



## Study Session Meeting Minutes

Central Administration Building  
601 South 8th Street – Tacoma, WA  
4th Floor Auditorium  
Thursday, October 19, 2023 06:00 PM

### Part 1.0. CALL TO ORDER

The Board met for a Study Session on Thursday, October 19, 2023 in the fourth floor auditorium of the Central Administration Building located at 601 South 8th Street in Tacoma, Washington.

Directors Bonbright, Keating, McElroy, and Strozier were in attendance. Director Leon was absent-excused.

### Part 2.0. FLAG SALUTE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### Part 3.0. LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

A statement to honor and acknowledge that we are on the traditional, ancestral, and historical lands of the Puyallup Tribe of Indians was read.

### Part 4.0. STUDY SESSION ITEMS

#### 4.1 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA PREVIEW

Superintendent Garcia shared background information on how the district prepares for the Washington State Legislative Session, identifying key issues we will focus on to help our students and community continue to thrive. He introduced Charles Brown, president and founding partner of Cascade Government Affairs, who helps us both during the session and outside the session to communicate to stakeholders why these issues are important to us as a school district.

**Critical issues** are things that are more specific to Tacoma School District. Our proposed critical issues this year are:

#### *Maritime Skills Center*

- Receiving the OSPI letter for the designation of this Core Skills Center is a huge deal, as they haven't issued one in over a decade. We asked for \$12M last year but were given only \$8M. We will be seeking the still-needed \$4M this year. Our Pierce County legislators are all on-board and have signed a letter of support for this issue.

#### *Prototypical School Model Funding Update*

- The legislature's funding model formula has not kept up with the actual requirements school districts need to run the basic educational programs. There are state-level efforts to look at classified and para-educator funding levels.

#### *Learning Services Support for the Whole Child*

- They want to continue expanding learning opportunities before and after the school day, which are especially needed for students who are from underserved communities. This also benefits students state-wide.

#### *Sustainable Energy Assistance for Buildings and School Buses*

- This is a top-of-mind issue in both the legislature and for the public to increase the energy efficiency of buildings and to lower our carbon emissions through things like electric school busses. Currently school districts operate bus fleets that primarily run by diesel fuel.

**Issues of High Concern** (affecting many Washington State school districts) include:

#### *Pupil Transportation*

- The student transportation funding formula doesn't cover the full cost for student transportation services, causing districts to use their local levy funding to cover these additional costs.

#### *Regionalization Funding Reform*

- Affects Pierce County more uniquely than other areas within the state as the formula is established around school district boundaries in urban areas which leads to inequitable funding levels among districts in the same metropolitan areas, especially in the South Sound.

#### *Board Member Compensation*

- School Board directors across the state receive a small per diem stipend for their work on behalf of districts, but they are being asked to run more complex educational systems which require more time. The State Department of Commerce recently conducted a study, surveying board directors across the state, on what would be more equitable. The study also acknowledged the difference between the basic board member roles and the additional three elected positions within a school board: President, Vice President, and Legislative Representative, which require even more duties of the person in each position. The issue is further complicated as the amount of work required varies from district to district, often based on district size.

#### *Employee Benefits*

- The state currently doesn't fully fund the incremental costs of benefits, meaning school districts must cover the gap using local levy funding, even though it's a state mandate. They're asking the state to cover the full cost.

#### *Community Partners Support*

- We've reached out to our community partners such as City of Tacoma, Pierce County, Metro Parks, etc. to see where there is overlap that can be built upon. JMAC (Joint Municipal Action Committee) is a powerful committee that benefits all. The City of Tacoma is still operating under a levy lid that was adopted years ago, but the rates of inflation under that lid are leading to challenges.

These last two issues are closely related:

#### *Simple Majority for Construction Bonds*

- In the wake of the State's Supreme Court's decision against the Wahkiakum School District, the requirement for a 60% supermajority to pass school construction bond votes puts districts in jeopardy of being unable to adequately provide updated and safe instructional space for students. School districts are asking for a constitutional amendment to allow a simple majority vote or even a 55% vote to pass school construction bonds.

#### *School Construction Formula Modifications*

- Again, the Wahkiakum SD decision from the State Supreme Court highlighted the need for additional state funding to more adequately reflect the true costs of school construction. There have been no meaningful increases in the funding formula since 2005, despite dramatic increases in construction costs. Districts will advocate for increased school construction funding for both the area-cost allowance the square-foot-per-student allocation.

Board members and staff remarked on many of the issues discussed, noting how many are complicated and are not unique to Tacoma Public Schools but are shared among other districts both within our area and across the state. Support and appreciation for our local legislators was also expressed, as they remain laser-focused on these issues.

Board members were asked to send any additional thoughts or requested revisions to Charlie Brown, Director Keating, and Superintendent Garcia by October 24th. The final legislative agenda will be voted upon at the October 26th Board business meeting.

## **4.2 TACOMA FLEX**

At the August Board retreat, Board Directors asked for a deeper dive into the Tacoma Flex program.

Adam Kulaas, Director of Innovative Learning and Career Tech Education (CTE) led the discussion and introduced the members of his team who attended: Tacoma Online Principal Shawn Martin and Assistant Principals Ruth Schlattmann (elementary) and Paul Eliot (secondary).

### **Our "Why"**

- Our students deserve it. We recognize that there is not a "one size fits all" for any single student, so everything

they design is personalized to each one. The more opportunities we can design, the greater the chance of success for each student.

- The Pandemic started us on this journey through necessity, but it showed us the possibilities.

**Tacoma FLEX** is an opportunity for students/families to make a choice to take an online class either in the morning or afternoon, whatever best fits their schedule and circumstance. It is really about student choice, offering more flexibility for work, sleep patterns, etcetera. They do not have to login at a specific time.

- The Flex Program launched Fall 2022 and was accessible to students in 9th through 12th grades. It allows students to take up to two courses (AM/PM), and there are a multitude of classes from which to choose, from required courses, electives, and even CTE courses.
- In Fall 2023 it expanded to Middle schools, with a "yes, and" approach through controlled pilot programs
- We are authorized by the state to authorize courses outside the Tacoma area, although there are caps of how many students outside the district are allowed (
- It is powered by Tacoma Online and by our Tacoma teachers.
- Tacoma Online is going through the process with OSPI to become an accredited statewide provider.
- The numbers of students participating and the number of courses have more than doubled from its launch in Fall 2022 to Fall 2023, and the program only continues to grow.
- The differences between FLEX and Tacoma Online were discussed.

#### **What's Next**

- For 2024/2025, we're creating bridges to school districts within the South Sound to participate in the program through inter-district agreements.
- Expanding course offerings
- Student and Family voice are always a driving force: Listened to them and --- RELISTEN – use qualitative and quantitative data to monitor – see how things are working and what aren't to be able to refine the program.
- The level of customization that exists now versus 3 years ago is almost immeasurable! Tacoma Online staff are outstanding. Superintendent Garcia clarified that the Tacoma Online experience that students had during the pandemic and online learning are not the same as where we are now. We continue to unpack and figure out enhancements. *Forced* choice is also not the option for us. We want to continue to give families the choice for what works for them.
- We're constantly looking at what's next.

Board President Bonbright thanked Director Kulaas and his team for their work and for the conversation. Hearing these stories helps Board Directors reiterate why they signed up to do this work.

The Board asked for continued updates in Friday Reports.

#### **Part 5.0. ADJOURNMENT**

Board President Bonbright adjourned the meeting at 7:32PM.