

Parent Advisory Committee to the Superintendent (PACS)

Key Communications

January 13, 2022

Via Zoom

Each school has two representatives on this committee.

Amber Asbjornsen and Elizabeth Walther are co-chairs

We are here to learn, have discussions and give input to the superintendent. Please take information back to each of your schools to share.

Please work with your principal to arrange for a parent substitute to attend PACS if you are unable to attend.

Co-chairs - Elizabeth Walther & Amber Asbjornsen

Elizabeth led the group in an icebreaker event to share a self-care idea you have for the new year.

Dr. Baker shared information related to the following topics and answered questions.

Our PACS chairs have organized **future meeting topics** based on the feedback received from PACS members at the last meeting. The focus of today's meeting is mental health.

- Health and Wellness: mental health, LGBTQ+ safety, education/awareness, neurodiversity
- Inclusion: welcoming new students, curriculum, special needs
- Role of parents: fundraising, One Schoolhouse, equity

Dr. Baker shared that **Promise Kindergarten** started right after winter break. Our early entrance kindergarten program grows every year; this year we have our largest cohort with 160 students.

Last week's **weather**, including snow and cold temperatures, presented challenges to our school schedule. We recognized on social media the BPS transportation and custodial/maintenance staff who work hard to prepare our sites, monitor roads and navigate bus routes. Thanks for everyone's patience last week!

Dr. Baker acknowledged **Sehome High School** experienced safety concerns and issues in December because of threats that were being sent via cell phone. It caused significant stress for staff, students and families as we worked with police on our investigation. Some other schools had similar issues with copycat threats on social media.

Dr. Baker and staff attend **COVID**-related meetings locally, statewide and on a national level, and we are hearing consistently that the

steps, including vaccines, boosters, tests and masks, are effective. Our goal is to keep schools open and operational. We are hoping case rates will decrease in the next two to five weeks. You can see the [new guidance for K12 schools came from the Department of Health](#). The virus is causing some staffing challenges, and [we are actively recruiting substitutes and expanding qualifications for staff](#).

The state has started its new legislative session, and we are watching **budget** processes closely. We are hoping lawmakers will add funding for K-12, especially in areas including special education, health/wellness and social emotional support for students. Many districts, including Bellingham, have seen a reduction in enrollment since the pandemic began.

Assistant Superintendent of Teaching and Learning Dr. Kristi Dominguez and mental health coordinator Chris Cochran talked about the many ways our mental health staff support students. Chris shared two resources: [Mental Health and Wellness](#) and [student services](#) webpages and introduced Laura Burke and Anna Rittmueller, who are mental health specialists and provide wraparound and direct services to students at our schools.

Parents asked questions about mental health supports available and also shared reflections. They said there are profound mental health needs across our district. One parent said that parents need to be a resource for each other to share best practices and resources.

Dr. Baker shared that the state does not fund mental health staff for districts, and while three staff focused on this area is not enough, it's more than we have had in the past. Parents shared that they want to advocate for funding for staff dedicated to mental health services to state legislators. [Chris](#) said he's available to be a resource for students and parents who need help.

PACS will meet again Feb. 24, 2022, 10:30 – 12 (could be in-person; TBD)