Bellingham Public Schools
a collective commitment

Board Summary: Community Linkage Meeting
Connecting with Higher Education Professionals
District Office Board Room
March 30, 2016

The Bellingham School Board of Directors and Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed audience members, invited guests and district staff to a linkage meeting with local higher education professionals. The purpose of the meeting was for the directors to engage in a discussion about how The Bellingham Promise resonates with this group and how the school district can strengthen its relationship with this segment of the community. The discussion focused on the following questions:

- *What rings true in The Bellingham Promise?*
- *What is missing in the goals of The Bellingham Promise?*
- *What strengths have you observed in our graduates?*
- *How might we better prepare them?*

During the discussion, attendees shared insights and thoughts on the guiding questions. Highlights of discussion:

- Some spoke of how much they appreciated that a core value in The Bellingham Promise is that *all children should be loved.*
- Success in high school math and/or written and verbal skills, as well as high levels of creativity, generally translate into success in college and beyond. Attendees expressed varied opinions on whether high SAT scores or grade point averages were the best predictors of success.
- It is important that students understand they have a wide array of choices upon graduation from high school. All kids do not have to go straight to college.
- A well-honed sense of introspection/self-reflection is sometimes missing when students start college.
- Financial literacy, time management skills, and fostering a sense of resilience were areas cited as needing more emphasis during high school.
- Adults need to do a better job communicating to students what they can expect from Running Start.

Meeting minutes are attached.

Official Meeting Minutes: Community Linkage Meeting
Connecting with Higher Education Professionals
Bellingham School District Board Room – 5 p.m.
March 30, 2016

Linkage Attendees:

- Higher Education Professionals: Shoshaunee Elliott, Northwest Indian College; Ed Geary, Western Washington University (WWU); Millie Johnson, WWU; Anne Marie Karlberg, Whatcom Community College (WCC); Raelyn Axlund McBridge, Bellingham Technical College (BTC); Caryn Regimbal, BTC; Jess Savage, WWU; Rod Taylor, BTC; Tawny Townsend, WCC; Steve VanderStaay, WWU
- Directors Kelly Bashaw, Douglas Benjamin, Camille Diaz Hackler, Quenby Peterson, Steven Smith
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker
- District Leadership/Staff: Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke; Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland; Executive Director Kurt Gazow; Executive Director Nora Klewiada; Assistant Superintendent Bob Kuehl; Assistant Superintendent Simone Sangster; Executive Director Tanya Rowe; Executive Secretary and Recorder Ruth Rasmussen

1. **Opening Items**

   Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions:

   Camille Diaz Hackler, School Board President, called the meeting to order at 5 p.m. She welcomed the group and introduced Dr. Baker. Following Dr. Baker's welcome and opening comments, the invited guests, board members and district staff introduced themselves and described their connections to the school district.

2. **Meeting Purpose – Explanation of Community/Board Linkage:**

   Ms. Bashaw thanked attendees for participating in this meeting. She explained that the school board views community linkages as an opportunity to listen and connect with the community and to strengthen connections with stakeholders. More specifically, the board is seeking input on the goals set for students through board policies expressed in The Bellingham Promise.

2.1 Large-Group Discussion with School Board

Meeting facilitator Tanya Rowe invited attendees to take a few minutes to review The Bellingham Promise. She said the following guiding questions would serve as a framework for this evening's discussion:

- *What resonates in The Bellingham Promise?*
- *What is missing in the goals of The Bellingham Promise?*
- *What strengths have you observed in our graduates?*
- *How might we better prepare them?*

Summary of comments:

- *What resonates?*
    - I appreciate the bold statement that *all children should be loved*. A child's attachment to teachers and schools is critical. Sometimes in our desire to raise test scores, we forget to ask the question, does the student feel attached to the school and teacher? There is no getting around how important that is.
    - I appreciate the *collective commitment* identified in the mission – the focus on the entire community, as well as the character-related outcomes (*respectful and compassionate humans*; *honest and ethical citizens who act with integrity*).
    - We develop *confident individuals who continuously challenge themselves*. I cannot overemphasize how important that is.

- *What is missing?*
    - Within the key strategies, typically one would expect to see something related to data-driven decision making.
    - I'd like to see something in outcomes related to introspection – the ability to self-reflect. For some students, the ability to identify strengths and passions can be a challenge. As a two-year institution, we work with students to identify career interests early, and many have not previously gone through that process.
    - Resilience should be emphasized. Students need to understand that they will experience setbacks. Almost nothing worthwhile is achieved without challenge and difficulty.

- *What strengths have you observed in our graduates?*
    - Students who have studied German seem to sail through our programs. They seem to do spectacularly well.
    - We have seen some key student government leaders come out of Bellingham High School – specifically in terms of civic involvement.
    - Our partnership with BPS through the high school credit retrieval program has been successful in terms of benefits to the at-risk population (potential dropouts); that has been powerful.
    - BPS students are definitely adequately prepared for our programs. I am pleased with what you are doing.

- (*In terms of how performance in specific subjects translates to overall college success, comments included the following*:)
  - BPS grads over-performed in applied English and under-performed in math.
  - In my experience, students who can read, write, and are articulate tend to do well; the students that are only strong in math and weak in writing and verbal skills tend to not be as successful.
  - In terms of placement in college-level math, BPS students perform well relative to other students in Whatcom County and beyond.
  - I find my strongest students are those who excel in English and theater; they can create.
  - Students who stop at Algebra II can sometimes flounder.

- *How might we better prepare our students?*
  - There is a financial literacy component that is sometimes lacking. This is not specific to BPS graduates. For example, our students need a level of increased awareness in such areas as filling out the FAFSA applications, or understanding credit scoring and credit card debt. These tie into outcomes in The Promise relating to developing students and graduates who are *dependable and responsible workers*.
  - *Regarding the tendency of top-tier students to leave Bellingham to attend college elsewhere:*
    - We tend not to get a lot of honor students from BPS. Many top-tier students tend to go elsewhere.
    - From an admissions perspective, this is not unique to Bellingham; it is part of the "hometown disadvantage." I think it happens everywhere.
  - The number one problem our students report is time management; they need to be more skilled at keeping a calendar.
- Other comments/questions:
  - In our work (in admissions), we often see classes listed on transcripts that raise questions. For example, high schools will sometimes combine courses and use creative titles for the class that cannot be easily interpreted by an outsider. As a result, we are not sure what the class is so we find ourselves asking the question, what exactly is this student coming in the door with?
  - How do we motivate students to learn? How do you incentivize kids to raise standards? [Cited example of a school district where students with a cumulative average of 2.50 or higher were rewarded with 15 minutes more at lunch.]
  - I worry about a message to students that says, "You are failing if you are not heading to a two-year or four-year college right out of college." If they take a year off – or longer – are we sending a message that they will be less competitive?
  - How do we connect with former students who are not recent graduates? Opportunities exist to pursue higher education, even for those who have been out of school for a few years or many years. Perhaps this presents an opportunity for us to partner in a way that will better serve our community.

- Regarding Running Start:
  - This is not a problem that originates with the school district, but misperceptions exist regarding Running Start. The program gets your "foot in the door," but it doesn't translate necessarily into an associate's degree.
  - We have students who have completed their General University Requirements who come in with a lot of enthusiasm, but it may still take them four years to complete college. It's something many students need to be aware of.
  - It's important, too, that students know Running Start is not for everybody.

3. Closing and Wrap-Up
   - Dr. Baker thanked attendees for their participation and summarized key points of the discussion. He referred to the 16 outcomes outlined in The Promise, noting that the directors and district leaders have frequent, in-depth conversations relating to data. The conversations revolve around quantitative as well as qualitative data that incorporates case studies and relevant story lines.

The meeting adjourned at 6:06 p.m.



Camille Diaz Hackler
School Board President

Attest:



Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board

Minutes approved: April 21, 2016