

Seattle School Board Retreat

Saturday, March 12, 2016 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

Auditorium, John Stanford Center

Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 10:04am.

Directors Blanford, Burke, Harris, Patu and Peters were present. Director Pinkham was unable to attend. Director Geary arrived at 10:07am. Staff present included Superintendent Larry Nyland, Deputy Superintendent Stephen Nielsen, General Counsel Noel Treat, Asst. Superintendent for Operations Pegi McEvoy, Chief Communications Officer Jacque Coe, Chief Information Officer Carmen Rahm, Assoc. Supt. Capital Facilities and Enrollment Flip Herndon, Assoc. Superintendent Teaching & Learning Michael Tolley, Chief Partnership Officer Brent Jones, Asst. Superintendent for Human Resources Clover Codd, Dir. Policy, Board Relations & Special Projects Erinn Bennett, Director School Family Partner Equity and Race Relations Bernardo Ruiz, and Chief of Schools Michael Starosky.

Director Patu introduced Pam Posey as the facilitator for today.

Supt. Nyland noted that one objective of the day will be to prioritize overlapping goals, and to decide what it is that the Board would like to accomplish. Dir. Geary arrived at 10:07am. Supt. Nyland noted in the previous discussions a few months ago around the goals the Board started out really broad, and now the work is on emerging ideas that are focused and that can be ready in June for school leaders to have a defined plan. He noted the Mayor's Education Summit, and discussed the parallels between the City's plan and Seattle Public Schools' (SPS) district goals on closing the opportunity gaps. Supt. Nyland thanked everyone for their gift of time today to work together in the same direction.

Pam Posey asked everyone to briefly say their name, title and say something about who they are and why they are here in the District. Each attendee stated their name, title and gave a brief background of their experience. Ms. Posey provided a story to give context to her work of finding common ground. She noted the diversities in the stories that each person told, and also the common ground, noting they all want to work together to help the students and the district improve. She thanked everyone for sharing their experiences.

Ms. Posey noted some ground rules, discussed the agenda and schedule for the day, and noted the process. She noted the three major topics that are on the agenda and gave an overview of each of the topics. Ms. Posey noted the preparation in talking with each of the Directors in individual calls and provided an overview of the themes that she gathered in those discussions. Ms. Posey noted taking the Director feedback and discussion to plan the framework of her facilitation. She pointed out the "meeting norms" from the last retreat in December which were agreed upon by the Directors. She asked if the Directors were still in agreement with the norms. Dir. Burke noted adding to the norms to focus on the what/why/how. Directors provided their feedback on the addition, and it was added to the list in parenthesis.

FOCUS & PRIORITIZATION OF 2015/16 SUPERINTENDENT SMART GOALS

Ms. Posey noted the handouts that have been provided. She discussed the governance priorities as noted on the graphic organizer. Ms. Posey solicited feedback on the Directors understanding of the goals. Directors provided discussion on their level of understanding of the definitions and ideas behind the goals, and the relationship between the goals and the strategic plan. Supt. Nyland weighed in on

the relationship between the goals and how they work with the strategic plan of the district. He noted the summary page handout. Supt. Nyland discussed engagement of principals and school leaders, he noted communications throughout the district, and made note on dotted lines between the priorities versus adding another priority to encompass the overall outcomes that the district would like to achieve. Ms. Posey noted in her experience with using graphics that they are primarily designed as a reminder of overarching themes, that these goals are all related in some manner, and they are there as an acknowledgement that the alignment shows that they are all driving toward performance outcomes. Ms. Posey suggested breaking into a few smaller groups to engage in discussion and invited the members of the audience to walk around and listen in each of the three groups. She asked the small groups to spend ten minutes discussing the outcomes and the impact on the district when focusing on these goals. Directors noted that some goals seem reactive, not proactive. Ms. Posey asked the Directors to discuss in the groups and suggested that the small groups focus on which goals they would like to emphasize and to discuss what outcomes to expect and build upon from there. Directors asked clarifying questions to help with prioritization of the SMART goals – the purpose of the activity would be a better sense of which of these priorities should have an even higher prioritization.

Supt. Nyland noted that last year there was a quarterly review of the goals and it was an overload of information all at once. He noted wanting Board champions for each of the goals to drive the district and to drill down on the goals. He gave examples in Marysville on goals and priorities. Supt. Nyland noted this year having work sessions, involving the committees in the work, and noted that the next step is to have Directors who are passionate on some of these topics to be a lead on them. He noted that there can be more continuity of the four goals in the next four years. Dir. Patu noted that we are three months into the year already, these goals have been discussed for a long time, and she realizes that to be successful at accomplishing these, that Directors need to focus on two of these to drive forward. She summarized the goals that are listed on the graphic organizer. Ms. Posey noted a growing body of evidence that says successful school districts narrow their focus and emphasize a few priority areas by understanding the types of outcomes they get for the effort that they put in. Directors summarized their understanding of the set of needs that should drive actions, and asked if the district needs are clearly understood and defined. Directors noted all of the expertise and passion around the table. Directors noted legal mandates in some areas, and asked if there should there be an added layer for the areas with legal mandates. Directors discussed needing a clear theory of action to address those challenges and to move closer to closing the opportunity gaps. Directors noted trying to sequence them in a way to make measurable change over time for items on the list and also those that are not on the list but that are necessary to drive overall change.

Supt. Nyland noted to add some topics not listed as emerging topics to add to next year's goals. He noted current issues from constituents and the current priorities, and asked if there are any that the Directors can each support now. Supt. Nyland noted using the communications protocol to manage staff time with the Directors' goals. He asked for clarification on if the groups will be discussing the three goals along the top of the sheet or the seven goals along the bottom. Ms. Posey clarified to look at the seven goals at the bottom and discuss what few can the Board get behind to get the most return on the outcomes. She noted that in the groups they are trying to answer if there are a couple of these that the Board can get behind to push further to get the district to the overall goals faster. Ms. Posey noted that the rest of the work is still going on, and staff will continue to push these all forward, but that there is a way that the Directors can push forward and make a greater impact on a selection now. The staff and Directors broke in to three groups to have discussion on impacts and outcomes while looking at all seven district SMART Goals.

When the group discussions ended, Ms. Posey summarized what she had heard in the groups as she moved from group to group. She noted that Supt. Nyland had created a "parking lot" on the easel board up at the dais for listing items for future discussion. Ms. Posey invited representatives from each group to summarize their discussions. Dir. Peters summarized her group's discussion to prioritize MTSS-A and MTSS-B, early hiring, and bell times. She noted measurement in terms of compliance and parent feedback. Dir. Peters noted her group's discussion on funding around these goals in order to fully implement. Mr. Starosky noted the lack of clear theories of action for the

impacts of these goals toward student learning. Dir. Peters noted a concern that was brought up is the possibility that this is overcomplicating and could get bogged down in detail. Dir. Blanford noted the complexities involved and there is no easy answer. He noted further on theories of action for each one of the goals would be essential to identifying the problem that they are trying to solve. Dir. Peters further summarized the discussion and identified suspensions as a topic that was discussed.

Dir. Geary summarized her group's discussion on the interconnectedness of the goals and outcomes. She noted action oriented goals on the sheet demonstrate the work that can be accomplished and that perhaps they identify actionable pieces for these goals to drive outcomes. Dir. Geary noted that capacity came up as an overarching theme in her group, and that capacity can be seen in terms of both external space and internal ability - enough room for the kids and throughout the district to meet the needs. Dir. Geary noted a discussion on special education as an example of an actionable goal toward closing the achievement gap through inclusiveness and substantive achievement.

Dir. Burke summarized his group's discussion which spanned problems, tactics, and outcomes. He noted at the high level prioritization of strategic plan goal 1, which they feel trickles down to many others. He provided examples within the goal. Dir. Burke noted they are all unique goals, yet aren't worked on in isolation. Dir. Burke summarized that the academic component of some of the goals is a top priority. He provided further summary of the goals in terms of Board priorities versus governance priorities. Dir. Burke noted challenges at the implementation level, and asked how the Board maintains support without distracting some of the other focus areas. He noted existing tools in place to achieve the outcomes.

Ms. Posey asked for common themes amongst all three groups. Directors discussed the theory of action needing to be clear for each of the seven SMART goals. Directors and staff noted that goals are already moving forward and some don't need as much of a push, whereas others need more shepherding, and that others are more focused on changes in the classroom (teachers and student focused) versus administrative. Ms. Posey noted the difficulty in making a choice among critical priorities and that the message is that all seven SMART goals are important, but how does a Board champion one or two goals, and what can the Board focus on where the attention is not split and where the staff and district are working on all seven. She asked if there is a way for the Board to choose two that they will champion to make a bigger impact now, knowing that they are all important. Directors noted working closely with cabinet staff and Directors to achieve outcomes and move the goals forward. Directors noted their varying areas of focus and priority and provided the reasoning behind their opinions and their own passions for the work. Ms. Posey noted the seven passionate individual Directors who have the ability to work together and focus on a few areas to get the collective wisdom and energy to move forward. Directors noted that over the course of each of their terms on the Board, that at some point their passions will be aligned with the goals, and that they can work on some things this year and some next year. Directors asked for staff feedback on the prioritization. Directors noted that they will all expand their foci over time, there is some common ground, and there is a commitment to meeting the needs of all students which capture elements of all of the Directors' passions.

Supt. Nyland noted prioritization and the alignment of the goals on closing the opportunity gaps, as well as the goals that are a work in progress versus those that are a new body of work. Dr. Codd discussed implementation of the goals and the past foci, and that many are already under way so there are other areas that could be focused on now that can be critical for the Board. Mr. Nielsen noted Board driven ideas that are underlying in this discussion and allow Board focus on the big picture. Mr. Ruiz noted outcomes of schools and families working together to achieve academic improvement. Supt. Nyland summarized themes that he heard on student achievement and closing the gap, and community engagement and transparency as another theme. He noted theory of action helping drive practice by being specific and focused. Supt. Nyland noted the issue of dividing up time between the work of the staff and the work of the Board, and pointed out that it is a delicate balance. Dr. Jones noted for staff to work with the Board on ideas and implementation, discussed the constraints of the political process, and provided an example of staff successfully attacking the goals of the Board when the target is focused. Ms. Coe noted that specificity is a beautiful thing that can

take time and patience, and reminded all that there are sensitivity issues. She noted the excitement around the work in communications and community engagement and identifying the needs of the students, families and community to get to a better place. Mr. Starosky noted the struggle for new Board members coming off the campaign trail, and the intersecting platforms outside of the passions for which they were elected.

Directors provided their opinions on their own political constraints and messaging which are derived from their core values, and the discussion around district goals and the high level of the goals are non-actionable. They noted the discussion earlier today that there are many people taking steps to pull these goals in a specific area, and that the passion of each Director can be applied and leveraged to champion aspects that still pull in the same direction and don't deviate. Directors noted their perspective and working with staff who are experts in their areas, to design the goals to move the collective forward, and noted the complexities with the parts and pieces. Mr. Nielsen noted the student achievement being the stump in the graphic, and there are many pieces as being interrelated with the many stakeholders, and noted the challenges with the staff and Directors coming together to represent the students and the families, and the need to become a cohesive organization. Ms. Posey noted that the focus is closer now than it was earlier this morning, that people seem to have coalesced around smart goal 6 and doing the work and service of students to close the opportunity gap. She noted that the avenues to pursue those are still up for discussion, but that there has been a narrowing of focus over the last couple of hours on customer service and closing achievement gaps. She asked for feedback on this idea. Directors provided their input on this and made notes of the discussion in their smaller groups that also encompass other goals.

Directors noted the scope of the work of a Board Director, and the responsibility they have to the over 53,000 students, and discussed turning their personal passions into a focus on all students. They noted that all seven goals are important, but that they cannot achieve what they need to with being spread among all seven, and the need to be focused to make an impact. Ms. Posey reiterated that everyone here is working to achieve all seven of these goals, and that if the Board decides to pick 2 or 3, the others are not being left behind, the work is still being done by district staff. Ms. Posey indicated her appreciation for the candid discussion.

The meeting recessed at 12:30pm for a 15 minute break. The meeting reconvened at 1:03pm.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT/COMMUNICATIONS

Ms. Posey spoke about the plan for the rest of the day – spend 45 minutes on community engagement, then move to the Board priorities for 16-17, and then return to the morning discussion for closure.

Directors discussed whether staff should be seated at the table for this discussion. Directors discussed the definition of community engagement. Directors discussed whether to put out that question to the community so that engagement options can be tailored to each community's needs. Directors discussed the example of bell times engagement.

Directors discussed that there are divergent views in the community that likely will not be totally reconciled. Directors discussed using community engagement as a tool to help guide the Board's work. Directors discussed having process maps.

Directors noted that the idea of community engagement is built upon the recognition that decision-makers do not know all that they need to know and therefore need to reach out to the community for input. Directors noted the need to acknowledge that they serve multiple communities. Directors noted that community engagement must be built on relationships, not just a one-time thing, and that it be ongoing. Directors noted the need for community engagement to be a two-way dialogue.

Directors noted the need to reach out to and actively go out to interact with the community, and that some communities need more effort than others. Directors discussed the idea of having Board meetings in the community once a quarter.

Directors noted the need to message that the district values the community's input and to show the community how their input has had an impact. Directors noted effective community engagement is at the lowest level and the need for a plan to have successful engagement for people in their school buildings because if they have to go outside that realm, it taxes resources. Directors noted the need to let the community know the decisions that are coming and what direction the district is going. Directors clarified the definition of community engagement at the lowest level.

Ms. Posey asked Directors to clarify what the short answer for the definition of community engagement is. Directors provided responses that it is gathering input from the people who the decisions are going to affect. Directors added the concept of sharing information of the decisions to the affected individuals. The purpose is to help Directors gather the information they need to make decisions. Directors discussed the opportunity to also share the rationale for the decision being made. Directors discussed the purpose of supporting the long-term health of the community and schools. Directors discussed using community engagement for advocacy to see what is possible as opposed to what is.

Ms. Posey discussed the continuum of community engagement and the need to know the purpose of it. Ms. Posey described the common themes she heard. Ms. Posey discussed the International Association for Public Participation's continuum of inform, consult, involve, collaboration, and empowerment. Ms. Posey discussed the challenge of selecting the right type of community engagement.

Ms. Posey and Directors discussed SMART goal #6, and the difference and connections between community engagement and customer service. Directors discussed the district's website. Directors discussed the law of unintended consequences and the result of pushing out information.

Directors discussed the need to ask the communities what they need. Directors looked at the language of SMART goal #6 and noted that the title Customer Service might not entirely capture the subject of the goal.

Directors discussed the need to be liaisons between the district and the community. Directors discussed the constraints of time and capacity. Directors discussed the opportunity costs of actions taken. Directors discussed the impact of a Director getting involved and the impact of a Director's stated public opinion. Directors discussed the need to be aware of candor and nuance. Directors discussed the need to identify needs of communities and to meet compliance. Directors discussed the need for already identified entry points to help Directors.

Directors discussed how to engage with the community. Directors discussed tools to help answer questions about how to help get issues resolved. Directors discussed first referring people to the teacher, then to the principal, and then to central office. Directors discussed having monthly meetings and making themselves available for meetings and on Facebook, visiting schools in their district, and making themselves available for events aligned to the district's goals to have a visible presence. Directors discussed referring people to the right individual.

Directors discussed the role of the Board member as a recruiter. Directors discussed the need to be a heads-up person for the people working in central office or our schools so that thoughtful planning can occur rather than being reactive.

Directors discussed the need to visit schools outside their district to understand the issues of the entire district. Directors discussed the occasional phone conversations needed.

Directors discussed the specific outcome they are attempting to achieve through the community engagement. Directors discussed wanting to know the impact of decisions being made on their areas so they can have an informed voice and to ground their decisions. Directors discussed wanting to be a positive voice of the district both ways. Directors discussed being a sounding board for the community. Directors discussed being a conduit and troubleshooters. Directors want to ensure the District and the Board are making informed decisions that benefit the community.

Directors discussed how the Directors' community engagement supports the Superintendent in SMART goal #6. Directors discussed how keeping the Superintendent informed is helpful. Directors discussed that bringing input from the community to the Superintendent and district can be good and bad, depending on the number of concerns being raised. Directors discussed that the loudest voices often get the most attention and the impact on closing the achievement gap.

Directors asked the Superintendent his opinion. The Superintendent reflected on the impact of responding to lots of fires and not being able to make progress on the goals and the need to find the balance. Directors asked for concrete examples of what fires staff is asked to put out. Directors asked whether the Board needs more staff to help them and take the load off of staff. Deputy Superintendent Nielsen talked about the capacity issue and the need to be disciplined. He discussed the need to focus and engage the Board as leaders and have staff support the Board. He discussed the need for systems. He discussed the impact of complex decisions and that staff want to support the Board. The Superintendent spoke to the 14 pages of Board requests and the need for the Board to decide what information they need to govern. The Superintendent discussed the need to clarify between being informational and directing staff. The Superintendent discussed how emerging issues are vetted and the need to follow the communications protocol. The Superintendent discussed the combination of balancing grain size and urgency. He described the need to follow or change the processes to lift things up gradually to respect staff.

Directors discussed the concept of change management as a deliberate thing and a protocol for elevating things. Directors asked staff to provide the impact of an ask. Directors noted there is a lot of capacity on the district team. Directors asked staff to remind them of the protocol if they do not follow it. Directors commented that the issues the Superintendent raised as drop everything are hugely important issues. Directors discussed the crises that are avoided when they get involved. Directors asked to see the 14 pages of Board requests. Directors asked what they should do when an issue is raised by a community member when it is not on a work plan, and that perhaps they should flag the level of urgency. Directors discussed some of the recent issues they have raised. Directors responded to the comments from the Deputy Superintendent and Superintendent. Directors asked for an opportunity to come up with steps for how to be a constructive team.

Directors discussed the similar conversation that occurred at the June 2014 Board retreat. Directors noted the need for clarity around the appropriate protocol for raising a concern. Directors noted that staff's job is to follow and implement policy and not to answer emails, to move from description to prescription. Directors asked for clarity on where they should send those questions and emails. The Superintendent responded with the need to keep it at the school level whenever possible, rather than go straight to the cabinet member. And if it goes to a cabinet member, it should be as an FYI whenever possible. Directors discussed the need to help Directors understand the communications protocol.

Directors discussed the challenges of retreat agendas.

Mike Starosky joined the conversation and suggested a need to refer to the communications protocol when responding to emails. Directors reframed the discussion back to community engagement and how to meet the needs of the community, which would reduce this kind of discussion. Directors discussed the issue of timeliness, and the need to ask some questions now. Directors discussed rating the urgency of requests.

Directors discussed whether there is a need for a work session. Directors discussed reviewing the policy and procedure and then meeting with Erinn Bennett to ask any questions. Directors discussed the impact on staff of Directors' actions. Directors discussed the opportunity cost of taking staff time away from their job in order to answer emails. Directors asked staff to give feedback to Directors.

Directors discussed adding the first two items of today's agenda back onto the next retreat. The Superintendent suggested Erinn should send out the policy and protocol again, ask Directors to send questions to her, and that she will look for a time to schedule a work session, likely on a Tuesday or Thursday.

Directors noted that this discussion is about a symptom and the need to know where you are before you can decide where to go. Directors discussed the need to reach a common understanding and work product. Directors discussed not scheduling a work session on the communications protocol.

PLANNING FOR 2016/17 POTENTIAL DIRECTOR GOAL AREAS

Director shared their ideas on the 2016-17 Director Goal areas.

- Director Geary
 - African American Male Initiative and principles of restorative justice
 - Special Education continuum in line with taskforce and Preschool/EEU work
 - Building cultural proficiency
 - Rolling out the Native American curriculum
 - Communication – Community engagement process used for bell times to develop a community engagement system (asking community what they think of community engagement)
- Director Harris
 - Removing Goals 4 and 5 of the current list (Early Hiring and Bell Times)
 - Capacity
 - Program Evaluations and Placements (alternative education)
 - Customer Service/Communication Goal #6
 - Professional development around cultural competency – for everyone in district
 - Addressing the continuum of services (Highly Capable, Advanced Learning, Special Education, underserved communities)
- Director Patu
 - Close the opportunity gap by utilizing Goals 1, 2 and 3
 - Do Governance Priority 3 by utilizing SMART Goal 6
 - STEM, International Baccalaureate, and language immersion schools funding
- Director Blanford
 - Deepening the Board's understanding of the Opportunity Gap (strategies/approaches used by other districts to close gap). Professional development.
- Director Burke
 - Middle School Math adoption
 - Evaluate CSIPs as a vehicle for district level governance
 - Assessments – provide effective assessment tools that maximize learning in the classroom
 - Support for Career and Technical Education and STEM
- Director Peters
 - More \$ to our schools (take a really close look at the budget)
 - Policy – update, change, scrap or initiate
 - Capacity

Ms. Posey clarified this is a brainstorming list that will be sorted and prioritized in the future.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00pm.