

**Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent  
September 25, 2014**

**Parents:** Parent representatives attended representing twenty schools - 13 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 3 high schools.

**Executive Team/District Staff:**

Superintendent Greg Baker  
Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland  
Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke  
Executive Administrator Rob McElroy  
Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe  
Communications Manager Jacqueline Brawley  
Doctoral Resident Anda Adams

**Note Taker:**

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

**Welcome:**

Trish Walton and Dawn Brand welcomed the group and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

**Superintendent's Update:**

Dr. Baker welcomed everyone to this first meeting of the Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) and talked about the purpose of the committee. He asked representatives to bring their own perspective and experiences to the meetings and to also represent the entire school community. Specific topics addressed at the meetings might or might not impact your child, but they likely will impact other children in your school, as well as other students in the district. This group also advises the superintendent on key issues, which are brought to the table by parents, staff and the superintendent.

Dr. Baker asked parents to talk for the next 4-5 minutes in groups of two or three about how this school year's school start-up has been. When the group came back together, Dr. Baker asked each person to share one acknowledgement and one wonder:

**Acknowledgements:**

- First day at Kulshan was awesome.
- Sehome's freshman orientation barbecue with healthy food choices was great. Dr. Baker shared that BPS now delivers healthy snacks to 7 elementary schools and Options High School, and the intent is to build on that in future years.
- Very smooth start at Fairhaven.
- Kudos to the paraeducators and for the hiring of additional paraeducators.
- My daughter has great teachers again this year, and many parents showed up for curriculum night.
- Appreciated the parent night at Squaticum.
- Our family loves the Fridays off. It is great for students who are taking AP classes, and will also be great when it comes time for college visits.
- Kudos to Transportation; busing seemed to be very smooth in comparison to last year.

- Just started kindergarten, and it went smoothly with smaller class sizes and more support. There was a clear difference for those students who went through “Promise K”. Dr. Baker noted that BPS was able to make kindergarten and first grade class sizes across the district smaller than they have been, and a second adult was in each kindergarten class for the first few weeks of school. Also, for lunch time and kindergarten dismissal time, district office staff helped in the schools to make those transitions run more smoothly. He also noted that 50+ students who had not had any preschool experience were given 10 weeks of kindergarten experience at the end of the 2013-14 school year.
- From the district to the school level, The Bellingham Promise is real and it is being implemented. Our family is new to the community and has felt so welcomed. It has been a beautiful experience, is so happy about the healthy snacks and the school supplies being provided.
- Columbia is working to increase communication to families. Parent volunteers are building a Columbia Parent Association website.
- The Options High School start was great!
- Sunnyland is so pleased with the new principal, Trina Hall. It’s great to see her smiling in the hall, interacting with kids. She has fresh ideas and is a positive presence in the school.
- At the time of the Northern Heights meet and greet, there was a “to be determined” (yet to be hired) 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher. Wendy Barrett followed that up with a very personal phone call to 1<sup>st</sup> grade students to let them know who their new teacher would be. Dr. Baker stated that it is sometimes difficult to know how accurate projected enrollment at each school and each grade level is until school starts. It is a complex issue, and sometimes adjustments need to be made once school begins. To this date, there are adjustments still being made.
- Geneva’s new principal has been amazing; he is there when needed and asks opinions of the Geneva parents.
- Impressed with how smoothly school started.
- Coming from another school district, is pleased with the amount of communication with families (phone calls and emails from the School Messenger system) – very different from prior district.
- The Sehome PTSA asked for help getting their webpage up to date. It took a year, but it is now online.
- Kindergarten start-up was great. The communication was very helpful, families knew what to expect.
- The first few weeks of school have been great!
- Great experience so far; impressed with commitment and quality of the teachers and the principal.
- Kudos for the new facility at Birchwood – it seems very well thought out, with a beautiful combination of old and new. The “vibe” of the school is cozy and welcoming, mellow and calm.
- The new principal at Parkview is wonderful. Our family feels very welcome; it feels like a new school. Our son also felt very welcomed at Whatcom. Middle school communication is so important, and we very much appreciate his team of teachers emailing assignments to parents.
- Kindergarten start was amazing - very organized, a smooth transition.
- Our 8<sup>th</sup> grader has life-threatening allergies. This was the first year where I felt a plan was in place before school started.

- The communication has been great for our new middle school student – Cubs Day (6<sup>th</sup> grade orientation) and parent information night were awesome. Just as the principal sets the tone for a school, Dr. Baker has set the tone for the district.
- Principal Jordan (Shuksan) knew there were some Squaticum 9<sup>th</sup> graders (former Shuksan 8<sup>th</sup> graders) who were nervous to walk into school on the first day. Mr. Jordan told students he would be there to walk them in, and he was at Squaticum on the first morning of school, standing next to Mr. Schacht, greeting them.
- The opportunity to meet with teachers early in the school year is invaluable.
- High school freshman night was great; grateful for the BPS commitment to kids.
- The Sehome freshman orientation was 10 days before school, and while the students were participating in the orientation, the librarian did a website overview for the parents.
- Impressed with the work that principal Analisa Ficklin is doing to improve the social climate at Wade King.
- Curriculum night was very informative.
- Great start at Sunnyland and at BHS. Happy that there is an after-school bus to the Boys and Girls Club from Sunnyland.
- Kudos to the district for hiring Brian Pahl as a Technology Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA).
- Happy for the return of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade strings program. Dr. Baker noted that 5<sup>th</sup> grade students are able to participate in a strings program. The after-school program will be for 10 weeks after school, rotating through the elementary schools.
- Kudos to the district for the direction we are moving with regards to better food choices in the cafeteria and with the snack program.

#### Wonders:

- Teacher evaluations (has been prominent in the news). Dr. Baker stated that there is a lot going on with regards to teacher evaluations, and there are a lot of federal dollars tied to teacher evaluation. Washington State has been developing its evaluation system over the past four years, which is commonly referred to as TPEP (Teacher Principal Evaluation Project). Our district has been engaged in new methodology and instruments, and this is year 2 of the phase-in. BPS has had a great team of teachers, principals and staff working on this project, and we feel we are one of the leaders in the state.
- Will Kleenex ever be supplied again? Dr. Baker agreed we should have Kleenex in our buildings. Kleenex has an interesting history over the past several years, and Steve Clarke will check on how tissues can be provided by the district (these were ordered by the close of the meeting).
- How is the new math curriculum going for middle school students? Dr. Baker gave a little background regarding BPS' K-12 math adoption, which has been and is a major investment in both financial resources and time. Much training and development occurred over the summer. There are two math TOSAs (Teacher on Special Assignment) who are helping staff with the adoption of the new curriculum.
- Now that we are making more demands on teachers (from highly capable to the other extreme), when will teachers get help making adaptive materials? Dr. Baker stated that the BPS' highly capable program went through a program review in 2013-14, resulting in many changes. We are dedicated to making sure teachers are trained to a high degree, which will require a great deal of training and development.
- Wonders how the math program is going.

- Also wonders about the new math adoption.
- Wonders how we will make it through the college application process.
- How are you going to be able to transition kids new to the district when they don't have a common core background? How do you plan to help those students? Dr. Baker noted that many states have come together through the governors' association and education groups to adopt common standards so there is more alignment. States and districts are in different places of implementation.
- Are you doing smarter balanced testing, and what will that look like? Dr. Baker stated that there is a new assessment system called Smarter Balanced, and that could be a possible deep session that is looked at during a future PAC meeting.
- How is it determined which schools are recipients of school supplies and is it sustainable? Dr. Baker responded that the district has a strong belief that if your child attends a public school, they should receive a free education. All school supplies are provided by the district at our elementary and middle schools. Each year, we are trying to lower the costs to all families. The middle schools all saw value in the Snow Goose field trip, and this year all 6<sup>th</sup> grade students will participate in this field trip at no cost to families. PSAT fees are now paid by the district. This summer the district purchased graphing calculators for all of the high schools. Those calculators can be checked out to students so families will not need to purchase a \$125 calculator for their child. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade Mountain School field trip and elementary strings program are now being funded by the district and donors, at no cost to families.
- Is there a plan to paint the exterior of Columbia? The trim is in bad shape.
- Coming from a school district in Georgia which had an autism program, wonders if there are plans for an autism program in Bellingham?
- When will the new district central kitchen be preparing entrees on-site? Dr. Baker responded that the timeline for the central kitchen can be found on the BPS website (<http://bellingshamschools.org/department/facilities-projects>).
- A PTA treasurer was under the impression that a percentage of field trips would be paid for by the district. Upon checking with Liz Crocker, they were informed that only the Mountain School field trip would be funded by the district. Dr. Baker said more clarity is needed regarding funding for field trips.
- There are issues at arrival and dismissal times, both with buses and with parents dropping off and picking up students at Geneva. Dr. Baker acknowledged that this continues to be an issue at many of our schools and is something that continues to be addressed.
- Notices the amount of food wasted at lunch time (kids dumping uneaten food into the trash), and wonders if schools have considered having recess prior to lunch so that students are not in a rush to finish eating and move on to recess. Dr. Baker stated that this has been a topic of conversation.
- The district and school websites can be challenging to navigate (for instance, finding the price of a school lunch). Suggested a new parent information packet with FAQs.
- Wonders about the technology supports for teachers – do they receive assistance from the tech department to set up classroom webpages? Dr. Baker noted that to train and develop all staff to a high level is a big effort. This is the first year that the district has a technology TOSA (Teacher on Special Assignment). There are many new state-of-the-art computers that have been placed in the schools, and more will be coming for teachers and for students.
- For families who do not have easy access to technology, how does the district communicate well with them?

- Every school has a certain sense of community, but could more families be pulled in, in order to develop a better sense of community?
- Is it possible to donate plastic pencil boxes that are not needed by our family? Dr. Baker stated that families are welcome to return unwanted supplies to their school office.
- The elementary school is sometimes used as a dog park. Even when people pick up after their dogs, bacteria is left behind.
- For a Fairhaven after school track meet, the second bus did not show up until 5:15 p.m. Could that be avoided in the future?
- There is a lot of outdated information on the website. Also, it would be nice if there were more links on the website.
- There are reports from Sehome students that boys are smoking in the restroom, and it is intimidating for other boys to walk into the restroom.
- Has the new grant writer been successful? Has she met with principals? Is she looking for grants across all levels? Dr. Baker confirmed that the grant writer has been successful in securing grants for the district. He stated that just last night the district received notification that it was awarded a \$25,000 grant which will support the GRADS program over the next three years.
- Does the district look at school culture?
- Is there staff development around curriculum night?
- Do substitutes receive training?
- Will parents receive menus for the family dinner nights at Shuksan?
- Wonders about the level of competence of the substitutes in the classroom.
- Wonders if there is any progress regarding Playworks. The Lowell program has too many regulations. Dr. Baker commented that implementation of the program is still a work-in-progress but the playgrounds will not be a free-for-all. The playgrounds need to be a safe, fun place for all students, and Playworks helps with that. All schools are working on massaging the program so that it works for their playground.
- Will we be moving in the direction of removing some not-so-healthy choices from the menu (such as chocolate milk)?
- We seem to be receiving a lot of paper home from school. Will that change?

Dr. Baker noted that he feels this has been the best start to a school year during his five years in Bellingham.

### **Potential Topics for Agendas:**

Committee members were asked to brainstorm potential meeting topics/agenda items for the 2014-15 school year. Dawn explained that typically there are two topics addressed each month. She asked that everyone get up to talk and brainstorm, to find topics that you would like to devote time to at future meetings. There is chart paper on the wall for suggestions (divided into elementary, middle and high school). Dawn will take the charts home to organize the information, which will help to determine what topics will be addressed at future meetings.

Dawn thanked everyone for contributing ideas for the future meetings.

### **Announcements**

- Key Communications will go out in the next couple of days. There will be a small write-up at the bottom of the Key Communications that can be used for school newsletters.
- The PTSA President at Squalicum High asked that it be conveyed to everyone that there will be a PTA training at Squalicum on September 30, from 6:00-9:00. The Training is free and includes dinner. You can sign up via PTA Region 8's website ([www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org)).
- If your PTA has any money left over (from Mountain school, etc.), please donate to the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation to support the strings program.

Dr. Baker thanked everyone for coming and the meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

**Next Meeting: October 23, 2014**