MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors
THROUGH: Superintendent
FROM: Tanya Rowe, Executive Director of Communications and Community Relations
DATE: Jan. 8, 2015
RE: Monitoring Report for EL-3, Treatment and Communication with Public, Parents and Students

I certify that the following is accurate as of Jan. 5, 2015. The reporting period is from Dec. 1, 2013 through Nov. 30, 2014.

Policy Type: Executive Limitation

Policy: EL-3 Treatment of Parents, Students and the Public
“The Superintendent shall not fail to ensure that non-employee stakeholders are treated with respect and dignity throughout the organization, and appropriately communicated with regarding district events, plans, and actions…."

Adopted: September 10, 2009

Combined EL-3, 12 & 17 November 6, 2012

Interpretation of items: None in question.
Description of Evidence of Compliance:

The Department of Communications and Community Relations helps implement The Bellingham Promise, the strategic plan of Bellingham Public Schools, by:

- Increasing our students, families, staff and community’s understanding of our vision, mission, core beliefs, outcomes and key strategies; and

- Supporting our school system to develop and implement authentic, transparent processes with thorough, proactive communications plans that help stakeholders engage in the Promise and influence decision-making.

EL-3 calls on the superintendent to treat non-employee stakeholders with respect and dignity, similar to the Promise outcome of developing students and graduates who are respectful and compassionate humans. This policy also provides the opportunity to demonstrate how our school system acts as effective communicators, another desired outcome for students and graduates.

Almost every one of our school system’s Priorities for Progress requires a communication plan and departmental support. The number of change initiatives and work priorities within Bellingham Public Schools predicts the work for Communications and Community Relations.

To treat parents, students and the public in an exemplary fashion and communicate effectively in a manner that is “typical for similar and highly effective organizations” as defined in EL-3 Item 1, we look nationally and regionally to identify, adapt and implement best practices from other high-functioning school districts, higher education institutions and others. On nearly a monthly basis, we connect with other school districts to conduct research. Some specific examples from this reporting period include research on administrative policies, website design and content, social media, fundraising guidelines, staff and visitor identification badge practices, safety and wellness, transportation policies, voicemail systems, and volunteer coordination. We also innovate when in unchartered territory and share our resources openly, as others do with us; many school districts approach us regularly.

For professional development in the last reporting period, communications team members participated in the following learning opportunities:

- National School Public Relations Association Seminar
  - In July 2014, Lisa Hust, Communications Technician, attended the National School Public Relations Association Annual Seminar to engage in learning about social media/engaging key communicators, staff morale/supporting staff, and emergency preparedness. During the seminar connections were made with local school public relations staff from Tacoma, Bellevue, Sunnyside and Central Kitsap school districts.

- August 2014 professional development for the entire communications team, including district office reception and interpretation and translation staff, included “Shift Yes” communications strategies focused on fostering a workplace culture that embraces others’ ideas and builds upon them.

- The communications staff participates in the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) “Power Hours,” which are webinars that include pertinent information and topics applicable to most public school districts. They are usually presented by directors,
monitoring report for EL-3

principals and/or communications staff who have deep knowledge and/or experience in a particular topic or issue. The following webinars were attended by staff:

- NSPRA webinar – Getting Ready for Common Core Scores and What To Do and Say About Them
- NSPRA webinar – Emerging Trends in Social Media
- NSPRA webinar – What Gets Measured Gets Done (and Valued!)
- NSPRA webinar – Parent Ambassadors: Changing the Conversation about Schools

- In November 2014, Jacqueline Brawley, Communications Manager, attended the Chinese Bridge Delegation for US Principals in Beijing and Shandong Province, along with four other administrators from Bellingham Public Schools, to engage in learning about the Chinese education system and culture; the importance of exchange programs for teachers and students; and the benefits of developing students who are multilingual and engaged in a broader world. Strong connections and relationships were made with administrators and educators in China, as well as from the US.

Data, Analysis and Supporting Evidence:

- The Bellingham Promise in Action:

  - **District Publications:** Storytelling has become the main tool for how we describe and demonstrate the effectiveness of our district’s strategic plan, The Bellingham Promise. This laser-like focus on The Bellingham Promise evolved further during this last reporting period, as demonstrated by the features and format connected to each Bellingham Promise outcome (*EL-3 Items 2B and 2C*) for the community newsletter ***Inside Schools*** (*EL-3 Item 2A-i*), mailed to every home and business in district attendance areas in February, June and October 2014.

*Above: From our fall 2014 Inside Schools community newsletter.*

In addition, we added a new section to the newsletter during this reporting period to help communicate the work of our School Board, taking steps beyond the requirement of **EL-3 Item 2Aii** to communicate School Board meetings, dates and materials as we do through our website, media and posted notices.

The Bellingham Promise in Action can also be found in weekly district email and web messaging to students and families; the addition of The Bellingham Promise
and references to it in the Graduation and Course Planning Guide published in February 2014; and inclusion of The Bellingham Promise in the Calendar and Family Handbook in August 2014.

- **Video:** One of our top-viewed videos during this reporting period helps tell the story of The Bellingham Promise in action:
  - *Dr. Baker Walking in the Shoes Of:*, Aug. 26, 2014 – 1,087 plays. Superintendent Baker’s Walking in the Shoes of others initiative is significant evidence during this reporting period of the treatment of and communication with parents, students and the public. In addition to walking in the shoes of students and staff, Dr. Baker met during this reporting period with junior and seniors at each of our four high schools in spring 2014 to build relationships and get their input on the culminating project, snow make-up days, and the school year ending date for future seniors. This communication was shared with students and families.

- **Evidence of Communicating a Key Strategy of The Bellingham Promise: Early Childhood:** The first day of Promise K was April 10, 2014. The program was created to help reduce the opportunity gap for students who have no pre-kindergarten experience either because families could not afford it or because they are on waiting lists. The 10-week program was very successful and will continue this school year. To promote understanding of the Promise K program, we created a video. The video was shared at the back-to-school all staff event and later shared on our website and through editorials in The Bellingham Herald. The video has received 1,100 views to date.

- **Priorities for Progress:** Work priorities as they relate to The Bellingham Promise evolved into a new published document called Our Priorities for Progress 2014-15, published in fall 2014. Organized by the five key strategies of the strategic plan, it lays out the focus of district work for the 2014-15 school year in a visually-appealing, easy-to-absorb way. This publication, along with all the other ones that tie in to The Bellingham Promise, keeps the district strategic plan a living story, not one that sits in a binder on a shelf for five years until the next one is developed. The Priorities for Progress now provides the foundation for our annual Budget Development Process.

- **Bellingham Families Magazine:** New in the last reporting period, Bellingham Public Schools partnered with the Bellingham Herald to send The Bellingham Families magazine home with each elementary student quarterly for the purpose of increasing families’ informational access to extra-curricular opportunities and community event information. The Herald manages community organizations’ requests for free listings and advertising and pays for printing; the district distributes this quarterly. This supports families’ request for less paper flyers going home with students and allows community organizations to promote their camps, programs, classes and events to our families. Bellingham Public Schools has a page in each magazine to share The Promise and important information using multiple resources *(EL-3, Item 2A):* Kindergarten Registration (February), Summer Learning Ideas (June), Back-to-School (August) and Superintendent Listening and
Learning (October). The Bellingham Families magazine also ran numerous district-based or referenced articles coordinated by the communications team.

- **Promise Awards Advisory Group**: To promote recognition of exemplary work connected to The Bellingham Promise, this group worked to score nominations for the Promise Awards in spring 2014.

- **WSPRA Awards 2014**: The Department of Communications and Community Relations received several awards during this reporting period for effective communications by the Washington School Public Relations Association (WSPRA).
  - **In the category of Branding/Image Package**, staff received a Perfect Score/Award of Excellence and the Best in Category for the *Sharing the Promise Toolkit*, which included the posters, letterhead, presentations and logos developed.
  - **In the category of External Print Newsletter/Newspaper**, staff received a Perfect Score/Award of Excellence and Best in Category for our *Inside Schools* community newsletter publications.
  - **In the category of Finance Publication**, staff received an Award of Merit for the *Bond Projects Timeline Poster*.
  - **In the category of Video/Audio Programs**, staff won for all four submissions: Honorable Mention for the *School Bond - Proposed Projects* video; Award of Merit for both the *Give Me 5! Employee Charitable Giving* video and the *Class of 2024 Heads to Second Grade* video; and an Award of Excellence for the *2013 Promise Awards* video.
  - Superintendent Greg Baker received the WSPRA Crystal Apple Award, representing an individual not in the public relations field, but who supports and promotes effective communications.

- **Looking Forward**: Staff are developing The Bellingham Promise website to launch in winter/spring 2015. During this past reporting period, a significant part of the team’s work has focused on how to demonstrate and communicate evidence of The Bellingham Promise in Action through interactive storytelling via our website. In addition to refreshing, updating and making the district and school websites mobile responsive, this new Promise website will allow staff, students and community members to share their own stories of the Promise in action. It will feature stories and evidence from around our district that highlight our students, families, staff and community as they relate to our key strategies and outcomes. This website will also provide supporting evidence for ends monitoring reports to the board.

**II. Bond and Facilities Planning**
The new Birchwood Elementary re-opened in September 2014 and Communications and Community Relations planned and coordinated the grand opening and ribbon-cutting ceremony in August to welcome staff, students, families, contractors, business partners and neighbors to the new school and provide an opportunity for tours before the school year began. Fact sheets, photos and press releases for media and the public were part of the communications. Funding for the construction of Birchwood was provided by the 2006 facilities bond.
After the $160 million bond was approved by voters in November 2013, planning for several new facilities and projects began, which meant several advisory committees needed to be formed. Communications and Community Relations helps develop the committee processes with district and school leaders and then publicizes the call for applicants, attends the group’s meetings and assists with strategic communications for internal and external audiences. The following groups were formed and are engaged in Bellingham Public Schools’ work priorities:

- Lowell Design Advisory Group
- Happy Valley Educational Specifications/Design Advisory Committee
- Parkview Design Advisory Group

All three groups held/are holding regular committee meetings and have engaged/are engaging school staff, neighbors, families and the community to seek input on designs, layout and prioritizing needs. They utilized online and printed surveys, as well as in-person community forums. Communications produces regular videos (1-2 per year) to provide staff and families updates on facility projects.

Looking Forward: Groups and committees related to rebuilding Sehome and Options high schools, athletic fields and the Gordon Carter conservation site will begin meeting in 2015.

III. Engagement Processes

Committees
Bellingham Public Schools has a large number of committees and advisory groups engaging stakeholders in moving Priorities for Progress forward. In addition to facility-related committees, the following are currently active and Communications has supported each with process development and formation during this reporting period:

- CTE General Advisory Council
- Family Partnership Program Advisory Group
- Joint District-BEA Professional Development Study Committee
- K-12 Highly Capable Program Review Committee
- Positive Behavior and Support Advisory Group
- Response to Intervention Advisory Group
- Special Education Parent Advisory Committee
- World Language Advisory Group

Of these groups, the K-12 Highly Capable Program and Family Partnership Program groups had extensive communications plans during this reporting period, along with the following groups that completed their work during the reporting timeframe:

- Attendance Area Committee for Happy Valley and Lowell
- Calendar Committee
- Repurposing Larrabee Think Tank
- PreK-12 Visual and Performing Arts Advisory Group
- PreK-12 Math Committee

Resulting from the work of the Attendance Area Committee, Communications and Community Relations spearheaded an extensive communications plan to inform families of the impending attending area changes that included three southside schools. In addition to the southside schools, attendance area changes as a result of the 2006 bond required that five additional elementary
schools be communicated with regarding school boundary changes and updates. Families at all
eight elementary schools were communicated with via letters sent in their home languages. The
result of this communications plan was a very low volume of calls of concern or confusion coming
into our affected schools and nearly zero coming in at the district-level.

**School Year Calendar**

The collective bargaining process with the Bellingham Education Association resulted in an
agreement that included school year calendars for the next four years. The calendar development
process started with the Calendar Committee, and then rolled into bargaining. Communications
were limited during the bargaining process due to labor practice constraints. Following a
successful and collaborative bargain, Communications launched an extensive plan in multiple
languages to share the calendars and rationale:

- **May 22, 2014:** Letter to Families and Community Partners
- **June 12, 2014:** Calendars Set
- **Calendar FAQ**
- **Calendars by Level and in Spanish** (Communications worked closely with Isabel Meaker during
  the summer on a special mailing to our families who needed calendar information in their home
  language.)
- **Superintendent Message Regarding Calendar Changes in Family Handbook (page 2)**

**Looking Forward:** We continue to hear from a relatively small number (approx. 25 emails/calls
to date) of students, families and staff who prefer a post-Labor Day start; many don’t understand
the rationale for starting earlier or having no school on some Fridays during the school year for
embedded staff professional development. Once people hear the rationale, many express
understanding even if it’s not their preference. This continues as a communications challenge that
we are addressing with an ongoing communications plan and messaging. Building awareness of
the upcoming Aug. 26, 2015 school start date is a current focus; this reminder will be part of every
calendar-related email sent to families as of early December 2014.

**Social Media and Blogs**

Our district and schools rely on continuous communication and regular communication and
engagement with our staff, students, families and community. We communicate in a multitude of
ways and the channels of engagement are growing. Since the last EL-3 report, we have added a
Twitter account (260+ followers. Klout score 40) for the school district. We have also consulted
and advised many staff and administrators about school social media accounts and best practices,
including the office of the special assistant to the superintendent for family engagement, which set
up a special Facebook page in Spanish for Spanish-speaking families. We have also set up blogs
for the superintendent, as well as a couple of other administrators. Blogs serve as a less formal
means to communicate with staff, families and the community. They allow the blogger to share
news, thoughts, observations and photos quickly and receive feedback via comments.

**Safety and Wellness**

In November 2014, we clarified and communicated out all of our emergency plans (both site-
specific and general policies/procedures related to emergencies) with the Bellingham Police
Department, staff, administrators, families, students, media and community. This communication
and update about our district’s priority to keep both students and staff safe was sent in a letter
home from the superintendent, as well as in an email. Communications staff are in regular contact
with all school administrators in how to handle emergencies, steps that need to be taken and how to talk with staff, students and families about our preparation for such events.

**Interpretation and Translation**

This is the second year that Interpretation and Translation services has been part of Communications and Community Relations. We have continued to refine the system for hiring and coordinating interpreters and translators to serve our families who speak a language other than English. We are prioritizing recruitment and training and now have 43 interpreters/translators in our roster. We have improved communication with schools on how and why to use interpreters and how to best communicate with families who do not speak English through email communication and during the annual secretaries training in August 2014. Our staff are collaborating more systemically with the special assistant to the superintendent for family engagement (Isabel Meaker). Interpretation and Translation services played a key role in assisting elementary schools and families with fall conferences. We continue to improve family access to our most important documents and information in the four most commonly used languages – Spanish, Russian, Vietnamese and Punjabi.

**III. Communication Tools**

- **District Usage of SchoolMessenger.** SchoolMessenger is our quick alert communications system that is integrated with our student information database Skyward. Through SchoolMessenger, both the district and schools reach families and staff by email, phone and text. The majority of messages to families are general outreach in nature, though the system allows for early AM weather messaging and emergency messaging. Our department supports and troubleshoots questions and issues that arise about the system from both staff (mostly principals) using the system to send message and from families receiving messages.
  - The primary use of SchoolMessenger continues to be by email and phone. Since its implementation, we have attempted to increase the accuracy and quantity of email addresses associated with our students. The number of emails collected districtwide continues to grow. In Dec. 2013, messages were sent to a total of 12,216 emails; in Nov. 2014, that number had increased to 13,790. Likewise, the number of students in the district without an email in the system decreased from 1,991 in Dec. 2013 to 1,498 in Nov. 2014. (These final 1,500 students without an associated email (8% of total student population) could be related more to a lack of home access to internet more than our efforts to retrieve an email for a student.)
  - In the fall of 2014, a first-time campaign to collect texting cell numbers took place. This was included in a communication about school safety and was an effort to make sure we knew the best way to communicate with families, especially in an emergency.
  - In fall 2014, an effort to work with schools on the look of their emails took place. Approximately one third of district schools have a new email template which includes their school colors and logo. The work will continue to all schools during the 2014-15 school year.
  - **Looking Forward:** Staff will continue to collect text message phone numbers for families to communicate instantly with families in case of emergency. We will work further to integrate and streamline the two technologies of Skyward and SchoolMessenger, making it user friendly for families to update information.
themselves through Skyward Family Access, this work in collaboration with Educational Technology.

- **Website:** During the year, peak web traffic occurred during snow days, when school was closed due to inclement weather. On Dec. 20, 2013 we had 6,900 visits and on Feb. 24, 2014 we experienced 12,463 visits. The dramatic increase in website visits during these snow days can be attributed to improvements made to the district website server in partnership with Educational Technology. Our website can now handle much higher loads of activity in the event of inclement weather or crisis.
  
  o **Looking Forward:** We are working toward redesigning and upgrading our current website to make it a better experience for families and community members who often go to the website first for information. The new site will maintain our Bellingham Public Schools branding and create a more mobile responsive web presence for families and community members accessing our site through tablets or other mobile devices.

- **Prezi:** Starting with the Budget Proposal and Key Accomplishment presentation in June 2014, staff have begun to utilize a new presentation software called Prezi. Prezi is a web-based presentation application that is versatile and easily incorporates photos, videos and other graphics. We also used Prezi for the back-to-school staff event in August. Prezi can be shared as a PDF or on our website as an interactive presentation for families or staff to click through and view at any time.

*Also from EL-3:*

Provide an affirmative (or negative) statement that the following actions have been taken:

i. Maintain a process to timely address student, parent, and stakeholder concerns;
   
   - **Affirmative.** The process is outlined on page 5 of the Family Handbook. The Department of Teaching and Learning and other Executive Team members meet regularly with parents and others who need their concerns addressed. These proactive communications practices, in support of policy governance, have resulted in a dramatic decrease in the number of complaints reaching the School Board. During this reporting period, 7 individuals spoke at board meetings expressing concerns and 12 submitted Listening Posts containing complaints (we have approximately 7,500 district parents, 11,000 students and 55,000 households and businesses within district attendance areas). During this reporting period, the board also refined its response and procedure for Listening Posts. Finally, the Department of Communications and Community Relations continues to coordinate a districtwide policy review and update.

ii. Appropriately utilize community advisory groups on important questions;
   
   - **Affirmative.**

*Statement of Compliance:* The superintendent is in compliance with EL-3.