**Amigos de Birchwood PTO
Board Meeting Minutes: 1/26/2023 (Elizabeth Station)**

**In attendance:** Jami Pitman, Nicole Talley, Jessie Gallagher, Katie Luerkens, Erica Schupbach, Kate Kershner, Becca Fleming, Hanna Hulbert, Kaycee Pang, Cherish Flint, Elizabeth Montoya, Emily Hagerty

1) 5:30-6:20: **Welcome**

2) 5:40-5:55: **Family Liaison, Jami Pittman**

Family Liaison Jami Pitman and the Family Resource Center (FRC) team connect students/families with school/community resources to advance equity and support the needs of the whole child. Jami serves all students/families including those who are multi-lingual, experiencing homelessness, in foster care, and experiencing hardship across many schools in the district including Birchwood, Geneva, Silver Beach, Shuksan, Whatcom, and Bellingham High School.

Jami emphasized the holistic approach of her team’s work, where students are connected to school staff, and school staff connect parents to school and community resources. She emphasized the important role community partners play in supporting students/families. Some partners include Blue Skies for Children, Lydia Place, Interfaith Coalition, Opportunity Council, YMCA, Habitat for Humanity, Assistance League of Bellingham, DSHS, food banks, Salvation Army, City of Bellingham, Community Toy Store, BP Cherry Point, and “Shop with the Cop.”

Resources provided through this approach include housing, food, clothing, transportation, employment, childcare, legal advice, holiday resources, assistance with enrollments/forms, translation/interpretation services, parent education, computer classes/laptops/low-cost home internet, beds/bedding/ furniture, and home visits.

Bellingham Public School’s FRC is supported by the nonprofit group Friends of the Family Resource Center, FriendsoftheFRC@gmail.com. 100% of donations made to this group go toward supporting families. They supply hygiene products (toilet paper, laundry soap, diapers, personal hygiene products, etc.) for the FRC as well as additional supports.

Parents have the right to receive educational information for their children in the language they know best. Family Liaison and FRC coordinate interpretation and translation services. Birchwood has 98 multilingual students representing 9 different languages including Dari, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Spanish, Russian, Filipino, English, and more.

Jami ensures eligible students under her care have full support and protection under McKinney-Vento.

McKinney-Vento is a federal law to protect and support children experiencing homeless. Homelessness is defined as anyone who lacks a fixed and adequate night-time residence. Is it fixed? Do they have heat, water, power? Is it safe? Trailer/motor home/vehicle, hotel/motel, temporary housing/shelter are some of the living arrangements that may not be considered fixed and/or adequate.

Jami’s job is to get students enrolled in school as soon as possible even if they don’t have proof of address, immunizations, birth certificates, etc. She helps reduce barriers to school success by getting them school clothes/shoes and a bed to sleep in.

McKinney-Vento ensures students have the right to remain at any school they became homeless at, as switching schools results in a loss of 6 months of education. 4 moves per year = 2 years of education loss. Under McKinney-Vento, transportation to the school they became homeless at is provided for the child.

McKinney-Vento also ensures students and guardians in the foster care system are offered the same school stability and approach, supported through trauma-informed care.

**Startling statistics on student homelessness:**

* Birchwood currently has 33 students who are experiencing homelessness, making it the highest percentage of homelessness of any school in the district.
* Cordata, Squalicum, and Birchwood are top 3 in the district for the number of students experiencing homelessness.
* Last school year ended with 479 students experiencing homelessness in the district; right now that number of students is 555, and it’s expected to climb to 700 by the end of the school year.
* This continued increase is in part due to important funding being lost by local nonprofits who are currently helping to house many families in the district.

**How can Amigos and FRC join forces?**

* Share scholarship information with families
* Reach out to Jami and the FRC for all PTO events
* Coordinate FRC resource drives & food pantries (kids are so happy to help with the drive and deliver the goods to the FRC)
* Family Liaison will connect with PTO to see if we need to share info regarding situations/events
* FRC can help translate PTO documents with 1 week+ notice
* Help FRC find a faith partner
* Support Jami to host a summer BBQ at Eliza Court
* Consider doing a financial drive for the FRC, but understand FRC can’t advertise; organization of a financial drive would have to come through Amigos.
* If you know of any families living with grandma and auntie, tell them to come talk to Jami and give them one of her cards. A lot of people are embarrassed to ask for help. Sometimes out of fear of legal trouble.

Comments from board:

“We have a shared mission of connecting families to the school and build community at Birchwood.”

Suggested verbiage for FRC drive(s): “If you’re looking a great opportunity to donate, this fund is losing a lot of money.”

3) 6:20-6:45: **Updates from Birchwood’s Principal, Nicole Talley**

Good to be back, complicated right now at Birchwood and across the district/nation. At Birchwood, we had pockets of trauma pre-covid, but now we have collective trauma, adults/kids together, which is a much more challenging situation. We ask for your support and grace. Students would greatly benefit from having more adult volunteers in the building. If you’re hearing things, please come talk to Nicole. If parents have concerns, please send them to Nicole. Safety is the school’s #1 priority. Staff is working hard to stabilize the students.

Question from board: How much do you have to triage for safety vs. go to the next level of priorities?

Answer: Stability was forming before Christmas, but students came back from break with significant challenges, and when you add in different things like staff changes, that adds to the complexity. We have a district-level support and team that comes in and observes/supports the classroom and behaviors.

We can’t just send kids away who are experiencing behavioral challenges. These are complex issues and answers that we can discuss in more detail at a future meeting.

Question from board: We heard about a shift in policy with developmental preschool this year, can you confirm?

Answer: The goal was to integrate our developmental preschool students into Promise K classrooms, so class size, class needs, and adult ratios are all very different than prior years, and it’s put strain on the system.

Birchwood is working really hard to stabilize the foundation:

* Staff is going through Sound Discipline training: a trauma-informed approach to providing supports and structures for students. Sound Discipline training teaches coping skills and what to do when your lid is flipped, including the zones of regulation.
* Katherin Chapman is a new staff member working 9:30-6:30 every day at Birchwood and coordinating after-school activities. She’s a teacher, so she can help put in intervention plans for students. Grant funding allows her full-time employment at Birchwood for 2 years. She can do anything the school needs for her to do. In addition to afterschool activities and intervention plans, she co-teaches kindergarten music. She’s another adult that never changes, which is so essential for students.
* Bridges is a behavioral program funded by the district, with the goal of providing every school with the tools, strategies and staff to support student needs, but we haven’t reached the goal yet. If we have 1 student that transfers in with trauma or significant struggles, it will take 3 months+ to settle in, and impacts the whole. Progress is being made, but we have more to make.

This is a particularly hard time on teachers due to grades being due. We’re coming out of COVID and teachers are expected to score kids on a scale of 4,3,2,1: 3 is at standard grade level; 2 is 1 year behind grade level; 1 is 2 years behind grade level or not making progress. It’s so hard for teachers to apply this grading scale at a time when so many students are significantly behind due to the pandemic. Send your teachers loving thoughts and offer support how you can.

Question from board: Push and pull between being an advocate for my kid and worrying my question will be a burden. I don’t want to add stress to teachers.

Answer: Always advocate for your kid, that’s not a burden for teachers.

Question from board: What is school counselor’s role in intervening with all these challenges going on, including with students who are experiencing the effect of other students? Can we have 5 of her?

Answer: There isn’t an adequate description of her role because her job is everything: she’s done amazing lessons with classes about the trauma response, breathing, mindfulness, and conflict resolution. She works with individuals and small groups in addition to whole classes. She does it all. It’s important to be aware of how introverted students might be experiencing collective or individual trauma, since they don’t always outwardly express their struggle.

This year feels like tipping point, like the challenge impacts and involves all of us.

It’s the tech that kids have been exposed to and entertained by for 2 years. If we could backtrack on the tech piece we could get our kids brains in a better place. Don’t give your kids phones if you can help it.

Volunteer come in and volunteer, another loving adult in the building we need that.

Feedback from board:

* Putting out a FAQ that addresses issues mentioned above
* Put out request for volunteers: more impactful when it comes directly from teachers
* Messaging: “This is hard for everybody and we can do hard things together”
* Encourage concerned parents to talk to Nicole about their concerns
* Provide a Positive Parenting takeaways 1-page sheet with resources on how parents can support their child’s learning and how parents can get support if they need it
* Next Amigos board meeting (and ideally sooner) generate ideas on getting parents into classrooms and increasing communication

4) 6:45-6:55: **Task Force updates (Cherish to send in Email)
Point was to come up with a simple and fair framework for maximizing the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of board operations**. Here was the Task Force meeting agenda and brief takeaways.

1. Task Force Intro (5 minutes): **The need**:
With the natural fluctuation of parents as their children graduate from Birchwood, creating stability in the structure of Amigos will ensure continuity of operations and the fulfilment of Amigo’s mission despite this natural changeover of leadership. Structure can be neither too rigid nor too loosely-defined, and roles should be adaptable with the changing needs of the school and the Amigos organization. Greater clarity on board member/volunteer expectations, term-limits, and other democratic practices will allow board members/volunteers to commit more readily and operations to run more equitably and efficiently. Defining roles in advance will better match skill sets/preferences to particular individuals, strengthening the organization as a whole and ideally, preventing burnout of core members.
2. Ideal Board Size for a Nonprofit - research findings and discussion (10 minutes): Research indicates a non-profit board size of 6-10 members is idea.
3. Voting basics - research findings and discussion (15 minutes): Research indicates a simple majority is the most common approach to voting, with a minimum of 5 members needed for a “quorum” (voting minimum). It is suggested that chair/co-chair does not vote except in the case of a tie. Chair/co-chairs set agenda for board’s review, schedule and facilitate meetings, and carryout leadership operations.
4. Board member roles - discussion (15 minutes): We weren’t able to dive into the specifics of member roles at the meeting. Katie and Cherish got together to briefly discuss roles. Though not exhaustive, the list includes the following tasks and roles, many which may overlap: organizing all-school Amigos meetings, onboarding new families, maintaining website, maintaining volunteer list, sending Parent Square updates, creating print flyers, making signs and other collateral for events, coordinating drives/activites in conjunction with FRC, role of secretary (typing meeting notes/assisting co-chairs with arranging meetings), role of treasurer (tracking expenses/budgets/liaison with Bellingham Public Schools Foundation), role of digital marketing coordinator (including updating Amigos FB page), and planning committee leads for the following events: Welcome Back BBQ, Kinder T-shirts, Spirit Wear campaign, Gingerbread Night, Heritage Night, Birchwood Boogie, Staff Appreciation, Birchwood Bash, Book Fair, Yearbook, Clothing Exchange (if board votes to incorporate this annually or 2x/year in the future).
5. Board member elections & term limits - discussion (15 minutes): Discussed whether to hold elections in the spring or fall. General consensus for spring voting so any necessary planning can begin before fall with those involved. Research indicates term limits of 1-3 years is ideal for a non-profit for stability. It is not recommended to have complete member turnover by voting for all positions in the same year, and it’s suggested that key roles serve longer terms.  Another suggestion was to tie each member to a non-member on a planning committee to scaffold learning for potential future members, in a mentorship or buddy system model.

Takeaways:

Co-chairs propose part 2 of the Task Force meeting takes place:

Thursday, March 23rd for 1.5 hours from 5:30 – 7pm at Elizabeth Station.

·      Meanwhile, members to reflect on their ideal role/involvement in the board, whether that be an official member who also commits to one planning committee, or a non-member who is involved on a planning committee and possibly other role(s), or something else.

·       Tentative plan will be to hold elections in the spring so fall planning can begin. Election process to be decided at part 2 of Task Force meeting.

6:55-7:05: **Gingerbread debrief**(amount spent, turnout, lessons learned/takeaways)

* Spent $600, more than last time, lots left over to use next year including hot cocoa and apple cider.
* Kids did not get their own candy in baggies seemed to work well (thought we’d get a lot of complaints).
* Liked the volunteer table at the front even if only 1 person signed up on the form
* We didn’t have enough people for setup.
* 75% of setup time was getting tables where we needed them. That’s something that can be easily fixed by teachers labeling 1 table from their room and fifth graders carry them into the main hallway (Note: suggestion to pull more tables from classrooms closer to event area for easier return at the end of the night (less hauling distance / less coordinating across multiple classrooms).
* Never plan for having tables or chairs in gym: it damages the floors.

7:05-7:15: **Clothing exchange debrief**(turnout, lessons learned, takeaways)

Hugely successful. Only had 1/3 of clothing left. 50 jackets originally with only 2 leftover.

Becca thinks we should do it twice a year, join it together with Gingerbread Night and maybe again in spring during changing of seasons.

Difficulty donating unused clothes due to event timing (thrift stores were only taking new clothes).

When we pack them, put them into plastic bags instead of boxes.

Question from board: Don’t some schools have a clothes pantry?

Answer: Yes. Sherry, school nurse, got first dibs before exchange and got to choose clothing items for pantry.

Before Thanksgiving would be ideal, but holding it in conjunction with another event is key for turnout.

Next time: ask for more volunteers to take unwanted clothes to donate.

7:15-7:25: **Upcoming events**

Heritage Night: Plan, needs, next steps, comments:

Kaycee: Good to hear what’s happening in the school, we don’t want to overwhelm teachers but so good for kids and our whole community to celebrate the diversity of our school. Rodolfo is going to be the school partner. In the past, they had the school organized for people to go around the globe with a passport that you stamped (decorations, costume, music, posters). Keeping it localized to one part of the school is wise (food’s always a big part of it – around the world with diff food), bring food from homeland with different family recipe, great grandma’s recipe when living in Guatemala, we could do food based or something more, 1-2 more people to plan the details out of the event. We have our list and Celeste and Elizabeth, spoke to Rodolfo, etc.

Elizabeth: loved the idea of integrating with school based project, she has friend who she cotaught a poetry class with at Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center and they did a “Where I’m From” activity (akin to Mad Libs) where students describe who they are through different experiences, really powerful. Kids could perform that in cafeteria. Liked the passport idea but it’s more powerful when kids have the opportunity to share about their experiences and histories.

Katie: Recommended approaching it as a 4th grade project so it’s not the same experience for all students every year, and less on teachers.

Kaycee: 4th grade are developmentally ready for reports, histories, etc. Mr. Burns did a unit that was displayed in the library, the catering is a nice easy way to bring in families.

Katie: We have an OSSI grant because of the diversity of ours school for family engagement, we could cater event, but we will wait until after leadership meeting when staff decides how involved school wants to be. If we need to push Heritage Night out further we could but we need to be mindful of how many emails and requests volunteers are getting to avoid conflict with the Boogie.

Question: If we get the date set for March 9, should we get the volunteer list out soon?

Answer: Let’s confirm date after leadership meeting and define scope of project / volunteer needs before reach out to volunteers.

Doing Clothing Exchange on Heritage Night: Enthusiasm for this approach due to changing of seasons. If we did Clothing Exchange with Heritage, Becca won’t be there, ask Joelene and/or Maeg if they help run it the night of the event.

Birchwood Boogie:  Plan, needs, next steps, comments:

Katie: 1 meeting is all that’s needed prior to Boogie, all supplies are bought and ready, the meeting will be a couple hours, and then everything is ready except for the day of.

7:25: **Surplus budget:** Will discuss at the next meeting

7:25: **1/9 staff meeting overview:** Will discuss at the next meeting

7:30: **Establish next all-board meeting date and sketch agenda:** Proposed Thursday, May 18th or Tuesday May 23rd so we can combine a Boogie recap, know our fundraising for the year and vote on next year’s budget.Proposedmeetingagendato come closer to the meeting. Input welcome.

 Katie: Spoke with Nicole and they’re not going to come close to spending that $5,500 budget, we’ll have a surplus there and for the Boogie,we will discuss surplus at the next meeting.

Vote request from Katie: Can we add a total of $200 to the teacher stipend budget to add 2 more staff members to the recipient list who weren’t on it originally? This brings the teacher stipend budget item from $3,000 to $3,200.

Result: Majority voted yes.