

Superintendent's Parent Advisory Committee
November 7, 2007

Note taker: Nancy Merry (676-6591; nmerry@bham.wednet.edu)

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Co-chairs Amanda Nunez and Mary LeDonne asked member to introduce themselves and verify the information on the sign in sheet.

PROCEDURES FOR CLOSING SCHOOLS AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

Tanya Rowe, director of School Information and Communications, explained the procedures for closing schools in inclement weather and how that information is communicated to parents. Copies of the 2007–2008 snow routes, which have been mailed to all families, were distributed. The flyer has also been translated to Spanish and mailed to 366 Spanish-speaking families. The flyer has been expanded this year to explain, in question and answer format, how the decision is made to adjust the school day or bus routes due to weather. Safety for students and staff is the primary concern when the decision is made to close or delay school or to use snow routes. The most current weather conditions, forecasts and road conditions are considered.

Rowe reviewed how missed days are made up. State law required students receive 180 days of school. The school calendar is part of the teacher contract and must be negotiated. For the 2007–2008 school year, the contract stated that up to two missed days will be added to the end of the school year. If additional make-up days are needed, the district and labor associations will work together on a solution.

If schools are closed, all school and district athletics, including mandatory or voluntary practices/rehearsals, activities, field trips, all school and district facility rental, meetings and events previously planned for before, after school or evening are cancelled. When school is open on snow routes or delayed, school and district administrators will decide whether to cancel such activities on a school-by-school basis.

Suggestions/questions included:

- Use volunteers to help communicate with families who speak other languages.
- Post the snow route flyer in other languages at places where non-English speaking families shop.
- Organizations that schedule after school programs need know the process when school schedules are changed due to weather.
- Work with the mayor to add snow removal equipment
- Work on establishing more walking school buses at more schools.
- How many kids ride buses? Dr. Vedra said he would find out.
- Do buses have chains? Some do.
- Is there a way to utilize learning at home during snow days using local television or video? Dr. Vedra said is might be a possibility in the future but would take time to develop this kind of online learning. Bellingham students come from all

socio-economic backgrounds. Would need to be certain that any alternative learning of this type would be available to all.

- If it seems like the next school day might be closed due to weather, is it possible for teachers to send homework for students to do while at home. Dr. Vedra said it was something we could investigate, but weather changes here quickly so may not be possible.
- It is important for families to know that it is their right to keep their children home if they feel it is not safe but they must communicate with their school if they do so.

Vedra has discussed with our legislators the possibility of changing the requirement for 180 days of school and instead specifying 1,080 hours of school. This would allow more flexibility in making up missed days. Vedra will continue to keep the Parent Advisory Committee updated on this request.

COMMUNICABLE DISEASE

Not all staph infections can be treated with antibiotics. If there is a suspected case of a staph infection, the Health Department would give the District guidance and recommend the best practices to follow on a case-by-case basis. The District would put into place a communication protocol involving the Health Department, school, families, staff, etc. HIPPA and FERPA rules what information we can access and what we can share. The District is very proactive and is prepared to deal with any such case.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER PROGRAM

Susan Peterson, director of Special and Federal Programs, explained the English Language Program. This program is funded by state and district money and supplements basic education. The English Language Program, which focuses on English language instruction, is available to qualifying students in kindergarten through 12th grade. Enrollment in the English Language Learner program has grown from 423 students in 2001 to 648 students in 2007. Having more students speaking other languages enriches the educational program for all students. There are 24 different languages spoken, with Spanish being the largest group at 52%. Other large language groups include Russian/Ukrainian, Punjabi, Vietnamese and Chinese.

There is an ELL program in all but two schools. The enrollment is much larger at the elementary level. Children gradually move out of the program at the middle school level but it increases again at high school. Staff is supported by instructional assistants, a program facilitator, consultants and a secretary. The program facilitator is Amy Carter.

At the elementary and middle school level, the program is delivered in class and pullout, using the program facilitator, instructional assistants and ELL consulting teachers. Students are assessed using a variety of assessments. According to Peterson, basic interpersonal communication skills (social communication) takes two to five years to

develop and cognitive academic language (academic communication) takes five plus years. We need to study what influences student learning and how to accelerate the process. Known influences on learning include poverty, parent literacy and previous schooling. Unfortunately, we have little or no control of these issues. The District has the most control on parent involvement, quality teaching and collaboration.

Learning can be accelerated by

- Articulating clear expectations
- Sheltering content instruction
- Increasing student engagement
- Partnering with parents (through interpreters if needed)
- Collaborating with other District programs
- Implementing a continuum of support
- Linking with Powerful Teaching Strategies

Peterson responded to questions, including:

- If parent groups need an interpreter for non-legal, non-technical reasons, they should work with their principal and school secretary. It would help non-English speaking families feel more included and would encourage their participation at meetings. Personal connections are so important. Most families have an advocate that helps the family so it is important to use that connection. Volunteer interpreters can be used for non-legal, non-technical purposes such as parent activities.
- District funds are available for approved interpreters for legal meetings, conferences, hearings, etc.
- PTA of schools with the highest level of ELL families should share ideas on how to make their ELL families feel more included. Can PTA's have access to which families are non-English speaking so they can work with them? Dr. Vedra suggested principals contact him and he will help with this information.

OTHER

There was general discussion about the agenda topics for future meetings. Topic suggestions should be emailed to Mary LeDonne (mary@edusystemics.com) or Amanda Nunez (nunezfamily03@aol.com).

Some suggested topics include (some topics may be geared toward certain grade levels):

- Athletic and activities code/discipline
- Individual tracking of student progress (Zangle)
- Counting hours/not days
- Sharing best practices
- Individualized instruction
- Culminating Project
- Reaching out to disadvantaged population

- Summer schools
- Small schools
- Counselors
- Other program options (including AVID)
- Food in school/snacks
- Equity among schools without competition
- Testing/assessments
- Translations
- Bus scheduling
- School start times
- Playground issues
- Music, arts, electives
- Highly Capable Learners' Program
- Inappropriate student language, attitude toward fellow students, safety, bullying
- Communication regarding transition between levels (for staff and families)
- Differences/similarities among schools; sharing ways to help each other
- Have level meetings with PTA (a night meeting)
- Using a buddy system at schools for non-English speaking families

There was discussion about the goal of serving on the Superintendent's Parent Advisory Committee. Some felt it was important to have time to collaborate and share ideas from other schools as well as using the time to have a better understanding of District programs. It was suggested that the regular program should end by 10:30 a.m., leaving 30 to 45 minutes for questions and answers and sharing.

Dr. Vedra thanked Mary LeDonne and Amanda Nunez for serving as co-chairs of the Committee. He would like to plan a couple of evening meetings to discuss larger topics.

FUTURE MEETINGS/TOPICS

- December 5, 2007: December 5, 2007 at 9:15 a.m. in Conference Room 212
AVID (tabled to a later meeting)
Food Services Program (including free and reduced)
Reviewing items of interest for future meetings
Dates for evening meetings (February 12 or 21, 2008)
- January 9, 2008: January 9, 2008 at 9:15 a.m. in Conference Room 212
Budget Process
Transportation