

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 303
SCHOOL BOARD MEETING MINUTES
COMMUNITY FORUM
Elementary World Languages

Date: February 28, 2013

Place: Commodore Commons

Board of Directors Present

Board President – Mike Spence

Board Vice-President – Mary Curtis

Directors – Patty Fielding, Tim Kinkead, Mev Hoberg

Call to Order

6:30 p.m. – Board President Mike Spence called the meeting to order, and welcomed community members. He stated those community members who would like to make public comment should use the provided signup sheet. Speakers were asked to confine their comments to no more than three minutes to allow time for all who would like to comment. President Spence explained the order of the forum beginning with an overview of the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project to date and a review of next steps. It was noted the district was in the process of conducting a feasibility study related to the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project and Elementary World Language. Recommendations from the feasibility study will be presented to the Board for a decision at the March 28th meeting. Following the presentation, community members will be provided an opportunity to comment on world languages at the elementary grade level.

Overview of District Perspective and Questions/Concerns about the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project and Elementary World Languages

Commodore Options Principal David Shockley provided background information regarding the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project, answering some of the common questions raised about the program as follows: *How did the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project get started?* – A few parents approached the district with interest in Spanish Immersion. Those parents were referred to the Mosaic Home Education Program principal. It was noted the Mosaic program had an ongoing K-4 Spanish component since 2000, with a Spanish-speaking teacher and an interest in creating more on-campus classes to address declining enrollment. *Why was the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project originally a part of the Mosaic Home Education Partnership Program?* – Changing rules governing funding for alternative learning education programs resulted in declining enrollment of students enrolled in the home partnership program. A historical overview of enrollment was provided, which showed the decline. *Evolution of Project* – The pilot project was developed with interested parents, staff, and the principal of Mosaic Home Education Partnership. The Spanish Experience Class was launched in February 2012 and provided a program that involved a 2-day per week class. The Spanish Immersion Pilot Project 2012-2013 was launched in September 2012 and provides a program 5 days per week. *Why did this project not have formal approval by the Board of Directors?* – It was noted in the past, pilots initiated by schools have not required a formal review by the school board. Pilot projects help to gauge student interest and allow program “kinks” to be worked out prior to large scale roll out. The example of the Eagle Harbor High School AP Environmental Science Class was given, noting that its success facilitated additional section to be implemented at Bainbridge High School. Given the concerns about the Spanish Immersion Pilot, the topic of Elementary World Languages was placed on the agenda of the K-6 Educational Programs & Innovation Committee (EPIC). It was noted the EPI Committee was in the process of developing guidelines for future piloting at the school level. *How was this project funded?* – Basic Education Funds provide for the allocation of staffing and basic materials equivalent to other district schools. The enrollment of new students to the district generates \$5200 per student, and 7 new students enrolled in the pilot providing an additional \$36,400 in revenue. In addition, Donations totaling \$25,000 were made to the district through the Bainbridge Schools Foundation to support costs above Basic Education. *How has the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project been staffed?* – There are 56.96 FTE students within the Mosaic program that generates 2.35 teachers (includes the allocation of specialists). Staffing within Mosaic support the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project (1 full time teacher). Additional support is provided through donations from the Bainbridge Schools Foundation (1 year only for a language consultant to support the instructional needs of student

K-4 in one class). *Was there an effort to keep the project under the radar?* – No. The project was originally intended for students enrolled in the Mosaic program. Some families in the original pilot (spring of 2012) decided not to participate. Some additional families learned of the possible program through “word-of-mouth.” Openings quickly filled. It was noted the board and district administrators were not aware of the process of how the class was filled until it was concluded. Due to the concerns regarding the pilot process, the EPI Committee is developing guidelines for planning, piloting and implementing new programs. *School Board Approval of Donations for Spanish Immersion* – The Board annually approves donations from the Bainbridge Schools Foundation (BSF). A BSF donation in June of 2012 included funds for the project. The Gifts and Donations form submitted to the Board stated the purpose of the donation was for “staffing, STEM, and teacher training.” A more detailed pledge accounting was provided to the district describing fund distribution.

Mr. Shockley addressed the question whether language immersion was a unique program for a school district to provide. It was noted that many other school districts already provide language learning in Washington State including Bellevue (Spanish & Chinese), Federal Way (Spanish), Highline (Spanish), Northshore (Spanish), Seattle (Spanish, Japanese, Chinese), Vashon Island (Spanish), North Kitsap (Spanish) and Bremerton (Spanish). Another question was whether the district considered world language instruction for all elementary students. It was noted the EPI Committee identified World Language as an important innovation to consider. There have been two foreign language program reviews, and there has been discussion regarding elementary language in schools. The EPI Committee is in the process of creating a subcommittee to study Foreign Language in the elementary school model. The subcommittee will research options for consideration and present options to the EPI Committee and the Board of Directors in spring 2013.

Next Steps

The district is in the process of conducting a Feasibility Study for Spanish Immersion Pilot Project that includes a timeline for communication, survey data, creation of an initial report, an open house to solicit interest, determining a location and associated implications, and the gathering of enrollment data. The Feasibility Study will include a pilot proposal for 2013-14, enrollment interest, and a cost analysis. The study will be presented to the Board on March 14th. After reviewing the feasibility study, the Board will consider action at their March 28th meeting.

Comments from the Community

President Spence opened the floor for public comment, calling citizens to the speaker’s table as listed on the sign-up sheet submitted to the board. (As more than twenty people signed up to speak, individual comments will be summarized.) Speakers included the following: *Tim Gleason* – As a parent with children enrolled in the district, Mr. Gleason spoke of advocacy for all students in the district. Quoting the district mission statement, he asked the question whether recruiting private school students had become part of that mission statement. Mr. Gleason challenged the district to support all students regardless of their parents’ ability to pay. *Rob Miller* – Noting the presentation earlier in the evening that showed a donation from the Bainbridge Schools Foundation to support the Spanish Immersion Pilot, asked when the board had approved that donation. Superintendent Chapel responded that all donations to the district are approved by the Board via the Consent Agenda. She further explained in this case, the donation from BSF came as a general purpose statement on that consent agenda, and was followed up with a listing containing specific categories. *Cindi Pratt* – Ms. Pratt expressed concern regarding the funding of the Spanish Immersion class with private money for only 28 students. She noted there had been a lack of transparency in the process of developing the pilot. Ms. Pratt submitted several questions to the board (full text available upon request). In closing, Ms. Pratt expressed her feeling that a foreign language program should be made available to all district students at the K-4 level. *Jayne Jones* – Speaking as a third generation “Islander,” Ms. Jones stated all students should be given the option of a language program without making cuts to other programs (arts, music, etc.). *Priscilla Jones* – Voiced support for the pilot project and compared music to language in that language learning needs to start young. *Bernadette Witty* – Spoke as a participant in the Mosaic Home Education Partnership program, reviewing how the Spanish Immersion Pilot was developed and noting Mosaic (in 2012-13) no longer has a Spanish component. She asked that Spanish be provided not only for just 2% of student, but for the other 98%. She asked if she could donate \$10K to a specific class to hire an educational consultant, and was told no. *Brandi Bispham* – Expressed her belief that at the core of public education is equity for all students. This is the time for innovation and support of teachers and parents. She believes both innovation and equity need to be done at the same time. *Rhett Stephens* - Mr. Stephens visited the current Spanish Immersion Pilot Program and observed students engaged in learning and thriving in the program. The concerns he heard during this meeting were based not on the substance of

the program, but on process. In his opinion, there is good will in the process and the district is looking to find an affective process for innovation. The pilot program is the process used for introducing new ideas. *Renni Bispham* - Expressed concern and disappointment about the lack of notice and opportunity for folks regarding the Spanish Immersion Pilot, and being told to “move forward.” He asked that there be some accountability for what occurred, because without accountability this could happen again. *Kim Paulson* – Stated the program should have not been implemented before it was available for all students. Ms. Paulson expressed her disappointment with the lack of planning for the pilot, and noted the division created in the community since the pilot’s implementation. *Heather Scott* – Spoke as a preschool music teacher and a parent of a child in the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project. She expressed support for the immersion model of language learning. Ms. Scott asked that the board consider moving the immersion model forward and look at the possibilities of other language learning models. *Heather Sharp* – Spoke as a parent with a child in the Spanish Immersion Pilot and noted her previous district had no language, art, or PE for students. She explained how she heard about the new program, attended preliminary meetings, and enrolled her child in the program. She encouraged continuing with the program, and possibly expanding it. *Gail Cole* – As a former teacher of foreign language, she was initially appalled there were no options for foreign language in the district. She stated the immersion program sounded good and encouraged the district to move forward with world language in general. *Piper Thornburgh* – Attended the Spanish Immersion Pilot observation held today and was impressed. It appeared the students in the program were thriving. The information and experience being gained through the pilot will inform other language opportunities in the K-4 setting. She agreed a better process could have been used. *Tricia Chilton-Peralter* – Asked why parents can’t participate in fundraising to fund staff such as librarians, such as was done with the Spanish Immersion Pilot. *Tera Eerkes* – Stated she has enjoyed the parent community of the Spanish Immersion Pilot, and asked other folks to come together with the district, BSF, and parents to design (world language) programs, go through proper processes, fund the programs and get foreign language for all students. *Sharon Eiler* - Suggested keeping the two topics separate – the process used for the pilot, and the need for foreign language for children early in life. Ms. Eiler attended the Spanish Immersion classroom visitation and observed students learning every second they were in the classroom. She referenced the popular Seattle School District Immersion program. *Rod Stevens* – Expressed his sense of “déjà vu” comparing the push for Odyssey expansion with Spanish Immersion. He believes community input doesn’t matter to the Board until it rises to the controversial level and “boils over.” He stated more leadership was needed from the board. He sees the need for true leadership at the community level, the state level, and the national level to bring people together. *Peter Murchie* – Asked questions related to the next steps in dealing with Spanish Immersion - what is the process for the subcommittee related to foreign language for students, and what is the long term plan for bringing world languages to the district? Board President Mike Spence partially answered by noting the K-6 Educational Programs and Innovation Committee was examining the obstacles to innovation and what can be done to encourage innovation. In addition, they are looking the processes related to new programs. *Linda Solberg* – Talked about world language and her participation on the committee reviewing world language through the curriculum review process. Ms. Solberg also talked about the importance of an articulated world language program as schools develop programs that support students becoming “global citizens.” *Cliff Lemieux* – Mr. Lemieux spoke as a teacher in the district and as a parent with a child in the Spanish Immersion Pilot. He noted not only was the discussion of the language program a board issue and an equity issue, but it is a contractual issue related to employees (teachers/specialists). Mr. Lemieux also talked about his child’s experience in the Spanish Immersion Pilot. At the conclusion of public comment, it was noted the Spanish Immersion Pilot Project Feasibility Study would be presented to the Board at their March 14th meeting.

Comments from the Board of Directors

Members of the Board of Directors addressed the audience members, with their comments summarized as follows: *Tim Kinkead* – Acknowledged the community input was important as the district continues to improve. In some ways there have been improvements in how the district makes changes. In this case we have fallen short in some areas around transparency, funding and student selection criteria. Mr. Kinkead expressed his appreciation for the input that will be taken to the K-6 Educational Programs and Innovation Committee, which is working to improve some of the district processes. He underscored an important factor involved with change – teachers make the biggest difference for students. So as the district seeks to improve, it will be done hand-in-hand with teachers. *Patty Fielding* – Thanked folks for attending the meeting and for the input. She noted it has been challenging, difficult, and there have been mistakes, and yet there is something to celebrate regarding the Spanish Immersion program. Ms. Fielding hoped people leave the meeting agreeing this is so. The challenge now is to figure out how to meet the needs of those students, and to understand lessons learned from this program that will help with early language education for all students. It is incredibly important. *Mary Curtis* – Added her thanks to the community for attending the meeting.

She agreed with the other board members, and noted she had been looking for a way to get more foreign language into the schools for a long time. She expressed excitement about the current momentum to do so. One of the things learned from the survey was not only was there interest in the language immersion model, there was interest having foreign language be a regular part of the school day. Mr. Curtis would like to see the district follow up as foreign language is good for students and there is such parent interest. *Mev Hoberg* – Expressed appreciation to parents and community members for attending and for sharing their opinions. Ms. Hoberg spoke of her children’s opportunity to experience foreign language in schools when the family lived overseas. She noted the current programs have helped to push the discussion, and the district would not be nearly as far in the discussion without something like this driving it. She appreciated all the audience comments. Ms. Hoberg agreed with others there is reason to celebrate, and focusing on language was important. She is looking forward to hearing the feasibility study. *Mike Spence* – He was struck by something Brandy Bispham said, which is we can do both – and he would love to do both. He believed this was the goal of the K-6 Educational Programs and Innovations Committee, as well as others he has spoken to - the question is how. The vehicle for figuring out how is the K-6 Educational Programs and Innovation Committee. He suggested those concerned about where the district is going should pay attention to the work of that committee. In addition, Mr. Spence noted most board meetings were attended by four or five people. He noted the more people that stay involved and attend board meetings, the easier it will be to come to the right decisions. Mr. Spence emphasized everyone attending this meeting is here because they want to improve education for their children. There are a lot of issues to think about including negotiated agreements, how the program would be created, how the program would be funded, and so on. Mr. Spence stated “We all take this very seriously and it is very important as it is our children’s education.”

Adjournment

8:18 p.m. – Board President Mike Spence adjourned the meeting.

SCHOOL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

ATTEST: _____, Secretary to the Board of Directors