Official Board Summary: Community Linkage Meeting
Connecting with the Faith-Based Community
January 22, 2015

The Bellingham School Board and Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed audience members, invited guests, and district staff to a linkage meeting with representatives of the community's faith-based groups.

The purpose of the meeting was for the School Board to engage in a discussion about how The Bellingham Promise resonates with members of faith-based groups and how Bellingham Public Schools can strengthen its relationship with this segment of the community. This evening's discussion focused on the following excerpt from The Promise:

- *Each child will be exceptional in his or her 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.*

Guiding questions were:

- *Where do our organizations' interests and work in these areas intersect?*
- *What are your greatest challenges?*
- *How might we work together better to improve opportunities for all students?*

During the discussion, attendees said they welcomed this opportunity to have a discussion with the board. Several outcomes within The Bellingham Promise were cited in response to the question regarding the intersection of interests and work; these include the commitment to develop multilingual readers and speakers; healthy, active individuals; effective communicators; and well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world. Attendees said they would like to find ways to work with the district to build awareness among students and families of programs and activities that their organizations currently offer. There was agreement that many faith-based groups have volunteers ready or willing to volunteer time and/or resources to the district; therefore, a coordinated volunteer program would be invaluable. This type of effort could include finding ways in which Spanish-speaking and other English Language Learner (ELL) family members can volunteer at their children's schools. Challenges faced by low-income and homeless families and other families in crisis were cited as a major concern. During a discussion of inequities faced by low-income students who often are unable to access extracurricular activities and programs, the district's *Project Free Education* program was referenced as one way the district is seeking to address this challenge.

Meeting minutes are attached.

Official School Board Community Linkage with
Faith Based Groups
Central Services Board Room

Linkage Attendees:

- Representatives of the faith based community:
  - Dane Burgess – Redeemer Church
  - Scott Connolly – Church of the Assumption
  - Grant Fishbook – Christ the King Church
  - Sandy John – Cento de Adoracion Vida
  - Margie Kimberley – First Congregational Church
  - Joel Langholz – Our Savior's Lutheran
  - Marikka Matheny – First Baptist Church
  - Janie Pemble – Interfaith Coalition
  - Tim Slesk and a second representative from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS)
  - Mike Stone – Sgi-Usa Buddhist Temple
  - Erin Vanstaalduinen – Relate/Whatcom County Pregnancy Clinic
  - Laurel Vodopich – Our Saviour's Lutheran Church
  - Jonathan Weldon – St. Paul's Episcopal Church
- Directors Kelly Bashaw (Board President), Doug Benjamin, Ken Gass, Camille Hackler, and Steve Smith
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker
- District Administrators/Staff: Doctoral Resident Anda Adams, Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland; Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke; Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan; Executive Director Kurt Gazow; Executive Director Nora Klewiada; Assistant Superintendent Bob Kuehl, Executive Administrator Rob McElroy; Executive Director Tanya Rowe; Executive Secretary and Recorder Ruth Rasmussen

Call to Order:
President Kelly Bashaw called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m.

Welcome and Introductions:
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.

Meeting Purpose – Explanation of Community Linkages:
Mr. Benjamin thanked attendees for participating in this meeting. He explained the purpose of community linkages, which is to give school board members an opportunity to hear from and connect with community groups. Referencing the district's strategic plan, The Bellingham Promise, he said the document represents a commitment that is owned by students, staff, and the community. It is important, he said, for the school board to hear how stakeholders connect with

this plan, what they think about the desired outcomes for students and graduates, and how they think the plan might be improved.

Large-Group Discussion with School Board

Ms. Rowe, the meeting facilitator, read this excerpt from The Bellingham Promise and said it would serve as a focal point for this evening's discussion:

- *Each child will be exceptional in his or her 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.*

A summary of guiding questions and responses follows:

- *Where do our organizations' interests and work in these areas intersect*?
    - {*Our Savior's Lutheran*} Our church outreach activities – such as monthly community meals – bring people in the neighborhood together and represent a part of our mission to serve the community. These gatherings give young people an opportunity to observe first-hand positive interactions between neighbors. (*well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world)*
    - {*Our Savior's Lutheran*} Various church activities provide opportunities for kids to see their parents modeling positive behavior; for example, speaking to others in a formal setting. (*effective communicators)*
    - {*Interfaith Coalition*} Our primary work is to provide emergency and transitional housing and severe weather shelters for homeless individuals and families. We hear of many challenges from families whose kids are going to school in the district; for example, they often have no way to access extracurricular activities that are so important in developing self-esteem. Some of this is due to lack of money, transportation issues, or a parent or child's fear of participating. Families have a need to get their children outside, to give them access to a different world. Are there individuals in the community who can facilitate these types of connections? {*equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all*}
    - {*First Baptist Church*} Our dream is to create a space where volunteers can offer enrichment classes to youth who might not otherwise be able to afford that. For example, we have a plethora of retired folks who might connect with these kids. That's a hope for the future. Additionally, we intersect with high school counselors in areas such as suicide prevention and crisis response. {*equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all*}
    - {*Centro de Adoración Vida*} We opened the church for *Tutoring Tuesdays*, to help with math, reading or Spanish. It really helped the kids, as well as parents who are unable to help their children with their homework. We also helped a student with his culminating project, and we had English-speaking students who were learning Spanish. We eventually stopped the program because we lost teachers. I know Bellingham School District provides a lot of help to Spanish-speaking families; but our questions are: "how can we help the district, and how can the district help us to get the word out?" I would love to see these types of program continue, either in a church or somewhere else where we can assist. {*multilingual readers and speakers*}

- {*St. Paul's Episcopal*} My major question is finding ways to encourage the people in St. Paul's to help in our neighborhood schools. What do the students need right now that some of our people could provide? We have some space available in our church and we started a community enrichment center; but it is not yet reaching school-age people. Is there something St. Paul's members can do within the schools, and can we employ the space we have in a way that would be helpful? {*equitable distribution of resources and services to ensure excellence for all*}

- *What are your greatest challenges*?
  - {*Our Saviour's Lutheran*} A challenge is getting the word out to students and community members about activities we offer; for example, how do we let people know about a program that is in place for parents and young children? How can the district and various organizations come together to figure out a way to get the word out?
  - {*Church of the Assumption*} We have a growing ELL (English Language Learners) population. Often, due to language barriers or other reasons, our parents feel challenged in helping their children with homework or in handling basic day-to-day life skills. Is there a way to share some insight on how to help them?
  - {*Centro de Adoración Vida*} Students get to a certain point when they speak English regularly, and they lose their original language. This is a challenge – how do we teach those kids the importance of not losing that language? How can we help those kids to be proud of the other language(s) they speak? They want to blend in, so they they kind of forget about their roots. I would love to see what insight the district can provide on this question: what language do we use when teaching our kids at church?
  - {*Redeemer Church*} We have a growing congregation that includes skilled workers, and the elementary school is just two blocks away. Is there a time outside of normal school hours when people can go to the school to help? If there are hands-on projects that need to be done, the normal school day timeframe does not work. We want to donate volunteer hours. Who do we contact and what are the hours in which we can work?
  - {*First Baptist Church*} We are central to downtown and have a connection to the homeless community whose children face many challenges. We work to build a volunteer base that can care for those children on Sundays. Rebound of Whatcom County has helped connect us with individuals who have the expertise to train these volunteers. We also sponsor a summer academy in July. What kind of continuing training can we access and encourage our volunteers to access?
  - *{Centro de Adoración Vida}* I know many parents who don't speak English or are not fluent. They'd love to volunteer and be a part of their kids' lives at schools, but they don't feel they can go to the schools to help. They don't know how they can help or who to contact. Can we send the message that they are more than welcome to be at the school, and find tasks they can help with?
  - {*Latter Day Saints*} – The Bellingham Promise has a commitment that each student will be exceptional in his or her own way. We believe self-esteem can be nurtured through athletics. We have seen many kids come through our congregation who have benefited from their participation in sports. It is important

to have great coaches and mentors that encourage kids to participate in sports and athletics. I know it's not our greatest need, but the coaches who love the kids and encourage them to participate are doing a great service.
    - {*Christ the King Church*} The level of crisis in families seems to be escalating, with an increased level of desperation. When families seek help, we are ready to help them, but the challenge is in finding a bridge to a network of community support that can encircle this family, while still honoring privacy. This is needed not just throughout the week but on weekends too. A child's crisis does not end on Friday. How can we create that kind of network of support?
    - {*Sgi-Usa*} As a Buddhist, my main concern is to create a more peaceful world. We need solidarity and vision. Students would benefit by viewing exhibits our organization has created; for example, *Victory Over Violence*, which was created after the Columbine shootings; and *Nuclear Weapons – A Threat to our World*. Kids need to see that adults are united in creating a peaceful world for them.
    - {*Our Saviour's Lutheran*} Is there a comfortable zone in which a school board, school district, and religious group can express that serving your neighbor is an important part of being a productive human being? Can it be articulated in a way that is not religious that it's important to get outside of yourself by serving others?
- *How might we work better together to improve opportunities for all students*?
    - {*Our Saviour's Lutheran*} How do we honor the separation of church and state and still work together for the benefit of kids and families? It's a huge challenge.
    - {*Church of the Assumption*} Having this type of dialogue is one of the ways in which we can improve these opportunities. I am grateful we've had the opportunity to be here. It's good to acknowledge we can work together.
    - {*Interfaith Coalition*} When people fall on hard times, they start knocking on church doors. Children learn that when they are in trouble, they can go to a church. What better way to acknowledge this, than to create a partnership between our organizations?
    - *{Christ the King Church}* Our food banks are doing an amazing job. When the goal is to feed people, groups come together and share resources, so there is always a place where we can send someone for a hot meal or for food. Within the faith community, we have a massive army of volunteers. How can we mobilize the resources we have to create a bridge? My appeal is to utilize us as resources to connect you with groups that want to help. There is incredible good will towards the school district. People want to help.
    - {*Interfaith Coalition*} There are a lot of lower income children in the district. What if we had a program, for example, where we can refer a child who wants to learn violin to a retiree who would be happy to teach? Would the school district provide space, for this, or would a congregation provide space?
    - {*LDS*} If we knew what the needs are, we would certainly want to help.

Closing and Wrap Up:
Dr. Baker thanked attendees for participating in this discussion. He briefly summarized key points:

- The Bellingham Promise was created not to simply articulate the district's strategic plan; it was intended to be inclusive of the community. We need to work to deepen those connections.
- Several in the group expressed the desire to find ways to strengthen connections with the faith-based community while being mindful of the lines of separation between church and state.
- We have a joint interest in serving families and students in a variety of ways, including tutoring, mentoring, and offering more services to our homeless population.
- The term "army of volunteers" is one we've heard at this and other linkage meetings. How does a school district access this army in a systemic way? As a district, we need to be better at volunteer coordination. We need to identify a person in our district who can make that happen.
- How can the community and the district make sure kids have access to opportunities that help build self-esteem and make them exceptional? Many expressed concerns about inequities in families' abilities to access extracurricular programs, sports, and other activities. The district's *Project Free Education* program is tied in closely with our *One Schoolhouse Approach*, which is a key strategy in The Bellingham Promise. *Project Free Education* identifies all the costs families incur to send their child to school – including extracurricular activities. Staff involved in this effort identify programs that cannot be accessed by families in poverty and seek solutions to help resolve that challenge.
- Proper training and development of our athletic coaches, who so often make a significant impact on students' lives, must be a priority to ensure we develop students with character traits defined in key outcomes of The Bellingham Promise.
- How do find a way to build awareness among families and students regarding the availability of the numerous non-school sponsored programs that exist in the community?
- One of the outcomes cited in The Promise is a commitment to develop multilingual readers and speakers. The district's World Language Advisory Group is focused on this task; and Isabel Meaker, Special Assistant to the Superintendent for Family Engagement, helps lead district efforts to channel appropriate resources to ELL families. Tonight's discussion highlighted ways in which increased engagement with community partners can enhance this work.
- There is joint interest in reducing violence and helping students believe a less violent word is possible. That connects with the key word "love," the first core value of The Bellingham Promise.
- The Bellingham Promise calls out development of the whole child. People don't just go to school or go to church. While creating an ongoing dialogue might be a challenge, it is evident from tonight's conversation that we have a common mission, which is to continue working to make this a great community.

At 7:19 p.m., the linkage meeting ended and invited guests, audience members, and Executive Team members left the room.

Following a brief recess, Ms. Bashaw said the board would consider the following agenda items:

Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) Discussion
Board members and Dr. Baker discussed steps to be taken to research the possibility of expanding the curriculum to be more inclusive of Native American studies. Dr. Baker noted that this would be an opportune time to consider this, as several new curriculum advisory groups are about to be formed. Next steps: Dr. Gass and Ms. Hackler will forward relevant materials to Dr. Baker.

Executive Session
At 7:39 p.m., Ms. Bashaw said the board would enter Executive Session for approximately one hour to consider the performance of a public employee per RCW 42.30.110.

At 8:50 p.m., the Executive Session ended and the meeting was adjourned.

Kelly M. Bashaw

Kelly Bashaw, School Board President

ATTEST:

G Baker

Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board