

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS)

March 26, 2015 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.

Central Services Board Room

Parents: Parents attended representing 20 schools – 14 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, and 3 high schools.

Executive Team/District Staff:

Superintendent Greg Baker

Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke

Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations Tanya Rowe

Doctoral Resident Anda Adams

Note Taker:

Lezlie Fox, Executive Secretary, Communications and Community Relations

Welcome:

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

Superintendent's Update:

Dr. Baker welcomed the group and let them know the discussions would surround personnel, start and end times, and an idea for a new field trip.

- The first update was about personnel changes within Bellingham Public Schools. Dr. Baker said that we currently have five principal openings: Lowell and Northern Heights elementary schools, Shuksan Middle School and Sehome and Squalicum high schools. He said they have been gathering input from students, families and staff about qualities desired in a principal and that interviewing will begin next week. Dr. Baker also discussed changes at Central Services and let the group know that Rob McElroy will be retiring, Anda Adams will be completing her Doctoral Residence and that Kate Baher will now be at Larrabee with the Family Partnership Program.
 - Dr. Baker described the hiring process and the meetings that have happened with parents and staff in each of the schools.
 - Dr. Baker said the principal positions have been posted and the interviews will start next week and continue after spring break.
 - Question: When you are hiring, since you have 5 schools, do you keep all of the positions in mind when interviewing?
 - Dr. Baker said the interviews are done by level, for instance they assemble an elementary interview team and that group works on interviewing for the elementary principal positions. Steve Clarke said it has been great to hear from each of the different parent groups from the individual

schools about what they think the best fit for their school will be.

- Dr. Baker then discussed plans for a possible new field trip experience. He said they are trying to find another field trip that might be funded across the board for all students in another grade. One idea is to take the PAC on a field trip to see what the experience is like.
 - Dr. Baker proposed a PAC field trip to the WWU Planetarium. He asked for thumbs up or down on the idea. Lots of thumbs up – some sideways – no thumbs down.
 - Question: What happened to the pioneer/conservation site?
 - The conservation site still exists. We have the [Gordon Carter Environmental Learning Center Vision Advisory Group](#) working on what this will look like and how it will be used. Anda Adams gave an update. We have been working with a group of people teachers, principals, community partners to think about and talk about what is possible up there. We have put together some guiding principles based upon The Bellingham Promise and will give that to Dr. Baker. Other discussions centered on transportation.
 - Dr. Baker said the challenge is to figure out how to get lots of kids to use the site.
 - Comment: When we were in middle school, we built a cabin out there. It wasn't just a one-time-use facility. Some of the best memories I had were from the conservations site.
 - Dr. Baker discussed additional uses for the facility, such as outdoor enrichment experiences.
 - Comment: I like the idea of the property being used. I like the idea of high school kids and others contributing to building. When you have a program like that which is cancelled, that is also remembered. The enrichment piece is important. Brought up the inequity of field trips between different schools.
 - This will be discussed next when we talk about Project Free Education.
 - Comment: Regarding the planetarium idea – are there other ideas in the works for a trip?
 - Yes there are a lot of ideas. We are looking at what other opportunities are out there and how will they might be funded.
 - Comment: I heard from my daughter about a roving pacific science center – and she loved it.

- Right now we don't have a centralized person to coordinate all of these opportunities for the schools.
 - Comment: Central coordination would be great – a lot of schools try to get together to coordinate an event.
- Next, Dr. Baker gave an update on the school schedules (start/end times.) Dr. Baker reviewed the current schedule and discussed the proposal that was recently shared with families and why the changes were proposed. He described the two main reasons for the proposed changes:
 - Sleep research stating that high school students are better prepared to study later in the morning.
 - State graduation requirements will require current middle school students to graduate with more credits.
- Dr. Baker told the group that we received a lot of feedback and shared some of the comments they received, both from parent surveys and from meeting with students in each of the high schools.

Dr. Baker said we're not pulling back from what we are trying to achieve, but know that we haven't yet found the best solution; we still have work to do.

- Comment: Was there anyone that looked at the budget situation related to busing and about combining elementary and high school to have start times at the same time?
 - Yes, we looked at this option. While this happens in many other districts, some the feedback included the comments that parents would not be comfortable with their kindergartener riding with a high schooler or a middle schooler. Also, this model would require 25-30 more buses.
- Comment: What happens if you do that and the bus is full?
 - We build our routes so that we can pick everyone up. This is why we would need to buy more buses.
- Comment: A PAC member said she would challenge the assumption that we would need more buses because she believes we have buses that are not full/well utilized. She asked the group who had kids that never take the bus. She said it bothers her that we have to have a bus for every family when not everyone uses it.
 - We bus all kids that meet certain criteria and our fleet is based on ridership, not school enrollment.
- Comment: What if people opt out of transportation? We honestly never use the school buses for to and from and then you build a model based upon that? The cost of the 8 extra buses goes down. I have a theory after watching Fairhaven Middle School come back from civic field with no one but the coach on the bus. I think the whole model needs to be looked at. I would love to see an opt out for transportation in the handbook.

- An empty bus due to sports is a different conversation. We build the model based upon who starts the school year riding the bus.
- Comment: Also important not to encourage a culture of every parent driving their kid. I know it's complicated.
- Comment: What about in high school? Do you see attrition once the students get their driver's license half way through the year?
 - The difference hasn't been that large. Some students stop riding but not enough that we don't need to run a bus any more. We do run fewer routes in high school than middle and elementary.
- Comment: Gave an example of a city in Wisconsin partnering with the local bus service.
 - We brought WTA in and matched where WTA goes and where our kids live. It came down to being able to guarantee children a spot on the bus. We are only required to offer transportation to students in special education, but if we don't offer busing, some kids wouldn't attend.
- Comment: What if you ask them (WTA) to start from scratch?
- Comment: I would be more concerned with my student riding a WTA bus rather than an elementary student riding with a high school student.
- Comment: My friends in Seattle, all of their kids ride the city bus.
- Comment: It's different when you send your kids on a public bus with a driver that you've never met. The bus driver works for WTA not the school district. What about a bus monitor? What if we made this a high school credit to help minimize any bullying?
 - Regarding adding school buses: The number of drivers is also an issue. We can buy buses, but then we would need to find bus drivers.
- Comment: My husband and I have been following the entire process. We are excited about the way it has been going. Excited to read the blog and that the comments were respectful.
- Comment: I have worked in many districts. We are spoiled here. To give us choices and listen to us is absolutely amazing.
- Comment: I felt like a glorious idea was presented and then it's not going to happen. Parents of older kids are disappointed.
 - Please know that we're not giving up; we just haven't found the best solutions yet.
- Comment: The idea of it being a heavier course load for high school students didn't even occur to me that they would feel more overloaded.
- Comment: My 8th grader is trying to figure out his schedule and is ready for increased rigor, but looking at a 0-hour class and an online class; please keep working on a solution.
- Question: How much preparation/communication about the health benefits to high schoolers was done?
 - This was part of the process and it's great that more people are aware now.

- Comment: My son came home talking about high school starting later. As he looked at it more, he pushed back. Looking at the big picture, he didn't like the idea.
- Comment: When you have elementary kids, it's hard to fathom high school.
- Comment: I did research and didn't find many that start earlier in elementary.
 - We did lot of research. Not many elementary starts were in the 7:00 hour.
- Comment: Hood River, OR. They all start early and go together.
- Comment: It feels comforting at the end of the day that the process has been such an open discussion. It feels that whatever the outcome is, the process has been good.
- Comment: It might be a good idea next to have the high school parents visiting with middle and elementary parents.
 - If PTSA wants to meet with Dr. Baker, he would be happy to hold a Coffee with the Superintendent. Also, we've been wrestling with this, so let's get a pulse to see if this is even palatable? This is part of the process. It's raised the awareness.
- Dr. Baker gave an update on development of the budget and the budget process. He said the state is still working on its budget. We will be coming out next week with draft budget priorities if we have additional revenue
 - Governor's budget has:
 - Cost of living increase. While this is good news for employees, the state doesn't fully fund schools. So, they would only fund a portion of this increase and the district will provide the remainder.
 - Class sizes. We may see some funding for class size reductions in kindergarten/primary grades.
 - Questions: Is there a plan to increase the Promise K?
 - We have taken every Promise Kindergarten that is eligible.
 - Question: But it starts mid-year or full year?
 - We won't start too much earlier. We're not trying to pull kids out of preschool that are enrolled.
 - Question: Space constraints? More teachers? More classrooms?
 - Good to have a state/national perspective. We will need a short-term/long-term solution for more space if the state funds more class size reductions. Short-term, we would need to put more portables in some locations. Long term – talking about what our next bond looks like and how we can add space.
- Steve Clarke gave an update on [Project Free Education](#) and PTA financial roles. He gave the group some of the projects they would like to see funded, but said they are still in the budget process.

Steve brought up the web site and showed how Project Free Education has been working through the last three years in BPS to reduce or eliminate supplies, materials and course fees.

Steve discussed next steps and goals for 2015-16, depending on the outcome of the budget process:

- Allocation for every elementary student to take a field trip.
 - Enrichment stipends – 4 in all of the elementary schools
 - A small allocation for students in need to access club sports participation.
 - Comment: My kids went to Alderwood and they were often the only students doing extracurricular activities. Very athletic kids, but unable to participate due to lack of funds. This is a great idea.
 - Hoping that the district and the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation will partner to help these needs. We also have great community partners that are willing to partner with us so families will have access.
 - Question: Rangers have a robust scholarship program. Do others?
 - They may, but it is limited. The Promise is to every kid in the community.
 - Question: How will that be executed? Is there a way to use the same scale for free and reduced lunch?
 - Question: I'm curious about assistance eligibility. Would people not using free and reduced lunch be eligible for this?
 - We haven't determined criteria. We just want to get in the game to support kids who want to participate.
 - Question: Is the field trip situation being looked at? Some can afford, some cannot.
 - We are looking at this. We have some students that are taking school trips to Europe. Do we offer that to everyone? It's an equity situation and will take a community effort.
 - Question: What is the 8th grade field trip/science trip?
 - They go to the San Francisco Bay area. Only a small number of 8th graders at Kulshan Middle School go on the trip. It's an application system and grade-based.
 - Comment: They work hard, fundraise and get the reward of the trip.
 - Comment: This is also based on the willingness of teachers to chaperone and the work that goes into it, which may be why it stopped at other schools.
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- Steve continued, and said we want to offer high school supplies. binders, pencils, flash drives etc.

- Question: Are you going to address what the schools need from the PTA's?
 - We are trying to support the PTA's work and not have it be a loss for anyone. We are in unchartered territory and need to work with you.
 - Dr. Baker. Conceptually, if we take away all the things that PTA's need to fundraise for, you can spend less time fundraising and more time doing other things. Maybe donating to the Foundation, which is a system wide option. We would rather not have us all fundraising all of the time.
- Question: What if you have a PTA that is divided a small group of people deciding what to do with the money?
- Comment: Now we are in a situation where we had to ask for money to fund the art program.

Discussions continued about how the PTA's work together and with the parents and where the money goes in the school.

- Comment: There are homeless coordinators available.
- Comment: ASB high school position: I would like to see the district fund the ASB position at all of the high schools. I understand money from the ASB fees pay for this position.

Announcements

Dawn Brand and Trish Walton are at the end of their second year of co-chairing the Parent Advisory Council and asked if there are other parents interested.

A PAC member pointed out a handout about a meeting about the drug SPICE and other ways to keep kids drug free. April 1 is the meeting sponsored by Parents Matter.

Adjourn

Next Meeting: April 30, 2015