



Board Special Meeting

School Board Retreat

March 2, 2019 10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Auditorium, John Stanford Center

2445 3rd Avenue South, Seattle, WA 98134

Minutes

Director Harris called the meeting 10:00 a.m. Directors Harris, Pinkham, Patu, Burke, Mack, Geary and DeWolf were present.

Staff present were Superintendent Denise Juneau; Erinn Bennett, Executive Director of Government Relations & Strategic Initiatives; JoLynn Berge, Chief Financial Officer; Carri Campbell, Chief of Public Affairs; Dr. Clover Codd, Chief of Human Resources; Dr. Diane DeBacker, Chief Academic Officer; Wyeth Jessee, Chief of Student Supports; Dr. Brent Jones, Chief of Equity, Partnerships, and Engagement; Sherri Kokx, Special Assistant to the Superintendent, John Krull, Chief Information Officer; Stephen Nielsen, Deputy Superintendent; Fred Podesta, Chief Operations Officer; Noel Treat, Chief Legal Counsel; and Ellie Wilson-Jones, Director of Policy & Board Relations.

Welcome and Icebreaker

Director Harris welcomed Directors, staff, and the public in attendance and asked Ms. Wilson-Jones to lead Directors and staff in an icebreaker. Directors and staff reflected on their reasons for optimism in 2019 as an icebreaker activity.

Strategic Plan

Superintendent Juneau introduced the discussion of the draft strategic plan and spoke to the work that has gone into the draft plan, including the incorporation of feedback from Directors, community members, and staff and the ways in which this plan will differ from prior plans in its strategic nature, clarity, and focus, particularly on racial equity. She thanked Director Geary for her work on the Strategic Plan Steering Committee and recognized staff and community members for their work on the plan.

Director Geary spoke to the efforts of the Steering Committee and recognized Steering Committee members in attendance.

Director Mack requested clarification regarding the timing for development of CSIPs and how that relates to the strategic plan development timeline. Ms. Bennett clarified that the strategic plan development timeline was based on the goal of ensuring schools can develop their CSIPs and budgets based on the strategic plan.

Ms. Bennett noted that district is working with the District Management Group (DMGroup) as a consultant on the plan and that DMGroup staff would be listening to the discussion via speakerphone.

Ms. Bennett reviewed key strategic plan development dates and provided an overview of the DMGroup Strategic Planning Framework, noting the focus at this stage is on Mission and Vision, Theory of Action, and Priorities. She noted that ideas around the next levels of planning—initiatives and action steps—will be collected for future consideration.

Ms. Bennett reviewed the Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action included in the draft SPS strategic plan and noted that the Mission and Vision statements are similar to those currently in place for the district. She spoke to the ways in which Director feedback was incorporated into the Theory of Action.

Director Geary requested feedback on the Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action and spoke to additions to incorporate prior Director feedback.

Director Mack addressed the Theory of Action and suggested the second to last paragraph be used to lead off the description of the district's Theory of Action, to provide clarity about the "why" and address repetitiveness. Director Geary spoke to the way the Theory of Action utilizes plain language at the beginning and then moves into more specifically using the terminology "targeted universalism."

Director DeWolf asked how the language is centered on students. Directors and staff spoke to the ways in which the language centers on students.

Director Geary spoke to the ways in which the language speaks to the differentiated abilities of all students and provides inclusive language while also conveying a tighter focus.

Director Burke asked how analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats can be incorporated into the strategic plan. Director Geary noted that work could align with required reporting to the Board. Superintendent Juneau spoke to the ways in which the language sets the bar for the direction of the district and that planning and consideration of feasibility are ongoing and will continue forward once goals are set.

Director Pinkham spoke to the language in the final paragraph of the Theory of Action and asked whether there was an intentional distinction between language referencing "every student" and "all students." Director Geary noted that the distinction was not intentional.

Director Patu noted clarification is needed in the language referencing Asian Pacific Islander students. Director Geary suggested that the language can be further differentiated.

Directors and staff divided into smaller groups to discuss the draft strategic plan priorities.

Superintendent Juneau spoke to the priority on High-Quality Instruction and Learning Experiences and the ways in which it focuses on the whole child; has an intentional focus on African American males, is supported by the language related to Targeted Universalism in the Theory of Action; and incorporates feedback about using asset-based language.

Each small group reported out on their discussion regarding the draft strategic plan, beginning with the priority on High-Quality Instruction and Learning Experiences.

Director Pinkham, reporting for his group, stated that the priority aligns well to the Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action. The group had a question regarding whether there was enough focus on the whole child and measurements to address student needs (e.g. homelessness, nutritional aspects). The group suggested focusing on cultural aspects.

Dr. Jones noted that his group found the priority to be close to the Mission and had discussion about the Vision. The group wanted to emphasize story, strength, and need in the measures, not just the quantitative piece. Director Harris noted that it will be important to consider how the plan will be branded and how community buy-in will be garnered, with consideration of audience.

Director Burke said there was not concern in his group about misalignment with Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action but there were questions about implementation. The group discussed how the language around “high-quality” relates directly to measures and the need for reliable measures. There was a request to add a footnote clarifying high-quality. The group discussed growth versus absolute measures, and Director Burke noted a preference for making growth a topline measure as opposed to proficiency.

Superintendent Juneau introduced discussion on the priority related to Predictable and Consistent Operational Systems and the ways in which this priority is centered on feedback received from families and focuses on customer satisfaction, communication, and service performance. Small groups moved into the discussion of the priority.

Dr. Jones reported on discussion in his small group. The group discussed how to evaluate whether people feel heard and acknowledged and whether there is a feedback loop, whether there is clarity on what the district does and does not do, and what the clear commitments are.

Director Burke reported on his group’s discussion about whether and how the priority aligns. The group thought tweaks were needed to explicitly call out planning and collaboration. There was discussion regarding whether this was a district, school, or system-level initiative and the need for it to be at all levels.

Ms. Kokx reported out on alignment discussed by her group. The group noted that equity was not as clearly conveyed in this priority as in the prior one discussed. Some members of the group had concerns about the terminology high-quality and promises being made. Director Geary requested feedback from Directors as to whether high-quality was over-promising. Director DeWolf said the intent should be that the district should make clear promises and then deliver on them. Director Burke noted the priority is about setting and delivering on predictable expectations. Mr. Podesta said it is important to reflect that the work meets the needs, and to have some statement of quality. Director Harris noted that the vision statement speaks to high-quality. Director Geary noted she is more comfortable with the reference to high-quality in the vision statement, as it is reflective of state standards and raising the educational floor. Director Mack noted concerns around the reference to high-quality in the operational systems priority, but noted there needs to be a statement about meeting needs if not already incorporated into the language. Dr. Jones spoke about engagement with the Chinese Information Center on the draft plan and their feedback.

Directors and staff moved into discussion on the Culturally Responsive Workforce priority.

Director Burke reported out on his group’s discussion. The group found the priority to be well aligned and spoke to its inclusion of all district staff. The group also discussed the need to capture the relationship to CBOs. There was also discussion of families and inclusion in the surveys. The group discussed equitable access to services and the factors that influence this, including a culturally responsive workforce.

Dr. DeBacker reported on her group’s discussion. The group found high alignment with the Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action. The group discussed the need to include communities in the language of the priority and provided other specific edits.

Dr. Jones reported on his group’s discussion. The group felt the word “support” should be clarified and strengthened. Director DeWolf suggested the word “empowered.” The group discussed the scope of the culturally responsive training and noted that not all educators are being trained. There was discussion about inclusion of a belief statement.

Dr. Codd noted a newspaper article regarding the workforce representing the demographics of the students and spoke to diversity as a goal. Director DeWolf spoke to representativeness as being reflective of the broader community, not necessarily a given classroom. Director Geary asked whether the addition of a footnote would be helpful in clarifying what “representative” means in this context. Director Mack noted the validity of the points made, with diversity being centered around whiteness and representativeness potentially perpetuating whiteness in some situations. Director Geary suggested a footnote to capture that representation speaks to the broader community.

Superintendent Juneau noted that the district also needs to be thoughtful of measurement.

The meeting recessed at 11:55 a.m. for a break and reconvened at 12:07 p.m.

Superintendent Juneau introduced discussion on the priority on Inclusive and Authentic Engagement. Directors and staff engaged in small group discussion regarding the priority.

Director DeWolf reported on his group’s discussion. The group felt that it was aligned to the Mission, Vision, and Theory of Action. The group had a concern about the phrase “not for” and suggested that the plan speak to what the district is for rather than not for. The group suggested replacing the language “culturally appropriate” with “culturally informed” and felt that the terminology “feedback loop” was jargon.

Mr. Krull reported on his group’s discussion. The group discussed the name of the priority and that it does not state the end that this engagement is toward. The group suggested refinement of the language “culturally appropriate.” The group also discussed the need for clarity about the goals of the engagement.

Director Burke reported on his group’s discussion. The group spoke positively about alignment. The group discussed challenges around measures for success and had conversation about the need to amplify the voice of those the district is hearing from who are further from educational justice. The group also had discussion about culturally appropriate engagement and the nexus with complex policies, procedures, and systems. Director Mack spoke to the intersection of families with the district and the challenges and barriers they face. She spoke to the need to consider this in the implementation of this and the operations priority.

Ms. Bennett noted that the next step would be to incorporate feedback received from the day into a revised draft of the strategic plan to be posted to the Board website March 8 for introduction during the March 13 Board meeting. She requested Directors provide questions and feedback as far in advance as possible.

Director Harris noted that Directors should not provide additional new ideas from the dais. Director Harris asked whether the plan would go back to the Steering Committee. Ms. Bennett and Director Geary spoke to the process, which was designed around the Board providing the final level of feedback.

Director Mack suggested a summary of the day’s discussion be provided in advance of the next draft of the strategic plan. Ms. Bennett noted that she would provide an overview of what is addressed in the new version being provided. Mr. Krull suggested the next version be released prior to posting for the Board meeting. Ms. Bennett noted that the timeline will be as expedited as possible, and that she could provide notes regarding the ideas that came up, noting that not all may be able to be addressed in the draft. Director Burke recommended providing notes from the day, and stated that he understood not all feedback will be incorporated into the draft.

Board-Staff Collaboration and Communication

Directors Burke and Harris introduced discussion of the next agenda topic, regarding board-staff communication and collaboration. Superintendent Juneau provided her thanks to all for their participation in this discussion and noted the importance of being predictable and consistent in communications.

Director Burke outlined a suggested process and outcomes, leading up to a proposed end goal of formally revising Board Policy No. 1620 and Board Procedure 1620BP, Board-Superintendent Relationship. Director Burke spoke to trust and Patrick Lencioni's model "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team." Directors and staff reflected on trust and spoke to the work of the morning, as a reflection of trust; how trust stretches into the broader community; how elevating trust as a consideration can support trust; how feelings about trust and discomfort are entangled with examination of privilege; and the ways in which a lack of role clarity and respect for clear norms can create distrust.

Director Burke spoke to the structure and content of the current Policy No. 1620, Board-Superintendent Relationship. He noted that feedback from Directors was that the policy does not provide specific guidance and needs to be fleshed out. He suggested language related to Board-Superintendent Communication on page 2 be moved into the procedure, with further specificity to be incorporated into the procedure.

Superintendent Juneau noted that the language speaking to role clarification should be included within the policy. Mr. Treat suggested that the substantive rules around roles and responsibility fit better within policy. Deputy Superintendent Nielsen noted that the current policy language aligns with state laws and provides protection to the Board. Director Mack stated that the policy should speak to communications. She noted that the Board's Committee structure makes the district unique. Director Harris noted that some lack of clarity is to be expected given transitions in the district. Ms. Berge noted discomfort with removing the existing policy language.

Director Burke reviewed additions and clarifications recommended by Directors. He noted that a revised draft of the policy will be brought to the Executive Committee. He reflected back that staff had conveyed that retaining the third section is important and that the policy should be aligned to RCW.

Director Mack suggested clarification regarding committee and liaison communications and what authority is provided to committees and liaisons.

Directors and staff discussed applications of the policy, as currently drafted and the ways in which the language offers clarity about how staff and Directors are to communicate.

Director Burke spoke to Procedure No. 1620BP, Board-Superintendent Relationship Procedure, and noted that there a number of communication channels Directors might use in their roles. Superintendent Juneau noted that the focus needs to be not just on the current context but also on building policy and procedure for the future.

Director Burke facilitated further discussion, requesting Directors provide questions in a format of "How do I?" addressing scenarios related to the policy. Directors brainstormed scenarios and provided feedback on those that most resonated with them. Director Burke closed the discussion by asking for reflections from Directors and staff regarding the questions provided.

The meeting recessed at 2:13 p.m. for a break and reconvened at 2:24 p.m.

Intra-Board Collaboration and Communication

This portion of the meeting was staffed by Superintendent Denise Juneau and Ellie Wilson-Jones, Director of Policy & Board Relations.

Director Harris facilitated a conversation regarding Intra-Board Collaboration and Communication, seeking Director feedback on current strengths and weaknesses.

Director Mack requested discussion and support around committees and Board work session requests and approval for work session presentations. She spoke to her comfort with communicating with the Board.

Director DeWolf asked how the Board could increase sharing around state legislative work. He noted that communication via phone can be more effective than email communication.

Director Geary noted that the Board meetings are run more smoothly now than previously. She noted that she values committee reports during meetings and suggested having some dialog during the Board meetings regarding committee work. Director Geary spoke to coordination between the Operations and C&I Committees to prevent siloing. She suggested more communication from Directors in advance of proposals being brought forward.

Directors discussed mechanisms for sharing proposals with the Board and working with Board Office staff. Directors discussed ways to share out their work as individual Directors. Directors discussed whether it would be helpful to share regular written reports. Director Geary noted that compiling written reports from Directors could over formalize work that is in early stages and does not have approval from the full Board.

Directors discussed their communication preferences and their preferences with regard to participating in district meetings, beyond those of the Board.

Director Burke noted relationships and communication between Directors are strong and that there has been an improvement in public trust. He reflected on the workload of the Board and the difficulty in tracking work on a given policy. He suggested including policy work online.

Director Patu spoke about the value of visiting schools and meeting staff and students.

The meeting adjourned at 3:04 p.m.