**Reflections on Today: A Message from Superintendent Greg Baker**

02/21/2018

Dear Students, Staff and Families,

After monitoring [today’s events](http://bellinghamschools.org/news/students-plan-protest-wednesday-feb-21/), I’d like to share a few thoughts and reflections.

Over the last few hours and days I have heard and spoken to many people: students, staff, administrators, parents, guardians, grandparents and community members. All of them were passionate and had somewhat different perspectives. I heard from a grandfather who was scared for his grandchild and upset that the district would allow students to leave school. I explained to him the best I could that this was not a district-sponsored activity. We did not plan the event, and students did not ask for our permission. The students planned these actions on their own and communicated to us their intentions to honor the students whose lives were lost last week and to hold a “peaceful rally to demand an end to violence in schools.” These students met with the police, obtained permits from the city and coordinated the walk-out and protest, using social media to communicate with young people across our community.

I also heard from a parent who observed some of the planning and described how proud she was of our students. She wrote how she was struck “by how much of the Bellingham Promise was evident in their discussions, decision making, and actions” including, “leaders, collaborators, and team players…effective communicators…well-rounded community members engaged with the broader world.”

Some people have been concerned that we were too supportive of these students. I know in some places, school districts are threatening to punish/suspend any student that leaves school for such an event. As superintendent, I want our students to be in school. I want them to be safe, and I want them to follow the rules.  If there are more protests, I would sure like them to be outside of the school day as it’s very disruptive to students, staff and families. But I also believe there are moments in time when young people decide they’ve had enough with what society has to offer, and they want their voices to be heard. I believe this is one of those times. Societal change is often led by the youth in our country, and in a democracy, they too have a right to express their views.

We also want all our students to respect differing viewpoints. We don’t want students to act due to peer pressure. We want them to make good choices, treat others with respect and above all remain safe. These are life-long skills we want for our children. There is no easy solution to the violence in schools, and I find most of the disagreement is with the methods to reduce violence, not with the concept itself.

I want to express gratitude to each of you for giving grace and patience; engaging with us and each other; and above all else for prioritizing the well-being of our students. As I just shared with a concerned mother, we always strive to reflect and learn from our actions, and we will do just that with today’s events.  The Bellingham Promise calls out that “We, as a community, make a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children. We will empower every child to discover and develop a passion, contribute to their community, and achieve a fulfilling and productive life.”  That’s something we can hopefully all agree on. Thanks again to each of you for caring about our kids and working hard to develop our next generation of leaders.

Greg Baker

Superintendent