Dear Community,

The mission of our strategic plan The Bellingham Promise says “all students will be exceptional in their own way.” This is a powerful statement, and I believe we can all improve upon the way we talk about our children by focusing on their strengths and potential, as opposed to their needs or services.

At our annual staff kick-off event in August, I encouraged our staff to talk about people first, and I’d like to extend that request to our community at large.

Instead of “this English language learner (ELL) student” or “this Special Education student,” we can use the phrase “this exceptional student who receives ELL services” or “this exceptional student who receives Special Education services.” This is the same for students receiving highly capable services, or students in particular programs such as BRIDGES or LifeSkills or even students experiencing homelessness.

It may seem like a small distinction, but it’s important to remember that no one is defined by their needs. Let’s keep working on this together and supporting one another with these efforts.

Thank you for your continuing support of students and staff in Bellingham Public Schools.

Best regards,

GREG BAKER
Superintendent of Schools

Above: Food services staff prepare salmon cakes ahead of Taste Washington Day. More on the Good Food Project on page 5.

Below: Mandala by Saunders Van Woerden, BHS student

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**The Bellingham Promise**

**vision**
We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children. We will empower every child to discover and develop their passions, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life.

**mission**
We collectively commit that our students are cared for and respected, and that they will graduate from our schools prepared for success. All students will be exceptional in their own way, with strong character, a passion for learning, and ready for the widest range of educational and vocational options to support a diversity of life choices.

**core beliefs**
We believe:
- all children should be loved,
- the whole child is important,
- every child can learn at high levels,
- early learning and development are critical,
- learning is lifelong and essential to a high quality of life,
- compassion and service build community,
- teaching children to do their best involves self-reflection and reaching higher,
- diversity enhances a strong and healthy community, and
- together we achieve more than alone.

**outcomes**
We develop students and graduates who are...
- readers and writers,
- scientists and mathematicians,
- historians and global thinkers,
- artists and performers,
- artisans and technicians,
- multilingual readers and speakers,
- skilled users of technology and information,
- leaders, collaborators and team players,
- dependable and responsible people,
- confident individuals who continuously challenge themselves,
- respectful and compassionate humans,
- honest and ethical individuals who act with integrity,
- healthy, active individuals,
- critical thinkers and problem solvers,
- effective communicators,
- innovators and creators, and
- well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.

**key strategies**
We will accomplish this by focusing on...

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**
We envision and strive for a more diverse, inclusive and equitable organization. Focus areas include, but are not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, language and culture.

**Innovation and Flexibility**
We support the diverse needs and learning styles of our students by being innovative and flexible. We embrace change and creative thinking and know that this requires a high level of trust and engagement with our community.

**Great Teaching with Strong Support**
High quality instruction occurs every day in every classroom, where we establish a safe and engaging learning environment. We support culturally-responsive instruction through effective leadership, ongoing staff learning, and a diverse staff reflective of our students.

**Early Childhood Education**
We support students and families from prenatal through graduation. We invest in a strong early childhood program because of its powerful long-term return for our students and community.

**A One Schoolhouse Approach**
Our schools are part of a larger One Schoolhouse, and we focus on taking care of each other. We provide an equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all students.

**Student, Family, and Community Engagement**
We develop partnerships and engage with a wide variety of stakeholders, including families and community partners, to support the success of all students.
Thanks to generous voter support of our bonds in 2013 and 2018, many facilities projects are moving forward. The new Sehome High School opened in January 2019 and final pieces of construction, including parking lots and soccer, baseball and softball turf fields, are nearing completion. Construction on Squalicum High School’s new softball and football fields have also begun, and these are due to be completed by January. Our next step on fields includes working with staff and coaches at Bellingham High School to begin phase two of their turf fields for baseball, football and softball. Those fields should be completed by late winter/spring 2020.

Above: The new Sehome High opened in winter 2019. Parking lots and fields are nearing completion.

Crews are currently renovating the transportation garage on James Street, which is 60 years old. The project involves interior improvements, including service bays, vehicle hoists, fluid and air distribution, and parts and tool storage. This upgrade is scheduled to be completed by spring 2020.

Updates, photos and webcam video on facilities projects can be found at bellinghamschools.org/facilities-projects.

There is also information on design work and recommendations for the new Alderwood and Parkview elementary schools. We will break ground on the elementary school projects by spring 2020 and will soon share a call for applications to the design advisory committees for the Sunnyland Elementary rebuild and the new District Office on Barkley Boulevard.

Operations and technology replacement levies on February 2020 ballot

In Bellingham Public Schools, we have an operations and technology capital levy on the upcoming special election ballot on Feb. 11, 2020. These would replace two voter-approved levies from 2016 that will expire soon. Levies are for learning. These levies pay for nearly 25 percent of the cost of educational services not adequately funded by the state.

While we are still refining the amount that will be on the ballot, here is a partial list of items that these two levies would fund. Stay tuned for more information in the coming months.

Operations Levy
Our upcoming replacement operations levy supports teaching and learning:

- Lowers class size
- Pays for teachers, counselors, nurses and other staff
- Funds other basic operations and programs such as safety, Special Education, English Language Learners and Highly Capable
- Provides arts, music, athletics and other programs for the whole child
- Supports field trips, Project Free Education, and food services and wellness

Technology Capital Levy
The replacement technology capital levy pays for:

- Classroom technologies
- School wired/wireless networks
- Adaptive technologies and devices for children with special needs: science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) and Career and Technical Education (CTE) support
- Computers, software, and digital curriculum licensing
- 1:1 (one-to-one) technology initiative to support learning and prepare students for the future
- Maintenance vehicles, equipment and other improvements

Levies are for learning.
Seesaw offers elementary families a ‘window into the classroom’

Even if “nothing” is the default answer to, “what did you do in school today?” elementary families now have snapshots from their students’ day thanks to Seesaw, a digital student portfolio available to all elementary schools. Families who sign up can see their student’s work and the communication between their student and teacher, both online and through the mobile app.

“Seesaw gives teachers a remarkable way to open their classrooms and the learning inside it to families,” educational technology coach Brian Pahl said. “My two children who don’t love talking to me about school have flipped. I no longer ask ‘what did you learn in school today?’ I can say ‘tell me what you learned about growth mindset! I saw your Seesaw post today.’ It totally shifts the conversation.”

The Seesaw program helps students take an active part of their work and encourages interactive discussions about the posts. Because students can use video and other tech tools within Seesaw, it also serves as a comprehensive learning portfolio and reduces the need for other apps or programs.

More teachers are delving into having students use Seesaw as a platform to share and reflect on their learning. “I love that students can communicate directly with families about their learning,” fourth grade teacher Jennifer Hanley said. “They are taking photos and videos of their work, plus they add the next layer of thinking behind the post. It’s not just for families – it’s for them.”

“We saw students become agents of their own learning,” Meredith Attar, educational technology coach, said. “It’s fun for students to see and hear their own growth. For example, they might record themselves reading and can look back at previous posts to see how their reading has improved.”

“When students can talk about what they learned, why it challenged them and how they are working to overcome a barrier, there is power in that,” Pahl said. More information is available at: web.seesaw.me/parents

Teaching about mandalas includes lessons in history, culture and technique

Catherine Gersich, an art teacher at Bellingham High School, shared her thoughts on an annual art project that focuses on the history and creation of mandalas. These mandalas were created by her students in Art Two in spring 2019.

“Art is a common language shared between cultures and across time. It’s important that I weave history and art from various cultures into many of my projects to give more depth to the assignments. I think understanding how and why people have created art for thousands of years, enables students to find more relevance in their creations. Art history helps shows visually how it felt to exist in certain location, a specific society and in a particular time!

Many students enjoy looking and talking about art from other eras and cultures and appreciate considering the emotional impact of the art, the historical context of it, and analyzing the circumstances of its creation and purpose. It inspires ideas for their own art and creates deeper meaning about the world around them and our place in it.”

ABOVE: Mandala by Cyan Paglia, current Bellingham High student. See full story and more mandalas at promise.bellinghamschools.org.
School food made with love

With the opening of the new Central Kitchen earlier this year, the Good Food Promise has expanded into the Good Food Project, our multi-faceted work describing how we will continue to improve our school food and cafeterias. In the first menu cycles of this school year, more than 50% of our entrées were scratch-made using the Central Kitchen equipment.

Our school lunch menus also include many more ingredients sourced from local farms and vendors. We are pleased to highlight Cloud Mountain Farm Center, Sage and Sky, Joe’s Garden and Crows Farm who provided us with the local tomatoes in our Two-Ton Tomato Sauce. Additionally, Lummi Island Wild, Bluebird Grain and Joe’s Garden were highlighted in the Taste Washington lunch on Oct. 2 (see story at right.) Other locally sourced items on the current menu come from Edaleen Dairy, Hempler’s, Jack Mountain Meats, Bellewood Acres, Cairnspring Mills, Avenue Bread and Cauldron Broths.

School menus now include new icons that depict whether a lunch is scratch-made, has a vegetarian option, includes whole grains or is made with local ingredients. (See below.) You can see our updated “made with love” menus online at bellinghamschools.org/school-menus

Taste Washington Day celebrated with special guests

Bellingham Public Schools was happy to celebrate this year’s Taste Washington Day with some special visitors. These included the first lady of Washington state Trudi Inslee, Chris Iberle and staff from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), staff from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and several local farmers and fishers.

First lady Inslee commented on a Facebook post how much she enjoyed her visit. She wrote, “I was thrilled to participate in the 9th annual Taste Washington Day in Bellingham! It was great to discuss the importance of local agriculture and healthy eating for kids in school.”

While in the district, Inslee and the state entourage visited the new Central Kitchen where the Taste Washington Day meal was prepared, then traveled to Cordata Elementary to visit the school garden and share a meal.

Iberle, WSDA’s farm-to-school specialist, noted the connection that school cafeterias can have with local farms. He wrote, “It was fun to see, and taste, firsthand how Bellingham is using local ingredients in their school meals to support farmers, and educating students about how food is grown.”

The Taste Washington meal on Oct. 2 included farro from Bluebird Grain (Winthrop, WA) and beets from Joe’s Garden (Bellingham), as well as salmon caught by Lummi fisher Ellie Kinley, who works with Keith Carpenter of Lummi Island Wild. Both Kinley and Carpenter attended lunch with Inslee and Iberle at Cordata Elementary.

LEFT: Birchwood Elementary student takes a salmon cake “adventure bite” with Chef Mataio Gillis

FAR LEFT: Columbia Elementary student enjoys the Two-Ton Tomato Sauce on the first day of school. Read story at the QR code.


THANK YOU TO ALL OUR LOCAL FARMERS, FISHERS AND VENDORS WHO SUPPORT THE GOOD FOOD PROJECT!
Educators participate in summer study of indigenous ways of knowing

Staff from Bellingham Public Schools attended July 2019’s Paddle to Lummi gathering as part of the Study Canada Summer Institute (SCSI) hosted by Western Washington University. In addition to the Lummi event, the institute also traveled to Victoria, BC, visiting the Royal BC Museum’s First Peoples galleries and living languages exhibit, as well as University of Victoria’s First Peoples Learning Center.

Alderwood Elementary School teacher Jennifer Wilkinson shared how this summer learning will inform her work as an educator, especially in light of the state of Washington’s recent adoption of new social studies K-12 learning standards. These updated standards include more opportunities for thoughtful civic engagement and also incorporate the “Since Time Immemorial: Tribal Sovereignty in Washington State” curriculum. (See www.k12.wa.us to review the standards.)

“As a result of attending the Institute,” Wilkinson writes, “I am now committed to using the resources of the Since Time Immemorial curriculum to be sure that my present second graders understand what the Lummi Nation is, where the Lummi Nation is, and how Lummi tribal sovereignty predates settlement of Bellingham and the Pacific Northwest.”

“I want my students to know that the Lummi Nation governs itself in order to keep and support their cultural ways of life.”

Wilkinson’s full reflection can be found at promise.bellinghamschools.org with the online story and photos, along with thoughts from other attendees.

Find the full stories online or on social media, along with other Humans of BPS, at promise.bellinghamschools.org.

ABOVE: Canoes from more than 100 tribal communities attended the Paddle to Lummi 2019.

BELOW: Institute attendees (left to right) were Patty Keene (recently retired teacher from Silver Beach Elementary), Susan Pevonak (Columbia Elementary teacher), Cynthia Wilson (Lummi partner), Anna Lees (WWU faculty), Susan Davis (Columbia Elementary teacher), Charisse Berner (director of teaching and learning), Sharece Steinkamp (Geneva Elementary principal) and Jennifer Wilkinson (Alderwood Elementary teacher.).
**Why have a race and equity policy?**

**CAMILLE DIAZ HACKLER:** I think the majority of people don’t think about race and equity because they don’t have to; they have that luxury. The new policy acknowledges that there are historically marginalized groups, and we need to do better by interrupting factors that perpetuate inequities.

**KELLY BASHAW:** Part of our responsibility as a board is to measure improvement and understand how the superintendent is helping our district move these efforts forward. We know this work is happening, for example, the annual Latinx festival and the new Youth Pride Parade. Having a new policy formalizes it and hopefully makes it easier to continue and grow this work.

**One aspect of the new policy focuses on increasing workforce diversity reflective of our students. Why is a diverse staff called out specifically?**

**CAMILLE DIAZ HACKLER:** I remember hearing from a student last year who talked about the value of having staff in our schools who looked like them. I think it’s important growing up to have teachers and other staff who represent you and your family, whether it’s your teacher, bus driver, food service staff or the principal.

**Can you share any other reflections about the race and equity policy?**

**KELLY BASHAW:** There is data that shows when your school staff reflects the students you are serving, students are more likely to go to college. Even if it’s just one person. If it’s two or more staff members in a school, the numbers increase significantly.

**KELLY BASHAW:** This work is about the next generation. We’re setting an example because most people don’t realize how many privileges they have, and we need to actively confront institutional bias.

**CAMILLE DIAZ HACKLER:** I think Bellingham is a unique community. Overall, we’re accepting. But we can do better and this new policy calls that out. Let’s do better.
The mission of the Assistance League of Bellingham (ALB) states that “volunteers transform the lives of children and adults through community programs.” Last school year alone, 734 students in Bellingham Public Schools were given new clothing through Operation School Bell ($100 per student), 51 district students received enrichment scholarships in 2019, and 40 Teen Team vouchers (worth $125 each) were given out to high school students experiencing homelessness.

Annual volunteer hours at ALB have been estimated at over $1 million but the experience for volunteers and the intrinsic value in their work is way beyond any monetary amount. ALB volunteer Christy Dahms says that “The camaraderie among the members is exceptional and we enjoy working together while making a difference in the community.”

“We are professional and organized, yet welcoming and fun!” Dahms said. She encourages community members to join their membership ranks.

To raise funds for their support, ALB runs a Thrift & Gift Shop and holds fundraisers such as the Spring Fashion event and the annual Yule Boutique. In 2019, ALB focused on literacy in their fundraising and collected over 4,000 books for Kids Need Books and assisted in a summer reading program.

District homeless coordinator Roxana Parise has worked with ALB every year to support linking the organization to families in need.

“The Assistance League of Bellingham has always been driven to help low-income students experience the joy of shopping for new clothes,” Parise said.

“For some students, the only new clothes they receive is through Operation School Bell. It’s heartwarming to see students leave a clothing event with a bag full of new clothes. For 20+ years, BPS has been fortunate to have the Assistance League of Bellingham as a community partner.”

To find out more about ALB, go to www.assistanceleague.org/bellingham.