**Board Summary: Community Linkage Meeting**
**Connecting with Families of Students in Special Education**
**September 26, 2013**

The Bellingham School Board and Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed parents and district staff to a linkage meeting on September 26, 2013 on the topic of special education. Mike Haberman, who recently joined Bellingham Public Schools as a Director of Teaching and Learning for Special Education, also welcomed families and expressed his excitement in supporting students and families.

The purpose of the meeting was for the School Board to engage in a discussion about how The Bellingham Promise connects with the Special Education Program and the services provided for students and families. Attendees were divided into small groups with at least one Board member and one Executive Team member with each group. The Board asked parents and staff members to explore the following questions:

- What in The Bellingham Promise rings true?
- What in The Bellingham Promise could be improved?
- How does The Bellingham Promise apply to students who receive special education services?
- How could Bellingham Public Schools better meet the needs of students in special education?

Parents shared their support for The Bellingham Promise and suggested ways it could be improved. Parents also suggested ways that the special education program could better serve students, including an emphasis on professional development/training for staff in the areas of assistive technology, sign language and identification of students with less severe disabilities (e.g. dyslexia). Parents also emphasized the need for more innovation and flexibility.

Meeting minutes are attached.

**School Board Community Linkage with Parents/Guardians of Special Education Students and Recent Graduates**
**September 26, 2013**

**Linkage Attendees:**

- Representative parents/guardians of students in special education and a recent graduate
- Board of Directors Kelly Bashaw, Steve Smith, Camille Hackler, Scott Stockburger, and President Ken Gass
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker
- Executive Team members Ron Cowan, Assistant Superintendent, Finance and Operations; Justin May, Doctoral Resident; Rob McElroy, Executive Administrator; Steve Clarke, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Teaching and Learning; Mike Copland, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Teaching and Learning; Nora Klewiada, Executive Director, Human Resources; Bob Kuehl, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources; Mike Haberman, Director, Department of Teaching and Learning – Special Education; Isabel Meaker, Special Assistant to the Superintendent; Bethany Verner, Assistant Director, Special Education; Tanya Rowe, Executive Director, Communications and Community Relations, Ruth Rasmussen, Superintendent's Secretary

**Call to Order**:
President Ken Gass called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

**Welcome and Introductions:**
Dr. Gass welcomed the group and explained the purpose of community linkage sessions: to provide the School Board with the opportunity to strengthen connections and to receive input. He noted that the board's role this evening is to listen and learn. Dr. Gass provided an overview of The Bellingham Promise, the district's strategic plan.

Dr. Gass introduced Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent of Schools; Tanya Rowe, Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations; and Mike Haberman, Director, Teaching and Learning – Special Education. Following opening comments, invited guests, the Board of Directors, and district staff introduced themselves.

**Board and Attendees Discussion**:
Facilitator Tanya Rowe invited board members, district staff, and families to break into small groups to address guiding questions related to The Bellingham Promise. Following the discussions, staff summarized key points from each group:

- What in The Bellingham Promise rings true?
    - All children should be loved.
    - Focus on the whole child.
    - Collective commitment that our students are cared for.
    - Every child can learn.
    - Together we achieve more than alone.
    - Early learning and development is critical.
    - Learning is lifelong.
    - Every child can learn at high levels.
    - Innovation and flexibility are key.
    - "All of this is true."

    - The transition (for my son) from eighth to ninth grade went better than expected. My student is doing great and the teachers have been responsive.
    - I have never felt any type of discrimination. I am Spanish speaking, and no one has ever made me feel different. I have always felt I receive the same level of service as English-speaking families.

- What in The Bellingham Promise could be improved?
    - Greater emphasis on outcomes that are inclusive of many different paths, not just college readiness.
    - "Every child can learn at high levels" – Need to recognize that high levels are different for every student.
    - At Squalicum High School, a staff member who speaks Spanish is needed 100% of the time.
    - Add "inclusion," specifically to the wording of The Promise.
    - This is their community; they need to learn they are valuable in their community.
    - We need to build on strengths, not just remediate.
    - Recognize that family values "fit" in with some schools better than others.
    - Implementation: are there goals and targets here that are not mentioned?
    - What does the "whole child" mean here? I have a view of what it means, but I wonder what it means in this context.
    - How do we engage the community?
    - Every high school should offer American Sign Language.
    - Communication could be improved. I want to hear about good things going on.
    - More compatible high school schedules to allow students easier access to courses not offered in their "home" school.
    - "Bellingham is 100% perfect."
    - Strong support for staff development to support universal teaching practices.

- How does The Bellingham Promise apply to students who receive special education services?
    - The Promise helps all students. That is why my child succeeds.
    - Relationships exist with particular caring individuals.
    - Community Transitions has been great.
    - My daughter is achieving a fulfilling and productive life.
    - I never thought my son was going to graduate, and now he is going to Bellingham Technical College.
    - Innovation and flexibility.

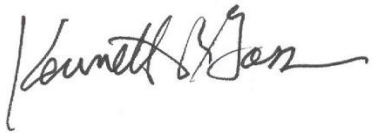
- How could Bellingham Public Schools better meet the needs of student in special education?
    - Need for assistive technologies. Can we partner with Western Washington in this area?
    - As noted previously, high school schedules need to be more flexible to allow students easier access to courses.
    - There should be more inclusion in regular classrooms, on the playground, and in after-school programs.
    - Need for more innovation and flexibility.
    - Transportation logistics can be challenging.
    - More education relating to parental rights.
    - Full-time staff at the high school level who speak Spanish would be helpful.
    - Think about keeping kids safe in schools. With all of the things that have recently happened, it is important to have plans to keep all kids safe.
    - I want more challenge for my daughter.

- Handicapped accessibility is needed on the playgrounds. Also, some playgrounds are too far away from the cafeteria.
- A parent was asked to sign an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with no opportunity for proper review, input, or full understanding of rights.
- My student misses out on some of the enrichment activities (extended programs).
- Budgeting needs to support cooking classes, automotive classes, wood shop, metal shop, and gardens at every school.
- More training for paraeducators.
- Strategies and The Bellingham Promise are great, but do resources match the sentiment?
- Families have a lot going on; can we make it easier to access information? For example, have electronic versions of IEPs.
- More inclusion in general education.
- Early intervention and early identification are critical.
- How are we doing on Child Find? (Required part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; requiring states to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities who are in need of early intervention or special education services.)
- How can we assure we find other students with less severe disabilities, such as dyslexia?
- More support for kids who are having challenges in transitioning to regular elementary school.
- Advocacy for parents (helping educate us about our rights).
- Skills of teachers (sign language please).
- Keep listening, be open, and support staff with professional development.

**Closing and Wrap Up:**
Dr. Baker thanked all who participated in this linkage session, noting that the event reflected The Bellingham Promise relating to a collective effort.

Dr. Gass also expressed appreciation to all attendees. He summarized some of the evening's comments and concerns, including the acknowledgement that early screening, prior to age 3, for disabilities and developmental delays is critical; and we need to engage community partners – for example, Western Washington University in the area of assistive technology.

The meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.



Ken Gass, School Board President

ATTEST:



Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board