

BOARD BRIEFING..... January 30, 2009

Yakima Public Schools District Number 7

Board of Directors

The Board of Directors of the Yakima Public Schools met January 30, 2009, at Whitney Elementary, opening with the Pledge of Allegiance. A brief summary of the meeting follows.

Whitney Elementary School Presentation – Principal Jean Hawkins expressed high regard for Whitney staff and the hours they spend to assure Whitney students are in good hands. Highlights at Whitney and its magnet program, ‘Character Counts,’ include fine and visual arts, integrated arts and technology, family involvement and an emphasis on language development and social-emotional competence. These were featured for the board through staff and student presentations. Students performed an excerpt from their 5th grade historical drama; 1st graders sang and performed on xylophones and bells; and 2nd through 5th graders read their compositions, demonstrating both reading and writing skills. Students in the American Sign Language (ASL) Club demonstrated signing. Highlights of Whitney’s P-5 Deaf-Education programs include a preschool that began this fall, the Reading Buddy program and parent nights. Updates in technology provide for interactive programs. Teacher Jean Love and her 1st grade students demonstrated how they use a mimeo board for lessons, allowing the class to go quickly from one reading strategy to the next. Woven Word curriculum is used for the kindergarten magnet ‘Character Counts’ and with Second Step, a K-5 violence-prevention program. Pam Merillat, parent booster chairperson, emphasized that kids benefit when parents are involved; this focus has resulted in a significant increase in parent participation the last two years. The group encourages parents to be involved based on their interests and availability. Closing comments from the board acknowledged students for coming to the early morning meeting to share with the board, parents for showing pride in their children, and Whitney for their innovation and the impressive integration of technology. Staff and parents were credited for working to meet the needs of the whole child.

Middle School/High School Transition Requirements – Jack Irion, Deputy Superintendent, reported that 8th grade students whose academic performance has been poor do not improve the last half of the school year. He has met with 123 students so far this year, many with little hope for earning a high school diploma. A promotion policy proposal with specific requirements to determine placement for students transitioning out of 8th grade was outlined. Dr. Irion will be meeting with high school and middle school staff soon, and students will be notified in time to rise to the bar that is set.

Discussion – Superintendent Search Update – President Ybarra provided an update on the superintendent search. The advisory committee will be identified today, preliminary visits will be held February 11 and 12. District visits for the three candidates for final consideration are planned for February 19, 24 and 25.

Approved - Slate of Superintendent Search Advisory Committee Invitees – President Ybarra reported she and John Vornbrock initially reviewed applications and all board members had opportunity for review and input. Thirty people were recommended for the committee and will be invited for an optional orientation meeting to be held February 5. It was emphasized that anyone can attend the open sessions on February 11 and 12.

Issues of Board Interest – In response to Superintendent Soria’s request, it was agreed to meet for a Friday board meeting on February 6 to discuss facilities. High school principals and their administrative teams will be asked to share input about their facilities.