Bellingham Public Schools
a collective commitment

Summary of The School Board Community Linkage with Senior Students
Bellingham High School Choir Room
May 28, 2014

The Bellingham School Board and Superintendent Greg Baker welcomed audience members, invited guests, and district staff to a linkage meeting focused on connecting with the district's high school seniors.

The purpose of the meeting was for the School Board to engage in a discussion about the students' experiences and reflections now that their high school career is drawing to a close. Discussion revolved around the following questions:

- *What has been your experience in our schools?*
- *What is working well?*
- *Is there one thing you would like our board to take away or anything else on your mind?*

During discussion, attendees who have lived previously in other communities said they appreciated the welcoming atmosphere they encountered within the district. Some terms used to describe Bellingham and our schools included: close-knit, kind, less competitive, and not as much of an emphasis on sports as in other locales.

Many students said they appreciated the strong support they received from district staff. It is clear, they said, that teachers really care about their success. They expressed the sense that staff members seem to be really invested in students' learning and are willing to go "the extra mile" to help.

In responding to a question about how the district could do better, several recommendations were made, including: provide more support for juniors who are working through the college application process; start school later each day; place more emphasis on the humanities and social studies; and consider ways in which certain programs (i.e., THOR or Sustained Silent Reading) might be improved.

Other comments focused on the value of peer mentoring programs; a recommendation that more emphasis be placed on foreign languages; and a need for classes that prepare students for applying for jobs and general "real world" survival skills.

Meeting minutes are attached.

Official Minutes of the School Board Community Linkage with Senior Students
Bellingham High School Choir Room
May 28, 2014

Linkage Attendees:

- Senior Students: Tiffany Abbott, Options High School; Jessica Allen, Squalicum High School; Melvin Deal, Bellingham High School; Eddie Diaz, Squalicum High School; Eli "Gage" Fuller, Options High School; Monisha Gonzales, Sehome High School; Devin James, Sehome High School; Quinn Rathkamp, Sehome High School; Sarah Rubin, Bellingham High School; and Jamisha Washington, Options High School
- Directors Kelly Bashaw, Ken Gass, and Camille Hackler
- Superintendent of Schools Greg Baker
- District Administrators/Staff: Deputy Superintendent Mike Copland; Assistant Superintendent Steve Clarke; Assistant Superintendent Ron Cowan; Executive Director Kurt Gazow; Options High School Principal Byron Gerard; Executive Director Nora Klewiada; Executive Administrator Rob McElroy; Executive Director Tanya Rowe; Bellingham High School Principal Jeff Vaughn; Executive Secretary and Recorder Ruth Rasmussen

1. OPENING ITEMS

Call to Order:

Vice President Kelly Bashaw called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. She said that Dr. Stockburger and Dr. Smith were excused from this meeting due to other commitments.

2. CONSENT ITEMS

Dr. Gass made a **motion**, seconded by Ms. Hackler, to approve the following consent items. Vote was unanimous.

2.01 Policy 2020 – amended administrative policy approved as submitted.

2.02 Personnel Recommendations – approved as submitted.

2.03 Personal Services Contracts – approved as submitted:

- Hilburn, Jeff: Summer School Principal for Migrant Summer School K-8 (summer 2014)
- McGrath, Paula: Promise Kindergarten Consultant, May 1 – June 30, 2014
- Austin Schlichting – 4th and 5th grade violin after-school program, May 2 – June 17, 2014

3. COMMUNITY/BOARD LINKAGE

Ms. Bashaw welcomed invited guests and explained the purpose of linkage meetings, noting that it is an opportunity for board members to strengthen connections, listen, and connect with stakeholders.

Dr. Baker welcomed the group and asked for introductions.
Tanya Rowe served as the meeting's facilitator. Following is a summary of questions and students' comments:

- *What has been your experience in our schools?*
    - When I was younger I moved around a lot, jumping from state to state and school to school. When I came to Bellingham, I went to Kulshan Middle School. I didn't like it, but as I matured, I ended up liking how they ran the school system, more so than in other states.
    - I moved here from Las Vegas in seventh grade. I was moving around a lot. I wanted to go back to the city at first, but I eventually realized that everyone is so kind here. Bellingham is a close-knit community, and I liked it. When I was a freshman, my mom lost her job, and she wanted to move to Los Angeles. I begged her to stay; that's how much I loved it here.
    - I moved from a very small school in Colorado. There was a welcoming atmosphere here, and not such a great emphasis on sports as there is at other schools. At Squalicum High School, there are a lot of AP programs available. I really appreciate that.
    - Last year I left Bellingham, and as soon as I got to the other place, I thought, "I should go back." The atmosphere here is so much more relaxed and less competitive. Everyone is not scrambling for their own piece of the pie.
    - I had to deal with ADD throughout my middle school years, and it was terrible. Once I went to Options, Gigi Morganti [former principal] took me by the ear and said, "your ADD is done." Options is a school but it is also more of a family. I felt comfortable there.
    - I've been here since first grade. I did not realize that the atmosphere was different until I started applying for colleges. It is welcoming here. I started hearing about kids from across the country who struggle for a "piece of pie." It is so competitive. I didn't realize how good it is here.

- *What is working well?*
    - The amount of support we get is great.
    - There is something for everyone; and there is a closeness among all the high schools. Although there are rivalries, we share.
    - I go to Options. It is a close-knit environment. The teachers become somewhat like parents; they start pushing harder and faster as years go on. The close-knit relationships at that school help a lot of students there.
    - Our teachers are really there for you. At Sehome High School, our science teachers are the bomb. You can talk to them personally. We are getting some good preparation for college.
    - I have never had a teacher I didn't like. All of them have really cared about me and have been really invested in our learning and seem to really enjoy teaching.

- The support from the teachers is really good. They want to see you succeed and want to help you; they are not just here for a paycheck. Especially in high school, I've had teachers that wanted to help me; they were there to give you a push. They would go the extra mile with you.
- Last year I thought of dropping out. Ms. Nilsen, our counselor, intervened. She called throughout the summer. She has been there for me and now I'm going to graduate. I'm excited.
- In my sophomore year, I moved to Options. After one week, I was being pushed. I started paying attention more. The teachers are there for you; every teacher has a connection with you. If I didn't go there, I would not be graduating this year.

Dr. Baker expressed appreciation for comments thus far, noting the students were painting a positive picture of their school experience. He then asked for ideas on what the district could do to make the school experience better.

- In junior year, I found I was overwhelmed with the college process. It is like a full-time job, to the point where it is hard to keep up with work. It would be nice to perhaps have a one-semester course on college prep. Although it all turned out fine, it would have been nice to have a bit more support.
- It's scientifically proven teenagers need more sleep. Our brains don't wake up until around 7 a.m. Waking up at 6 a.m. is terrible. We should have a later school arrival.
- Why do we have to have a complete six hour day? (In response, Dr. Baker explained that the state has laws that dictate how long students need to be at school. The law requires a school year of 180 days, with a minimum of at least six hours of classroom time. He added that the number of classroom hours is tied into graduation credits as well.)
- I always thought we should have an hour for every class, and bump start time so we came to school around 8:30 or 8:45.
- Our math and science teachers are so amazing. It seems that the humanities and especially social studies are "swept away." We have world geography and CWP (Current World Problems), but CWP doesn't do anything for students; people don't care. It should be given more emphasis. People are taking it just to graduate.
- In California students seemed to have more diverse interests and we had majors in history or anthropology.
- At SQHS we have "THOR time" (Teachers, Homework, or Reading), and it's not doing anything for us. It is twenty minutes to talk; and we are getting credit for it. You have to stay in your anchor class. It is beneficial when you have time with your teachers, instead of a random teacher. Anchor class should be for you – getting caught up.
- I like anchor time, but there is inconsistency in how teachers handle it. Some uniformity would be cool.

- You can pretty much work by yourself during anchor time, and on block days, you can do makeup work. But sometimes I need to do that on Monday and Tuesday, not Thursday and Friday.
- [Regarding Sustained Silent Reading]: I never really liked reading; but I think they shouldn't pick one day just to read. We also have RTI (Response to Intervention). I think both days should be work days (instead of one day of reading and one day of work). On RTI days we can leave the classroom and go to other computers. On SSR days, we should be able to still stay in classroom. More flexibility is needed; we should be allowed to take time to do homework on both days if needed.

- *Is there is one thing you would like our board to take away or anything else on your mind?*
    - At Sehome High School, the peer mentor program was just implemented. It is a really cool thing; a senior or junior meets with a freshman on a weekly basis and helps them on the transition into high school and the rhythm of high school. It is a program that should be in all the schools.
    - I was involved with another mentoring program. I met with a Western Washington student who helped me with work after school. We became friends. I found that to be really helpful. Any student would benefit from that.
    - We should put more emphasis on foreign languages. Encourage students to take a language, or offer more languages – for example, Italian – something more fun that what is offered now.
    - At Squalicum High School, we have had an American Sign Language (ASL) but not enough students are signing up for it.
    - At Sehome High School, I took ASL. Lots of people signed up, and we have a club. ASL has been awesome
    - Clubs are a good idea for foreign language.
    - We need classes that prepare us for the real world – how to get jobs. I think Squalicum High School has Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and we have a "Surviving on Your Own" class, but maybe some more branches of that would be helpful.
    - These classes should be required. Freshmen and sophomores need to know how to do a resume. Most people want to get a job at around 16. Anything that teaches you about life outside of high school would be welcome.
    - If you are working, you should get working credits.
    - Life skills are super important -- teaching us things we will not just walk away and forget.
    - I think the special education department can always use more funding. I've been tutoring, and I know they can use computers that are more reliable. That is an important area to support.
    - At Sehome High School, the after-school learning center is awesome; it should be at all the schools. A lot of people get a lot of work done there.

- You can't go to the school library after school unless you check in. There is not a lot of flexibility to be there with friends and to just enjoy our amazing library. There should be more flexibility.
- I think all schools should have a special senior class. There is so much stress. Every school should have a period for seniors to get their work done.

Dr. Baker thanked the students for their participation and summarized key points of discussion. He said feedback at these types of meetings helps the board and him to reflect on what is working well in the district and how we can keep getting better. He said today's discussion brought to mind many of the commitments outlined in the The Bellingham Promise. He said he appreciated the perspectives of students who have come from other communities. It is evident that mentoring programs are worthwhile. He concurs with comments concerning research regarding the importance of adequate sleep for high school students, and he assured the group this is a topic which is factored into ongoing discussions regarding scheduling. He added that the district is working hard to update technology, and this will continue to be a priority.

Ms. Bashaw also thanked the group for their feedback and noted how helpful it is for the board to hear directly from students.

The meeting adjourned at 8:24 a.m.

Kelly M. Bashaw

Kelly Bashaw, Board Vice President

ATTEST:

Greg Baker, Secretary to the Board