

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

SCHOOL BOARD MEETING AGENDA

Study Session

Date: December 3, 2013
Time: 5:30 p.m.
Place: Commodore Commons – Commodore Campus

Board of Directors

President – Mike Spence

Directors – Tim Kinkead, Patty Fielding, Mev Hoberg, Mary Curtis

Call to Order

5:39 p.m. - Board President Mike Spence called the meeting to order and a quorum was recognized. He noted a public comment sign-up sheet was available for those who wanted to speak, and comments made should be limited to three minutes.

Presentation

Woodward Volunteer Investigation Report and Recommendations

Superintendent Faith Chapel and Assistant Superintendent Dr. Peter Bang-Knudsen provided an overview of the Woodward Volunteer Investigation Report and Recommendations. The goals for the presentation were stated as follows: a) share the investigation report; b) provide the District's recommendations in response to the report's findings; c) provide an opportunity for community comments; d) implement balanced solutions.

Ms. Chapel explained how volunteers were extremely important to the Bainbridge Island School District (BISD). It was noted that an indicator of an outstanding school system is a high degree of parent and community involvement, and the District is proud of the high level of parent and community engagement in its schools. Ms. Chapel acknowledged the investigation report revealed gaps in district policies and procedures related to volunteers in the schools. These gaps have caused some students and parents to feel uncomfortable, for which the district apologized. In order to address some of the gaps in policies and procedures, the district will share ideas regarding how it can strike a balance between welcoming volunteers while providing clearer guidelines.

Dr. Bang-Knudsen provided explanation about why the district hired an independent investigator to address the increasingly divisive issue related to the Woodward lunchroom volunteers. He underscored the district takes student/parent concerns very seriously, and the administration wanted a thorough and objective review with an outside perspective in order to separate fact from rumor. The District hired attorney Shawn Flood who interviewed students, parents, staff members, volunteers, and others. Following the conclusion of Ms. Flood's investigation and submission of her four-page report, the District took time to review and understand the report, and create some action steps to move forward with policy changes. It was noted the investigation report had been posted on the district's website.

Dr. Bang-Knudsen summarized the report's findings noting as a whole, the investigator cited that "youth pastors volunteering in the lunchroom did not use their time and access to students to promote religion or convert students to their faith" (e.g. no evidence of distribution of Bibles, religious literature, discussion of God or Jesus). Two exceptions were noted in the report: a) One student who was a member of his church approached a youth pastor with a religious question; b) there was one report of a youth pastor approaching a student and telling the student that he could talk to him if he ever wanted to talk about religion. Regarding the report's findings related to invitation to religious activities outside of school, it was found that youth pastors invited some student to off-campus religious activities (e.g. youth pastors would remind students in their church of upcoming activities and/or handed out permission slips). The report also found that there was evidence that some students who were not members of these pastors' churches were also on occasion directly or indirectly invited to attend off campus group

activities. Report findings regarding other interactions found no evidence that any youth pastor engaged in counseling or mentoring students at school. In addition, some students, parents, administrators and lunchroom supervisors stated that youth pastors were effective in their role as lunchroom supervisors.

The report also highlighted other findings unrelated to religion. It was reported one youth pastor walked across the gym with an arm around a student and sat on the floor with a group of students in the gym and was sitting close to a female student (2012-2013 school year). Administrators immediately took corrective action, giving the pastor directives regarding appropriate physical interactions with students. No further reports were made to administrators regarding this type of interaction between youth pastor volunteers and students. Another finding that came to light during the investigation involved a youth pastor volunteering during lunch, engaged in conversation with a group of girls about their social lives. The youth pastor found out the name of a boy one of the girls liked and brought the boy to her table. This made the girl feel uncomfortable. It was noted administrators had not been notified about this situation last year.

Superintendent Chapel presented information about solutions developed to bring consistency to district volunteer policies and procedures. It was noted that currently, Woodward was the only school in the District that relied on volunteers during the lunch hour; other schools have paid staff. One of the changes to be implemented will be the use of only paid staff for lunch supervision at Woodward. Making this change will facilitate consistency of training for staff, and will result in consistent volunteer opportunities across the district. The district will also revise and update volunteer policies, procedures and the volunteer handbook. This will ensure all schools have common application and screening procedures for volunteers, and that all volunteers will have clearly defined roles.

At the conclusion of the presentation, the School Board heard public comments on the topic, and noted written comments and any additional questions could be submitted to the district via Community Relations Coordinator Pam Keyes (pkeyes@bisd303.org). The School Board will address the topic again at the December 12th meeting where some action may be taken.

Public Comment

Comments were as follows: *Missa Pgne*: Asked those in attendance what was the true cost of the investigation but she said she did not mean the monetary cost to the school district, but the cost of the reputations of the young men who were tried in the local media and internet. She said there is a schism between how we profess to embrace and coexist and love this community and yet when it comes to religion, particularly Christian religion, there is a wall put up. She has been a volunteer at WMS for four years and appreciated that others would play basketball with the students in the gym. She expressed sadness that our children will lose this opportunity to see and work with volunteers outside of their parents, and she also mentioned that paying staff to supervise the lunchroom would also mean the district would incur more costs in these tight budget times. She appreciated the school district's suggestions to have more consistent volunteer policies and consistent training. She hopes the community embraces and apologizes— especially those who were so unkind to these young men. *Paul Weber*: Thanked the Board and the District for the work so far. Findings were useful. They clarified some issues but also they highlighted some other larger issues. Still finds it very unusual that three youth pastors were in the lunchroom and still finds it an issue that three evangelical pastors were there. Mr. Weber stated he is a big fan of diversity...where was the rabbi or scientologist? Where was the diversity? Mr. Weber also felt there was secrecy regarding these volunteers and felt this caused anxiety amongst parents. He felt that this was covert. Programs should be upfront, not in the lunchroom. *Darrell Martin*: Thanked the district for the expediency as he was concerned this investigation could be dragged out and was pleased it was not. He does not want to remove volunteers from the lunch program all together, would like to keep the door open on volunteers helping with basketball and interacting with the students etc. Mr. Martin went on to read from a Kitsap Sun article highlighting Ordway Teacher Alice Mendoza's need for more volunteers in her classroom, even at lunchtime. Ms. Mendoza was advocating more one-on-one volunteers for her classroom. *Ruth Caron*: Commented that parents as volunteers are not more qualified just because they are parents however, youth pastors are trained in dealing with youth. Mentioned she was glad that we are getting some uniformity on volunteers. She is glad the method or process of getting volunteers will be more in depth and unified. Mentioned that her mother has volunteered at Ordway and had one-on-one time with students but had not been background checked or asked about her religion. Ms. Caron said she feels she has heard folks say we want volunteers, but there is a little bit of an undertone that we don't want Christian ones. Would like to suggest for you

(District) to consider how quickly you responded to this and this was due to politics and that it was heated. Important for us as a community, to recognize biases and why we make decisions, and try to make them on the basis of what is good for the children.

Dawn Weber: Reiterated thanks to all for working with us in this process. She wanted to clarify that no allegations were made by this group of parents. This was a group of parents (lunchroom volunteers) who noticed some people in the lunchroom whom we did not recognize. They were not employees, not parents, and we started wondering who they were and what they were doing with our kids in school. This process started as a series of questions, not allegations. We wanted to know: who are these volunteers? What role are they fulfilling? They are legal lunchroom volunteers, but they are not doing the same jobs as we are? Why are they identified as positive male role models? We wanted to know why parents were not told of this for years. We have been accused of not wanting Christians and that is untrue. She also asked why these volunteers were showing up at school dances and registration. Why are all of these non-parents, evangelical pastors...we didn't accuse—we asked questions that were not answered. She feels this report answers some of their questions but not all of them. No intention to hurt or accuse anyone, we just wanted to know the truth. Citizen Rod Stevens: Commented that it seemed like an uneventful report. But he has heard that the Woodward Middle School PTO Volunteer Coordinator has resigned, and he noticed many divisive and hurtful blogs. Mr. Stevens noted that report seems to be incomplete as it deals with events not the cause, and it seems to be a management issue. Where did the management break down? Who is Mike Florian's boss in this? How did this come to a head and how did it come to this point. Mr. Stevens stated we have had a series of issues throughout the schools and we need to look at supervision of the schools. Citizen Kalpreet Rana: Asked if this report is the complete report that the District and Board received, the exclusive report, or is this an abridged version? President Mike Spence replied the report was complete. Citizen Dawn Janow: Asked about visitor access. Was the district tracking who is allowed into schools—not just volunteers but visitors.

Adjournment

6:26 p.m. – Board President Mike Spence adjourned the study session.