

## **Superintendent's Parent Advisory Committee**

*May 14, 2008*

Co-Chair: Mary LeDonne and Amanda Nunez

Note taker: Nancy Merry

Superintendent Ken Vedra reported he is a presenter at a meeting in which the state is considering increasing the number of credits required for graduation. He also thanked Meg Metzger and Sharon Stahl for their work on the Best Practices Fair, which was well attended and provided an opportunity for networking. Vedra expressed his appreciation to Mary LeDonne and Amanda Nunez for co-chairing the Parent Advisory Committee and thanked the members for their support during his first year as Superintendent.

### **Recognition Programs**

Tanya Rowe, director of School Information and Communications, shared information on the various recognition programs which help build a strong culture where people feel valued and appreciated. New this year are District awards for school volunteer/parent, certificated employee, classified employee and team of the year. Each school submitted a nomination for each category. This provides the District an avenue to participate in the State Teacher of the Year program. Rowe obtained outside corporate sponsors for these awards but needs one more sponsor. Sponsors contribute \$600 for the annual District recognition and receive recognition in press releases and at the award ceremony.

Also new this year is the Senior Star Awards being held May 15 at Bellingham High School. Ten seniors from each comprehensive high school, four from Options High School and three from the GRADS Program will receive a certificate and a token of appreciation based on criteria established by each school.

The Board of Directors recognizes Shining Stars at each Board meeting for outstanding accomplishments of students, staff and schools/departments. It was suggested that the Herald should publish these Shining Stars in the paper.

For a number of years, the District has hosted a dinner recognizing retiring staff but significant changes were incorporated into the evening this year, including a sponsor for tokens of appreciation.

Rowe indicated she has a great relationship with the education reporter from the Herald and is working with her to get more positive coverage in the paper. Additional suggestions included creating a poster with the different ways the District recognizes staff and parents for schools to post so more people would be informed.

### **Best Practices Sharing Faire**

Meg Metzger and Sharon Stahl reported on the Best Practices Sharing Faire, held May 7, 2008 at Bellingham High School. Approximately 40 attended including principals and teachers. After a general opening session, the group broke into "tracks" for in-depth discussion. At this time of year, many parent organizations are in transition with new officers so a suggestion was made to hold the Faire in early fall. Fund raising ideas included a date night and a prom night for parents, Qwest online bill payment which generates funds to schools, and turning student art into cards.

The track on communications discussed school newsletters. Questions were raised on whether parent groups could have access to District technology for electronic mailboxes, to maintain mailing lists, newsletters, and a web presence. The decision was made to ask Tanya Rowe and/or a District technology manager to participate in a meeting in early fall for further discussions. Rowe indicated the Fairhaven Middle School parent group piloted a newsletter through e-news this year. As a past member of the Technology Committee, Michael Jay volunteered to help review possible uses of District technology. The members also felt there was enough interest in communications to hold an evening meeting on this topic next year. School newsletters cannot be entirely electronic due to diversity in languages and lack of computers for families. Parent groups need to use multiple methods of communicating to ensure reaching the most families.

Parent involvement was another topic that generated much interest for all grade levels at the Faire. Two suggestions included hosting a back to school breakfast for parents the first day of school to help new families feel included and to have parents of older students mentor parents of younger students. It was also agreed that a personal invitation to participate is always effective.

The middle and high school track discussed how to get parents excited at middle school. One suggestion was to have middle school parent groups mentor fifth grade parents. Other topics discussed at the middle and high school track included sports, dances, student transportation to social activities, the importance of collaboration between schools, and encouraging all-encompassing activities such as open gym night for activities other than dances. Parents also suggested sharing information on disc jockeys who have been reliable and professional, police officers assigned to high schools and their jurisdictions; and the allocation of funds for the arts. There was discussion about the lack of science fairs at the middle school level and how to implement them. However, the group recognized that the need for funds to pay an individual to organize a science fair is a primary issue. Another issue discussed at the middle and high school track included options for students after graduation, including "gap year," travel, vocation and educational opportunities.

At the elementary school track, the primary discussion centered around how to increase parent involvement. Suggestions including having one school mentor another school for specific activities; funding for special activities; having schools combine their parent organizations; having schools combine activities, such as Geography Club or Chess Club.

Because parent involvement is such an important issue for all schools, it was suggested it should be an agenda topic for a Parent Advisory Committee meeting in the fall.

Meg Metzger and Sharon Stahl reviewed the evaluations from the evening, which include limiting it to two hours; cover only one or two topics; have translators available; host a meeting for all parent organizations with a key speaker followed by breakout sessions.

### **Alderwood Enrichment Program**

Kate Haskell shared information on the enrichment program she started at Alderwood Elementary School for early release days. Many children are home alone on early release days so the program not only enriches their education, but also offers parents an option. Haskell did fundraising for three pilot enrichment programs, which focus on art and science including the jungle, science and volcanoes. Western Washington University education students who have received their pre-certification taught the classes. The program currently serves students in graded 3 – 5 but Haskell would like to expand it to students in kindergarten through second grade. Parents were informed of the program through flyers in Spanish and English sent home.

Haskell is interested in expanding this program next year and is working with the District on possible grants. The cost to run the program is relative inexpensive, mostly to cover the costs for the WWU students and materials. The District supported the program with transportation.

This program benefits both District students and WWU students. The WWU students, who are pre-certificated, have had background checks and have done their practicum, learn much from their direct work with students. Haskell suggested other options to utilize WWU students for student enrichment programs could include summer camps.

### **Goals and Job Description**

It was agreed that the name of the Committee will be Parent Advisory Committee for Superintendent (PACS) to focus on the superintendent receiving input from the committee members. Mary LeDonne met with members and distributed revised goals, job description and responsibility for the members and co-chairs, and the election process for the co-chairs. LeDonne asked committee members to review and email her any suggested changes ([mary@edusystemics.com](mailto:mary@edusystemics.com)) or bring to the next meeting. She will present the revisions at the June 4 meeting.

It was also suggested that at each meeting Superintendent Vedra give committee members specific questions or issues for which he would like input. This gives members an opportunity to discuss with other parents.

### **NEXT MEETING:**

The last meeting will be held on June 4, 2008 at 9:15 a.m. in the Board Room.