Official Board Summary: Community Linkage Meeting
Connecting with the City of Bellingham Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission
April 23, 2015

The Bellingham School Board and Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed audience members, invited guests, and district staff to a linkage meeting focused on listening to representatives of the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission (MNAC). The purpose of the meeting was for the School Board to engage in a discussion about how The Bellingham Promise resonates with members of the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission 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:

- *We develop students and graduates who are well rounded community members engaged with the broader world.*

The following were guiding questions:

- *How are Bellingham Public Schools developing well-rounded community members?*
- *How might we work together to improve community and world engagement opportunities for all students?*

During the discussion, attendees shared insights and thoughts about how their neighborhoods have engaged, and could continue to engage with Bellingham Public Schools staff and students. Attendees described various ways their neighborhoods are already connecting with the schools in their area and made suggestions about how the interaction could be increased. Attendees shared a desire to see Bellingham students engage with the community around them and the world at large by embracing diversity. Discussion focused on the importance of the whole child, including education in the arts, early childhood education, and exposure to topics such as civic government. Homeless and displaced youth were also highlighted as a group of students whose needs must be addressed. During the discussion it was evident that there is a strong desire by neighborhood groups and the city to continue to partner with the school district to provide students with learning opportunities in the community.

Meeting minutes are attached.

Official Meeting Minutes: Community Linkage Meeting
Connecting with the City of Bellingham
Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission
April 23, 2015

Linkage Attendees:

- Representatives of the Mayor's Neighborhood Advisory Commission (MNAC):
  April Barker, Birchwood
  Roberta DeBoard, South
  Bill Dubay, Cordata
  Steven James, Puget
  Kay Reddell, Sehome
  Sheryl Russell, City Center Neighborhood
  Janet Simpson, Fairhaven

- City Representatives: Mayor Kelli Linville, Vanessa Blackburn
- Directors Kelly Bashaw, Douglas Benjamin, Camille Diaz-Hackler, Steve Smith
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker
- District Leadership/Staff: Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland; Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke; Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan; Assistant Superintendent Bob Kuehl; Executive Director Kurt Gazow; Executive Director Tanya Rowe; Executive Administrator Rob McElroy; Executive Secretary and Recorder Lindsay Ahrens

1. Opening Items
   Call to Order/Welcome and Introductions
   Kelly Bashaw, School Board President, called the meeting to order at 6:18 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 Linkage:
   Ms. Diaz-Hackler thanked attendees for participating in this meeting. She explained that the school board holds community linkages as an opportunity to strengthen our connections with our customers. These meetings are an opportunity for the school board to listen and connect with our community. More specifically, the board is seeking input on the goals we have set for our students through our board policies expressed in The Bellingham Promise. She emphasized that the purpose of the meeting tonight was to listen to the neighborhood representatives and hear thoughts about what is working, how we are connecting, what the challenges are.

3. 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:

- *Students and graduates will be well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.*

Ms. Rowe said the following guiding questions would serve as a framework for tonight's discussion:

- *How are Bellingham Public Schools developing well-rounded community members?*
- *How might we work together to improve community and world engagement opportunities for all students?*

Summary of comments from invited guests:

- The Puget neighborhood is becoming more involved with Carl Cozier Elementary. Eric Paige, Carl Cozier Principal, contacted the Puget Neighborhood Association and suggested an opportunity for students to see how communities work by learning how the association is interacting with the proposed housing development near Fred Meyer. The association has connected the students to Rick Sepler, City of Bellingham.
- If the neighborhood groups had more information about what the schools or PTAs are doing, there might be more ways to participate and be involved with the students and the schools.
- Cordata is a unique neighborhood in Bellingham because most of the school-aged children are in the Meridian school district boundary. The Cordata neighborhood would like to see school involvement in the community but it is difficult because the students who live in the neighborhood are bussed out of district.
  There was some discussion about why the students in this neighborhood go to Meridian schools and how a student might transfer if they want to go to a Bellingham school. Dr. Baker clarified that district boundaries are determined by the state, not by the school district or the city. There are district procedures for both in-district and out-of-district transfers and other state laws that influence those procedures. Although there has been talk in the past about changing the district's boundary with Meridian, it isn't a process authorized by anyone at the table tonight. Initiating the process begins with the community.
- In the Birchwood area, the community is very involved with the school. The principal has been encouraging community and school interaction. The neighborhood representative commends the district on the excellent job they are doing but also encourages more emphasis on neighborhood schools for the distinct advantage they provide to the community. She also suggested further efforts to connect with the Hispanic community and others who do not speak English as a primary language.
- The Art Walk is extremely telling about our school system and the quality and subject matter of the art is amazing and impressive. She encourages music as an inclusion of the arts programs and is hopeful that it is being well supported in Bellingham schools. She indicated this is important because of the way it connects with the Bellingham Promise and in creating good citizens. There is also the question of teens on the street – are these schooled kids; how are their needs being addressed by the district?

- A neighborhood representative suggested that the most important question for our students is the curriculum and that teaching for understanding is more important than rote learning. She emphasized that the district set a firm foundation in the early childhood years and that the inclusion of play is also important to the whole child. A far as it pertains to The Bellingham Promise, she interprets *every child can learn at high levels* means at their own highest level, according to their individuality.
- Wants to see the district meet challenge of bringing larger world to our children and to take advantage of the cultural diversity that we do have in the city.
- Bellingham Sister Cities Association is very active in the community and there is a position for a school board member on their board. Sehome High School hosts students from Chile in winter and there are other exchange opportunities with our sister cities all over the world. Also, the city provides many wonderful opportunities for field trips for Bellingham students as a great way to get kids out of the classroom and into the community. Whatcom Middle School has been participating with the municipal court and students from other schools have taken field trips to the wastewater treatment plant. Tours of City Hall are available and will broaden students' understanding of civic government. There are many ways the city can partner with the schools and the mayor's office would like to know if there is any way they can help facilitate those relationships.
- Bellingham schools have relationship with Mt. Baker Theatre and the city would be interested in working out a similar arrangement with the museum to create more opportunities for less cost through partnerships. There is an idea about Parks and Rec programs that are supervised in summer. Even though funding for parks exists, there is a gap in programming. Neighborhood meetings in the schools are the best way to begin to connect neighborhoods with their schools so if barriers to that access exist, the city would like to see those removed. Most important is that students understand how city government works. The mayor loves to visit the schools and connect with the students and have students at the council meetings. Please consider the city elected officials as resources. Students at Birchwood and Northern Heights have come to recite pledge of allegiance and sing songs at the city council meetings and there are a number of other ways to connect students to their local government.
- There should be an emphasis on teacher training around diversity. Also, there are interesting people all over the city who could be resources to our students and connecting with the MNAC representatives could help access those people. For example, the woman largely responsible for the plastic bag ordinance is connected to one of the neighborhood advisory groups. There are other arts and science opportunities in community such as testing water at Padden, the mural in Fairhaven, and community gardens.
- Lydia Place is in the Puget neighborhood. Remember that displaced and homeless children are also a part of diversity and need to be addressed.
- There are successful art projects with teens in other communities, such as a community band or a drill team in an area of economically disadvantaged youth. Perhaps there is the possibility of connecting street kids with Allied Arts on a

project. To her knowledge, Bellingham Public Schools does an amazing job with the homeless youth.

- Let's find people in community that embody the attributes we are looking for in our school. We know the tendency for people is to find like when searching neighborhood. The hope is that school and city and staff fix some of the mistakes of the past in the way we develop. Birchwood is lucky to be so diverse but it is hard to develop well-rounded community members who don't experience diversity outside of their schools in other neighborhoods.

4. Closing and Wrap Up

   Following the general discussion, Dr. Baker summarized key points. Although we focused on one portion of The Bellingham Promise to begin the discussion, much of what was said touched on many aspects. The Bellingham Promise is not just about the district, but the community as well. Tonight we heard multiple examples of schools and community interaction. There are neighborhoods where the school is the center and others that are more fractured. There is concern about being thoughtful as we grow and adapt. We heard acknowledgements that The Bellingham Promise addresses the whole child, which includes the arts. Staff and the school board are trying to respond to that because it matters to the whole child. We know early childhood is a key strategy. School is not just what happens in our walls, but in whole communities. We want to encourage kids to find a passion. When kids feel love and find a passion, we can get them connected.

   Ms. Diaz-Hackler thanked participants on behalf of the school board and reminded guests about the link on website to school board listening post if there are any additional comments.

The meeting adjourned 7:16 p.m.

Kelly M. Bashaw

Kelly Bashaw
School Board President

Attest:

Greg Baker

Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board