



Summary Notes for Safety and Security Planning Committee

Meeting 1 – Thursday, January 23, 2025 4-5 p.m.

Location: District Office, 1985 Barkley Boulevard, Bellingham

Present: Russ Robinson, Director, Safety and Security, co-chair; Jessica Sankey, Chief Operations Officer, co-chair; Jay Jordan, Assistant Superintendent; Kurt Gazow, Chief Technology Officer; James Hayes, Director, Athletics and Activities; Dana Smith, Assistant Director, Communications; Allison Chryst, Principal, Shuksan Middle; Micah Smith, Birchwood Elementary; Laura Britt, Principal Geneva Elementary; Curtis Lawyer, Director, Capital Projects; Heather Jones-Jennings, Custodial Supervisor; Mark Peterson, Director, Facilities and Sustainability; Cindy Dennis, Director, Transportation; Laura Cardinal, Director, Mental Health Services; Jon Knutsen, Bellingham Police Department; Josh McKissick, Bellingham Police Department; Anthony Paz, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office; James Allen, Whatcom County Sheriff's Office; Derik Scott, Bellingham Fire Department; Dionte Thomas, Campus Monitor, Squalicum High; Kelly Balzer, Paraeducator, Northern Heights Elementary; Roxanne Borders, Preschool Teacher, Silver Beach Elementary; Lauri McBeath, Systems Analyst; Analisa Ficklin, Director, Special Education; Lindsey Keane, Parent/Guardian, Happy Valley Elementary; Jennifer Kilmer, Parent/Guardian, Columbia Elementary; Dawnette Chadwick, Parent/Guardian, Bellingham High, Birchwood Elementary; Fernando Olvera, Parent/Guardian, Kulshan Middle; Eric Hamerski, Parent/Guardian, Fairhaven Middle; Shay Colson, Parent/Guardian, Alderwood Elementary; Cooper Stafford, Student; Angie Ritchey, Operations Specialist; Katie King, Administrative Assistant, Facilities.

Russ Robinson, Director of Safety and Security, welcomed the committee, led introductions and went over the agenda.

Review of safety and security projects

Russ reviewed the district's recent projects over the last five years, including how the 2013 and 2018 bond funds were used and the direction the district is going with the funds. Bond funds in conjunction with general funds were used towards video monitoring systems and door access control in school buildings and transportation, school specific needs such as fencing, and ADA improvements at various sites. These are all projects that have been completed or are in process.

- **Video monitoring systems** are used to protect our students, assets and used for accuracy in investigations. Work has been completed, and we are now discussing adding them to our outdoor facilities as they are upgraded or modified.
- **Access control** has given all buildings the ability to have electronic control, with buzz in and out so that when staff, students, parents/guardians, or visitors arrive they must be allowed access to the building, we did not previously have this. Schools and buildings also now have fob access, electronic locks with doors locked and on timers for transition times. As of 6/24/24, elementary, middle and high schools are updated and active, and we are currently studying the feasibility at Bellingham Family Partnership Program.
- **Site-specific needs** included: fencing around Carl Cozier, security film on windows and blinds have been added to schools. Door hardware is in the process of being updated for consistency with thumb turn locks. We have also made quite a few ADA improvements, including entryways.
- **Possible future enhancements:** Russ talked briefly about potential implementation of Centegix, Raptor, or other wearable panic button system in our buildings. This could allow security protocols to be initiated by any staff member with an alert system.

Safety protocols and training

We have updated our business practices. Some of the updates include using ParentSquare alerts for communication during a safety protocol, as well as making upgrades and repairs to some school intercoms so everyone can hear announcements and act quickly.

Russ shared information about the safety protocols adopted during the 2023-24 school year: [the “I Love U Guys” foundation’s standard response protocols](#). We worked with the rest of Whatcom County and all public schools have or are currently adopting the standard response protocol. Often many districts share students between moving and activities, and this allows the students to follow the same protocols. All administrators in BPS were trained by the “I Love U Guys” foundation in August of 2023 and law enforcement officers can expect the same protocols at each school in Whatcom County. Additionally, Whatcom Community College and Skagit County school district also use the “I Love U Guys” protocols, which is building waves for others to use the same protocols.

Russ reviewed the five different protocols and gave examples. More information is available at [the school safety webpage](#).

- **Hold** – lowest level and is initiated when a school has a situation that would require students and staff to remain in place. Examples: investigation, spill or medical emergency in the hallway.
- **Secure** – schools are always in secure to a degree; the protocol is initiated if there is an unsafe situation outside or around the school campus. Learning continues, classes move inside the building with no one in or out. Example: law enforcement activity in neighborhood.
- **Lockdown** – initiated if there is an unsafe situation in the school. Students and staff lock the doors, turn out the lights and stay out of sight until cleared by first responders. If outside, then self-evacuation is allowed. Example: dangerous person in the building, report of a weapon in the building.
- **Evacuate** – if people need to get out of the building in a safe manner, initiated if the building is unsafe and needs to be evacuated. Example: fire, severe earthquake.
- **Shelter** – initiated if there is a hazard to be mitigated and people should remain in place rather than leaving the building. Example: earthquake or toxic spill near building.

Russ reviewed the Campus Monitor position, who they are and where they are located. Campus monitors are key to increasing the sense of security students and staff feel and offer additional support that isn't tied to a classroom. Campus monitors can build relationships with students, and it has been beneficial to have the position at middle and high schools.

Staff training and relationship with first responders

All district leaders are required to be trained in the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and the Incident Command System (ICS) management, and two members of the district engage and train with Whatcom Unified Command and the County Emergency Response Team. On June 27, 2024, we held a full-scale reunification exercise and training. Half of the day was an instructional process, and half the day was a hands-on exercise with all public school districts in Whatcom County, private school representatives, first responders, and NWESD members, where a lot of lessons were learned. After any big incident the goal is to get our students back to their families safely.

Russ talked about how important and critical our relationships are with first responders and law enforcement in our district. He works with patrol officers in our school areas and detectives for any needs within our buildings, including collaborating on investigations into students, staff and facilities. We believe in the power of a tight knit community and bringing trainings into our buildings, and have hosted exercises with Bellingham Police Department in our buildings including the K-9 unit. We have not had Bellingham Fire Department in yet

but would like to look into that. Trainings help first responders and law enforcement get into our buildings for further knowledge of our space, which could ultimately benefit our students.

Group mission-building activity and closure

Russ and Jessica then asked the committee to break out into groups to discuss what do we care deeply about, who do we want to serve, and what impact do we want to make, as well as what words are most important and which concepts are vital to communicate. Each group shared ideas out to the group and wrote on a common whiteboard.

Russ then let the committee know that we would be wordsmithing the items that the groups came up with and would bring them to the next committee meeting to finalize the mission statement. The planned agenda for the next meeting is: identifying potential areas of growth, developing goals and creating a plan moving forward.

The next meeting is scheduled for 4-5 p.m., Thursday, March 6 at the district office.