

...Message from the superintendent

Feb. 23, 2011

Dear colleagues,

Earlier this year, I urged you to reflect upon the freedoms we each enjoy and to help ensure that those freedoms are protected for each individual in our schools. As we conclude the Presidents' Day holiday, I'm again reminded that as adult role models with responsibilities for the growth and learning of young people, each of us has many opportunities – and obligations – to support the democratic principles on which our country is founded, and to eliminate bullying and harassment in our schools, and thereby in society. I am taking this opportunity to thank you for your past efforts to keep our schools safe places to learn and to grow, and for your positive response to my call for that work to continue.

This month I urge you to remember that our great democracy embraces differences of opinions, and it protects the right we each have to express those opinions. We expect such differences to be expressed through civil discourse and to result in understanding – even if this discourse does not produce agreement.

The good; the bad; the obligation of public discourse

You and I were barraged with both positive and not so positive examples of public expressions during the November campaign season. No matter our feelings about election outcomes, I believe that each of us hopes that election discourse will become civil discourse, and that our state and national officials will provide leadership and governance grounded in understanding and a desire to do the right things, for the right reasons, in the right ways, at the right times.

As elected bodies, school boards usually include members with divergent opinions, AND school boards are bound by the [Open Public Meetings Act](#) (OPMA) to discuss those opinions in public. Unfortunately, the public's view of a school board's democratic process can focus narrowly on the drama of the disagreement, however transitory or impermanent, instead of upon the critical work on which the board members spend the vast majority of their time and energy.

Common vision; different pathways

Let me assure you, that no matter what you read or hear about school board deliberations, **your school board** supports the work you do each day, and the directors care deeply about their responsibilities to support each student's learning. It is only natural that five individuals might take different pathways to this support. It is legally required that they air those differences publicly, and that they hold each other accountable for these legal requirements – no matter how those differences may be portrayed or interpreted.

January was *School Board Appreciation* month – a time to reflect upon the gift of time and the level of expertise these elected officials give to support students and our work with each student. What better time to look at the work of this board just this year.

Ours is a *working* board

NewsLinks frequently includes a section entitled *Your School Board at Work* – a quick summary of the decisions and discussions from school board meetings. Sometimes the media reports on a board meeting, usually if there is a controversy. For the most part, the careful, thoughtful, professional discussions, planning and decisions about using public resources to educate today's and tomorrow's students are left unreported and unheralded – except by those who attend school board meetings.

While a portion of some of the discussion of the Feb. 22 school board meeting was portrayed in the article [Everett School Board censures fellow member over discord](#), the article focused on discussion and an action that took an hour in the board's five hours of work on Tuesday night. Unless they were among the meeting attendees, readers did not learn about:

- Board recognition of EHS graduate J.J. Frank for his work leading the YMCA of Snohomish County Minority Achiever's Program (MAP). MAP's mission *to motivate and support students of color and immigrant students to achieve higher educational and career goals* directly parallels the district mission of educating and graduating *each* student, and J.J. has been a tireless advocate for our students.
- Board review of the district's midyear strategic plan report. In the past, the board heard only an end-of-the-year strategic plan report. More frequent updates help the board stay in touch with the work we do and our progress toward achieving the goals the board has established.
- Board compliments for a report and work of the district counseling team's [individual interviews of students of color this year](#). Counselors' interviews of Hispanic students about student achievement, reaching standards, on-time graduation, and becoming college and work ready were summarized. The data from the interviews is rich and will inform the strategic plan and the daily work we do in schools. Counselors have been sharing that information with school staff; you can read the report from the board meeting online. Check it out to see what students are asking for and how determined they are to succeed in school and in their futures.

This report and the work it entails and work that it will lead us to is representative of the board's goals to continue focus on the success of each student and on ensuring that our schools are safe, nurturing places for our students and their families in which to grow and learn.

- Board enthusiasm for the [Equity and Access Advisory Council's goals and work plan](#). This is the first report the board has heard from this council, established in fall of 2009 to support learning for each student and ensure a welcoming atmosphere for all. Council members include community members, parents, staff, students and several former members of the superintendent's diversity task force.
- Board members' work to add student representation to their numbers. The concept was born out of the board's summer 2010 workshop. This weekend the board and I will travel to Olympia with ASB leaders from each of our high schools where they will meet with legislators and Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) members for the annual legislative conference. In addition to working with board members to craft an outline for student representation to Everett's school board, students will be interacting with legislators as a clear demonstration of the power

and excellence of the education in our schools. A report about student representation on school boards and articles about that topic are available with other Feb. 22 board agenda items on [BoardDocs](#).

- Details of the district's six-year draft technology action plan. Funding from the February 2010 *Building Repair and Technology Levy* will become available this spring. For two years, a team of staff has been laying the groundwork and plan for a new Student Information System (SIS) and Learning Management System (LMS) that will merge with the rollout of system and equipment upgrades and the supportive professional development to maintain technology as a key tool for teaching and learning and accessing student learning data. To see how the technology action plan will impact you and when, [read the plan online](#). This public review of the plan gives the board members a month to study the details before considering it for approval a month later at the March 22 school board meeting.

These district strategic policy priorities were the “meat” of Tuesday's school board work, but not the topic of headlines or Facebook comments. All of these topics, discussions and decisions arising from them are extremely important to students, parents, staff, citizen taxpayers, businesses and our community and are clear evidence of the board's commitment to open process and transparent governance.

I have urged you in the past, and do so again today, to use [BoardDocs](#) to see the upcoming school board decisions and discussions and those that are completed. School board work matters in all that we do and aspire to do on behalf of students.

Below is a preview list of meeting agendas and topics since the first of the year. You will find details and background material on [BoardDocs](#).

- Jan. 11, 2011
 - Recognition of the class of 2010 National Board Certified Teachers
 - *School Improvement Plan* strategic progress monitoring
 - First quarter financial report
 - School board's self-evaluation instrument approval
 - 1.5 hour work study session on strategic planning
 - 1 hour work study session about educational service center consolidation
- Jan. 18, 2011
 - Executive session to evaluate the superintendent
- Jan. 25, 2011
 - AYP and School Step Improvement plan implementation
 - Progress update on the board's 2010-11 work plan
 - Review of performance of board president and board member
 - Approval of Energy Operational Cost Savings Improvement Grant
 - First reading of Conflict of Interest Policy
- Feb. 1, 2011
 - Special meeting on strategic plan development

- Approval of city of Everett's efforts to expand opportunities for higher education
- Feb. 8, 2011
 - Financial reports as of Dec. 31, 2010
 - Adjustments to 2010-11 all day kindergarten, 2011 summer school and 2011 preschool tuition and fees
 - Approval of contract with Little Red Schoolhouse to provide early intervention services for children from birth to age three

To see the agendas and minutes for meetings since the beginning of this school year, go to [BoardDocs](#).

Why write about this?

I share all this because I believe it is important to know that while different opinions and approaches are to be expected among elected officials, **our school board** spends the vast majority of its time doing work that is vital to our efforts and the success of students today and tomorrow. We owe them not only our respect for their positions as elected officials, but our genuine gratitude for the intensity and commitment they have for their work. We also owe them thanks for conducting their disagreements publicly, as required by law, no matter how painful it is.

At the heart of every effective educator is an understanding of praise as a motivator. Your school board supports your work and praises your achievements at each meeting. Please join me in thanking them for the work they do and for their gracious response to those who question their motivations or commitments.

Gary