8th grade students in need of support are identified by middle school teachers and counselors, and that information is passed on to the students' high school team.

Q: What are some of the alternatives to a traditional high school model?

A: Bellingham Public Schools offers an online program, Bellingham Virtual Learning (BVL), and we have students enrolled at the Northwest Career & Technical Academy, as well as in the Running Start program. The goal is for students to stay in their high school. Kids who are successful in high school are typically successful in Running Start and vice-versa. All of our high schools can offer academic rigor, and kids now choose Running Start for social reasons. We also contract with Graduation Alliance, which is a re-engagement program. Graduation Alliance contacts dropouts to offer them three alternatives – return to high school, choose a career path, or choose a GED path. Byron Gerard noted that BVL offers 321 courses that are high school accredited.

Q: With a majority of the tutoring/mentoring opportunities being after school, are there accommodations available for student athletes who have turnout after school?

A: When teachers connect with the coaches to let them know a student is struggling, some coaches will insist that the student attend the after-school tutoring sessions.

Family Resource Center Update:

Steve Morse, a Director of Teaching and Learning, and specialist Jessica Haugan updated the group about the new [Family Resource Center](#) (FRC), which is located at Carl Cozier Elementary. From 1992 to 2002, FRCs were funded with the financial help of the City of Bellingham. Steve and others will be meeting soon with the City to appeal for funding assistance. The FRC helps to address some of the basic needs of families and the whole child, as called out in the Bellingham Promise. The FRC's mission is to link human services, schools, communities and families together to support the healthy development of families and students. The FRC is staffed by volunteers, as well as by Jessica and Paula Stratman, and is a resource for the entire district. The hope is to open additional centers with increased funding from the community. Jessica shared a Power Point [presentation](#) and handed out a spring newsletter. A summer newsletter will be published soon and will be available online. Brochures and posters have gone out to all schools, which will help to create awareness of the FRC. There will be staff presentations in the fall, which will increase that awareness. It was asked if the FRC is mostly geared for low income families. The resources are for all families, across the district. There will be summer hours, and evening hours are also being looked at. Steve, Jessica and Paula are hopeful to recruit more volunteers to staff the FRC. Dr. Baker pointed out that Steve Morse is an example of an outstanding principal who has been pulled out of a school in order to benefit the entire district.

PACS Member Survey and Announcements:

- Trisha handed out a survey with regard to next year's PACS meetings and asked that everyone take a moment to complete the survey.
- This is the last meeting for Joanna as co-chair. Next year Trisha and Dawn Brand will serve as co-chairs.
- Todd Guiton shared that the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation is hoping to have each school's parent group donate to the BPS Foundation, and to also provide a volunteer to act as a designated liaison to the BPS Foundation.

Next Meeting: September 17, 2014