

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 303
School Configuration Committee
Meeting Minutes

Date: May 8, 2013
Place: Board Room – Commodore Campus
Time: 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Welcome & Update

Superintendent Faith Chapel welcomed committee members and asked them to review the minutes from the April 24th meeting. As there were no revisions or corrections, the minutes will be posted on the district's website.

Discussion – May 7th Community Meeting

Ms. Chapel distributed a copy of the presentation provided at the community meeting regarding school configuration. She asked committee members to provide feedback regarding the presentation and, for those who attended the meeting, feedback about the meeting as a whole. One committee member noted feedback from the community participants had suggested less presentation at the beginning, with more time for questions and answers. Other committee comments included: a) Listening to the small group discussion summaries was interesting as you could hear the common thread from group to group; b) The process was appreciated, with the small group conversations. However, some folks may not have been able to speak with their “full voice.” c) It was suggested that having comment cards available would give folks the opportunity for further input; d) It was suggested documents relevant to the community meetings – the most requested documents – could be available on the district's website via a link (from the main page). It was also suggested there could be an avenue for comments through the district website, which is not currently available. e) Ms. Chapel needed to be introduced as superintendent. Also, when a question from the attendees is read out loud, the person submitted the question should be given an opportunity for a follow up question or clarification of their original question. f) The context of “why now” was missing from the presentation – the context of financial need. g) It was suggested a summary of the options being considered by the committee would be less confusing to community members than the detail that was in the presentation. h) It was suggested a brief explanation about why other options were not considered be included in the presentation. i) A definitive statement from the Board of Directors should be included in the presentation.

The committee entered into a discussion regarding the two fundamental decisions they have been tasked with – 1) should the district have seven schools or six schools (what can the community afford); and 2) if there is a move to six schools, what is the configuration of those six schools. As the discussion continued, it was noted that the community needs to understand what the trade-offs will be with each option being considered. Several committee members agreed the current configuration is not fiscally sustainable, and any new funding from the state (McCleary decision) would be targeted, with no back-filling to other budget areas being possible. Noting the fiscal concerns being faced by the district, one committee member described the three configuration options being considered as one not saving money for a long time, one saves money now, and one never saves money. If the committee is charged with saving money, there is no choice of not saving money (the “forced choice” idea). The committee was reminded of all the budget cuts that have been made over the past five years through the District Budget Advisory Committee process. Another committee member stated the sense of “gloom” was not valid, as the numbers have not been validated that confirm closing Commodore will save \$450K. When the analysis of the numbers is

finished, those numbers may be lower. It was noted the savings would come from staffing, not just closing a building. It was suggested the district needs to think “outside the box” regarding generating revenue.

Ms. Chapel spoke about the process underway for the committee as being much different than the process in other districts. In other districts, committees are charged with closing a school due to financial concerns – they have to choose which one. The charge from this district’s school board was to develop configuration options within the constraints of the district’s economic and demographic limitations. It is a question of what are people willing to support – where is the balancing point between closing a school, looking at additional revenue, bonds/levies, and the support of the foundation.

One committee member noted the idea of an option 4 – disaggregating the Commodore Options programs – had been raised. The importance of having this option be part of those being considered was underscored. The question of urgency was also discussed, and again it was suggested a better understanding of the financial situation be provided. Discussion also centered on the innovative programs across the district and the “urgency” felt by staff, especially with the configuration conversation and the consideration of closing a school building. Ms. Chapel noted the district has the luxury of having multiple possibilities, which is also a dilemma. When there is no choice, things can be far clearer. One of the major goals in the committee process is engaging the broader community in discussion about the choices faced by the district. The trends indicate the district is dependent on “soft” money and that is not sustainable. It is important from a strategic standpoint to engage the community and learn their priorities. When a community values their schools, it is a difficult conversation.

Discussion: Staff Debrief

Comments included: a) Staff at Ordway were quite vocal; b) Staff at Woodward were trying to visualize how the school environment would work with sixth grade coming back on campus. Also, the urgency of the situation was questioned. There was another session held with staff chaired by Principal Florian and SCC member Linda Purdom at which many questions were raised. c) Sakai staff voiced a strong belief they are the bridge from elementary to middle school. It comes down to believing the savings versus the program costs. d) Ordway staff expressed sadness about the campaigning going on, but also felt they needed to voice their opinion about a fourth option and submitted a letter to the committee. e) Commodore staff have a number of questions about facility costs, and keeping the programs together. As the school staff shared feedback from the individual school presentations by Ms. Chapel, they acknowledged the conversation had become emotional as each school community advocated for their own programs. Dave Layton shared feedback from the Bainbridge Island Education Association, and committee members who are school staff noted the volume of emails they receive regarding the school configuration process.

Next Steps:

Ms. Chapel explained the process of the study and survey process, which will help to answer a number of questions. She also thanked the subcommittee for the work they are doing with further analysis of the costs associated with the configuration scenarios. It was noted a cost analysis of the purposed Option 4 (programs at Commodore) will be done. The next meeting was proposed for May 28th and the committee members agreed.

Next Meeting:

May 28