OFFICIAL MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY LINKAGE SPECIAL MEETING
BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF DIRECTORS
January 23, 2025 6:00-7:00 p.m.
District Office

Topic: Childcare

Linkage Attendees:

- Birth-5 Childcare providers: **Maureen Hodge** (NWESD 189, representing ECEAP); **Heidi Bugbee** (Generations Early Learning & Family Center); **Kim Walbeck** (The Seedlings Early Learning Center); **Stephanie Schroeder** (Bellingham Public Schools Early Learning Center); **Lilly Grucza** (parent).
- After School Childcare providers: **Shannon Millican** (Whatcom YMCA); **Erik Becerril** (Boys and Girls Club of Whatcom County); **Sammy Jolly** (Wild Whatcom); **Lisa Powell** (parent)
- Directors present: **Douglas Benjamin, Camille Diaz Hackler, Jenn Mason, Scott Ritchey, Katie Rose.**
- Superintendent of Bellingham Public Schools **Greg Baker.**
- District Leadership and Staff: Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations **Jackie Brawley;** Deputy Superintendent **Mike Copland;** Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning **Ari Feeney;** Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning **Jay Jordan;** Executive Director of Family Engagement **Isabel Meaker;** Chief Technology Officer **Kurt Gazow;** Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources **Matt Whitten;** Chief of Operations **Jessica Sankey;** Chief Financial Officer **Kathryn Weilage;**

Call to Order: School Board President Jenn Mason welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Community linkage meetings give the school board an opportunity to strengthen our connection with our community members, and the school board looks forward to hearing what tonight's attendees have to say about their experiences. She introduced Superintendent Greg Baker who welcomed attendees and invited all to introduce themselves.

Meeting Purpose – Explanation of Community Linkages: Dr. Baker thanked everyone for taking the time to be here this evening. This linkage will give the school board information about existing childcare opportunities. A similar meeting several

years ago led to the district expanding to full-time kindergarten and expanding its pre-kindergarten opportunities.

Small Group "Fishbowl" Conversations: Ms. Rose facilitated a discussion with the birth-to-five group, and participant responses and comments to the questions asked are below.

In looking at The Bellingham Promise, what stands out for you as important? How does childcare and/ or after-school care relate to the outcomes?

- The one schoolhouse approach is integral to our community, with everyone working toward common goals for children.
- High quality play-based learning and early learning support help students to attain learning skills.
- The Bellingham Promise contains a core belief that every child can learn at high levels.
- From infants on, we believe children are competent, and children will rise as high as we expect them to.
- When we have capable, well-paid educators, it pays off for our children.
- Families and early learning centers provide a lot of learning in the first five years of a child.
- We have expectations for infants and toddlers during critical development time, and each child needs a different level of support.
- Strong partnerships between early learning organizations and the school district were formed during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Early childhood providers offer important support for students with special needs. Teachers and staff often act as co-parents.
- The transition of students from early childhood and kindergarten is crucial.
- The kindergarten transition forms are great for connecting public school staff with childcare providers and families.
- It would be helpful for parents new to elementary school to have a "cheat sheet" that provides information not covered in the registration paperwork.
- Childcare providers can be a great resource for parents and families when they are experiencing difficulties with their children.
- We're all here and invested in this because we want the kids in our community to become good adults.
- We need to be valued, and what that looks like is knowing we're all contributing to a child's trajectory.
- As children transition from developmental preschool to Promise K, families have a difficult time finding childcare to fill the gap.

Ms. Mason facilitated a discussion with the after-school enrichment group, and participant responses and comments to the questions asked are below.

When you think about access to and the impact of quality childcare, what's working for children and families? What barriers do you see?

- For students to attend the Boys and Girls Club after school, transportation is the biggest barrier for families. Not all employers will allow parents to leave their job to transport. The district partners with the Boys and Girls Club to provide transportation for some students to the club.
- YMCA is on site at each elementary school with over 530 kids currently registered. Some families qualify for reduced rates, and the Family Engagement team helps to find ways to subsidize tuition.
- The lack of workforce is a barrier for after-school providers, as is the ability for providers to pay a living wage for high quality staff.
- Kids who have challenging school days also have challenges after school.
- It can be difficult for kids to adjust to different rules during and after school.
- There is a lack of scholarships.
- For students who have IEPs, that additional support goes away after school.
- Eloping is the new not listening, and childcare staff need to follow kids to keep them safe when they run from program areas.
- The turnover rate is high for staff in after-school programs, which is difficult because it takes time to form connections with kids.

As a childcare provider, what's working well in your organization? What challenges do you face?

- The addition of transportation was a game-changer.
- Many families need after-school programs to go until 5 p.m.
- The low cost of membership with the Boys and Girls Club ($40 per year) is helpful for families.
- It works well to have childcare at the school, as it prevents the need for transportation to another site.
- There is a big disconnect between what is provided at school versus after school, especially for neuro-divergent kids. The transition is hard.
- Trauma-informed training is helpful for providers.
- Joint professional development is crucial in providing seamless care for kids.
- Attending IEP meetings to gain useful information is helpful, but that is limited because of staffing.

What are some things that you would like district leaders to know about working with Bellingham Public Schools?

- The YMCA has built a tremendous relationship with Bellingham Public Schools, and both the operations and the teaching and learning teams have been good partners.
- The district and childcare providers working together during Covid was unique to this region. It was not common across the state.
- The Boys and Girls Club is appreciative of the support provided by the Family Engagement team.

Dr. Baker asked if any of the school board members had questions or comments:

- Collaboration is critical, and I did not hear any barrier or struggle that money wouldn't solve.
- It was great to hear everyone's experiences and appreciated their contributions.
- I was reminded that it's hard to be a kid, being shuttled from environment to environment all day. The kids are lucky to have adults who want to provide the best services for them.

Dr. Baker thanked the attendees for participating in this evening's community linkage. He is proud of the work that has been done through The Bellingham Promise. Minutes will be posted on the board's website in the coming weeks.

Ms. Mason thanked everyone for their valuable input. The school board enjoys hearing from our beneficiaries and owners, and it was wonderful to hear from childcare providers this evening. She adjourned the meeting at 6:54 p.m.

Approved:



Jennifer Mason, Board President

Attest:



Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board

Minutes approved: February 13, 2025