

## **LWV-Kitsap Bremerton/CK Unit Meeting Notes--Saturday, January 15, 2022**

Kitsap United Way Conference Room/Zoom

In Person: Maureen Cervinsky, Janice McLemore, Kathleen Cahall

Via Zoom: Bremerton School District Assistant Superintendent Iva Scott, Linda Museums, Raejean Bridges-Avalos, John Cervinsky, Pat Troxell, Amanda Rodgers, Connie Marchant, Debi Barner, Gail Sackman, Kathleen Gallagher, Robin Muir, Candy Rankin, NK unit members Pam Hamon & Susan Griggs

After we introduced ourselves to our guest, Iva Scott, she shared a bit of her personal and professional background. Born and raised in Croatia, she came to the U.S. for one year as a foreign exchange student. When war broke out in Yugoslavia, she ended up staying here, went through some rough times, entered college and graduated with a major in Science/Cell Physiology. While working in a zoo, primarily with marine mammals, she found she greatly enjoyed interacting with young kids. That led her to go back to school to pursue a career in education. Her first job was student teaching at SKHS, followed by teaching science at John Sedgwick Junior High. She has been assistant principal at Bremerton High School, middle school principal in the Peninsula School District, principal overseas in Thailand, returning to Kitsap and CKSD Fairview Middle School, and now is back with Bremerton School District, where her heart is. She is Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Iva spoke about the importance of neural education in understanding the way the brains of Generation Z children and adolescents are wired. Kieran O'Mahony, PhD, is founder of the Institute for Connecting Neuroscience with Teaching and Learning, a Seattle-based nonprofit that provides professional development for K-12 teachers. He says this generation of students are fast processors, tech-enabled, digital natives and anything but binary. They can think easily in 3- and 4-dimensional space, and find it hard to zone down to 2-dimensional frameworks as in a school setting, which is very structured. Their brains are simply wired differently--and for them, **boredom is the same as high stress.**

Iva said schools are serving kids who are hurting, referencing a recent declaration by the American Academy of Pediatrics and other experts that the "shocking" rise in families seeking urgent mental health for their children amid the COVID-19 pandemic is a "national emergency". Even before the pandemic, mental health challenges in our country were the leading cause of disability and poor life outcomes in children ages 3 to 17, with up to 1 in 5 having a reported mental, emotional, developmental, or behavior disorder. Early estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics suggest there were tragically more than 6,600 deaths by suicide among the 10-24 age group in 2020.

The Washington State COVID-19 Student Survey was an anonymous online survey administered to students at 330 participating schools in 6th through 12th grades in March of 2021.

When asked, "During the past 12 months, have you felt depressed or sad MOST days, even if you felt OK sometimes?", 45% of middle schoolers responded yes, as did 58% of high schoolers.

In response to, "During the past 12 months, did you ever **seriously** consider attempting suicide?", 13% of middle schoolers said yes, and 17% of high schoolers said yes.

Asked "Are there adults you can turn to for help or support if needed?", 84% of middle schoolers responded yes, as did 82% of high schoolers.

Iva said this last statistic sounds hopeful; yet, the research shows that four caring adults are needed to impact kids who are struggling.

**\*\*\*Iva emphasized that if students do not feel safe, their prefrontal cortex is not accessible and learning cannot take place.\*\*\***

To help address all these issues, Bremerton School District has spent 4-5 years developing the **We Are Bremerton Model: Our Recipe for Success**, consisting of 5 components and 3 guiding principles:

**Environment:** BSD believes its students and staff thrive when they feel they are in a safe, supportive, consistent, and socially-just environment. Involves a shift from punishment and disciplinary practices to engagement with the student in a teaching and restorative mode.

**Relationships:** BSD believes its students and staff thrive when they feel a sense of belonging and connection to their school (applies to parents also)

**Learning:** BSD believes its students develop and grow when engaged in rigorous, relevant and responsive learning, using equitable practices, teaching critical skills. WICOR instructional strategies (Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration, Organization, Reading) of the AVID program (Advancement Via Individual Determination)

**Empowerment:** BSD believes its students and staff thrive when they are self-determined, develop a sense of purpose and hope for the future. Goal-setting, solving complex problems, peer collaboration.

**Support:** BSD believes its students and staff thrive when staff can meet student needs by providing access to timely evidence-based early interventions. They utilize a universal design for learning: MTSS (multi-tiered system of supports) & RSI (regular & substantive interaction)

**Three guiding principles represent the lens and mindset infused in all BSD educators do to promote outcomes for their students: Equity Being Trauma-Invested and Family Partnerships**

In April, 2021, Bill ESSB 5044 was passed by the Washington State legislature, adding cultural competency, diversity, equity and inclusion professional learning requirements to those previously existing. The We Are Bremerton Model meets the new criteria.

**The Model can be viewed at <https://www.bremertonschools.org/Page/8409>**

BSD has negotiated tangible steps in implementing the We Are Bremerton model in their collective bargaining agreements. In their school-based team structure, BSD provides stipends to staff members of an Environment & Relationships (ER) team and a Learning & Empowerment (LE) team.

The LE team supports the BSD professional community, setting high accountability and expectations, while offering high-quality experiences. Staff became trained system-wide 5 years ago in the AVID program, initially developed as a program for students furthest from educational justice, an elective to support identified students for specific supplemental instruction. Now AVID is part of the overall identity and culture of BSD, helping in the shift to a more equitable, student-centered approach. BSD uses SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based) system-wide on its Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP), adding inclusivity and equity to their goals, resulting in a new SMARTIE acronym.

The ER team works to ensure socially-just interventions, trying to eliminate exclusion as much as possible. Student, Family and School Liaison personnel collaborate with school interventionists and counselors to support students and families. For students who need to de-escalate, BSD provides green rooms, where staff with appropriate skills can provide help. Other spaces are available for kids who are in the upswing of escalation; trained staff use trauma-informed and restorative practices with those hurting students.

BSD Teach, an area of the BSD webpage accessible only to staff, provides a wealth of resources, with explicit ways to implement the We Are Bremerton Model. Highly interactive slides allow a wide choice of entry points. Iva gave the example of the Racial Equity and Justice slide, whose entry points can lead the user into choices of books, videos, research, collaborative possibilities. BSD's board members and staff have read together books on racial justice issues--one title: *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond.

Utilizing numerous measures, the Washington State School Report Card's purpose is to share information about K-12 schools, one of which is educator diversity, a statewide struggle.

In BSD's 2019-20 school year, the staff was 75% female, 88% white and 3% Hispanic/Latino.

For the 2020-21 school year, BSD students were 49% female, 48% white and 23% Hispanic/Latino.

**<https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us>**

BSD has tried to recruit black and brown educators, even from outside the state. In most cases, they didn't feel connected to the community, they missed their home and after one year, they were ready to go back. Young educators especially did not feel there was much to do here if they came from a more urban environment. Over the last three years, BSD has been designing a CTE (Career & Technical Education) pathway within their own system called Grow Your Own Educators. Students will receive instruction in the field of education, hopefully continue those studies at Olympic College and/or WA state universities, and come home to live and teach in Bremerton.

What does BSD look for in an educator? Someone whose values align with the We Are Bremerton Model. The process begins with a welcome, when they talk about mindset, supportive environment, being relational, developing connections with kids, acknowledging this work is challenging and hard. An interactive step follows, in which candidates engage together around the We Are Bremerton Model. BSD recruiters listen to the candidates' language and tone. Next comes a more traditional sit-down interview, and a community forum is the final step.

In response to questions submitted ahead of time concerning development and adoption of instructional materials, Iva said no books in their library system have been contested by BSD parents or community members. BSD is currently reviewing its Science and Math curricula, for which the process is clearly outlined in their written policy. Should a review result in a proposal to adopt new instructional materials, the team makes a recommendation to the school board, and the board votes to adopt or not adopt the new materials.

The BSD webpage updates frequently its COVID-19 Information links, including important updates from the Superintendent, Bus Schedules & Routes, Alternative Learning programs, COVID Dashboard with Test to Stay program info, Guidelines for Visitors.

**<https://www.bremertonschools.org/domain/2413>**

Iva shared that teachers' and administrators' days are not like they have ever been before. Teachers are subbing for other teachers who are out, going without any planning time. Iva has been subbing in classrooms most days every week, as have other administrators. She has acted as principal or assistant principal in various schools and has spent less time in her office at the district level than ever before.

In the best of times teaching may feel like climbing a mountain. Some routes are easier, and now the routes have become very difficult. BSD is trying to put a light on what matters this year. Which practices help students and staff and which do they need to leave behind?

Iva ended her presentation with this quote:

**"Hope and fear cannot occupy the same space. Invite one to stay."**

She clarified that hope here is not meaning what we wish for, but rather agency (goal-directed energy) and pathway (planning to meet goals) to it, with the needed level of support.

---

Maureen showed Iva a copy of *The State We're In: Washington*, a civics text written by the League of Women Voters of Washington. It is available in elementary school & middle school versions, both as an easy to read glossy-paged 8"x10" book, and also available digitally, together with a Teacher Guideline (the digital version & Guideline free on the OSPI website). Maureen said LWV-K would be willing to purchase classroom sets for the BSD civics teachers. She will see that Iva gets a copy so she can take a look and request more if she wishes. Iva said BSD has been using the Since Time Immemorial curriculum to teach issues of tribal sovereignty and she is certain additional information on state and local government would be welcomed by teachers, especially when it's available online.

Janice said her grandkids do tell her that school is really boring and asked how teachers deal with that? Iva said their We Are Bremerton Model was not developed in isolation. The district worked with Dr. Clayton Cook (Univ. of Minnesota) and other national experts. To implement the key ingredients of the Model, certain pre-conditions for adults in the system are needed. Not everyone believes that boredom is the result of kids' minds being wired differently. Diving into how the brain works and providing the why of students' behavior helps change the minds of teachers and staff.

BSD has begun introducing this shift slowly. Last year they invited all principals and K-12 staff to attend Kieran O'Mahony's one-week immersive Summer Institute course in evidence-based Neuroscience. This year principals who did not participate before attended the training.

Iva said we have to change what happens in the classroom, basically the way educators approach teaching the material. A traditional path could involve the teacher assigning a certain number of pages to read, telling the students to highlight important points and answer questions concerning the material. There is no cognitive engagement and Gen-Z kids might think, BORING! So how do you hook a kid (or adult) to want to learn more, to learn content that is grounded in standards? With neural education design, teachers learn to present knowledge-based content through a choice of multiple entry points, as with the Racial Equity and Justice slide on BSD Teach. How students present what

they know will vary from student to student--it could be a number of different approaches: a pencil and paper project, a slide deck, hands-on, collaborative with another student(s), audible, an art or music project. The learning standard is the anchor and the teacher invites access to different pathways to show proficiency in that subject area. Iva said younger educators are already different learners than she.

This sweeping change is definitely time consuming to implement. She spoke about Douglas Fisher & Nancy Frey, authors of professional development books for teachers. The Fisher & Frey model suggests that cognitive work should shift slowly and intentionally from teacher modeling, to joint responsibility between teachers and students, to self-directed practice by the learner. They offer new ways to engage the adolescent learner with focus lessons and guided instruction. Asked by Robin if students would assemble portfolios of their learning outcomes to be able to represent to others what they have learned, Iva said that would definitely be one way to do it.

Teachers are encouraged to think about asking students three core questions to help provide curiosity to learning:

- 1) What was surprising to you?
- 2) What did you already know, but now see differently?
- 3) What do you need help with or want to know more about?

Iva shared that BSD Freshman Language Arts teachers have asked if they could design a course that still meets essential learning standards, but does not use the regularly adopted curriculum. This new project-based learning course will be a model.

When asked if many other areas of the U.S. are implementing neural-based educational programs and if the U.S. is lagging behind other first world countries in applying this knowledge about the development of kids' brains, Iva spoke about the International Baccalaureate (IB), available at schools all over the world, including in the U.S. She said the IB Middle Years Program is well suited for kids to learn. In the Primary Years Program math is the only class taught in isolation. Literacy in most schools is taught outside the context of any other system, i.e., social studies/science. Critical thinking skills are not easily developed. Especially for kids who struggle to read at an early age, they lag content-wise when the reading material later becomes more complex.

In these particularly stressful times for students, staff and parents, Iva said schools want compassionate people. Kids are definitely hurting. Many of them act with defiance and use words and gestures that are hard to ignore--at the same time, Iva notes that what some kids consider respectful is not necessarily the same for adults. Our brains go to what is familiar and we can quickly climb the ladder of assumptions, not being aware that someone else might not be seeing things from the same lens as we. It may look like kids are seeking **attention**, when in fact they want and need **connection**. Those in the educational system are the only ones who see all the kids, and the responsibility for fostering kids' well-being seems to be even more now on the shoulders of teachers, counselors, administrators, bus drivers, and all who come in contact with students. It's essential to know how to pause, triage and regulate. If we disengage every kid who acts out, there won't be any kids left.

BSD partners with Kitsap Mental Health, Kitsap Strong and other community organizations. They also have a menu of services that can be given to parents, but cannot recommend any one of those resources in particular for families. Kitsap Strong is a collective impact organization, seeking to develop a resilient community and improve the health, well-being and educational attainment of Kitsap residents. Executive Director Kody Russell is a hope researcher/scientist. Kitsap Strong provides training to BSD around trauma-invested experiences and ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). Iva said the first study around ACEs was done by Kaiser Permanente in an affluent San Francisco community. Their research showed that ACEs had significant impact on later life and success. Additional studies have since shown that in less privileged communities, where ACEs can be many times more frequent, violence and loss of life are often prevalent. Iva stressed that equity is not independent of trauma.

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, pediatrician and California's Surgeon General, links ACEs and toxic stress with harmful effects to health later in life. Her TED talk and her book *The Deepest Well: Healing the Long-Term Effects of Childhood Trauma & Adversity* speak to their effect on brain development.

Iva shared an experience she had just a couple of days earlier when she was in a school building for the day and some boys were vaping in the restroom. When security was alerted, the boys ran away. She knew that vaping, smoking, using drugs are unhealthy ways of coping with stress. With a school social worker, she engaged in a restorative circle with them and learned a bit of their stories. Most were from very unstable homes or in foster care and most ended up being kicked out of school for two days. She said we can't afford to suspend kids because they are not going to safe, supportive homes.

When asked if enrollment had declined, Iva said somewhat, primarily at the K-1st grade level. The assumption is that families were apprehensive about sending their young children to school and felt reasonably comfortable doing home schooling at that grade level. At other grade levels enrollment has declined by about 10%. They've seen a threefold increase in their K-8 Home Link (Home Schooling) program based at Crown Hill, and more students have enrolled in the district-wide K-5 Virtual Learning Academy with BSD's own teachers.

Iva said their staff are capped out. Teachers have no time to prepare for their own classes. She said that the day before at Bremerton High School, they had about 320 students absent. That has been a trend: 300+ students absent each day, and not the same 300. In a school of 1000-1200 students, that's 1/4 of the student body absent on any given day. Assume one student in a teacher's class has to quarantine for 10 days, and then a different student for another 10 days...for teachers, that's a loss of two weeks of instruction. Iva said it's a daily discussion among BSD leaders about what to do, how to approach the current situation. She added it would most likely be staffing constraints rather than the number of COVID cases that would be the deciding factor in pivoting to remote learning.

Asked about ventilation in the schools, Iva said replacing HVAC systems is very expensive. Some suggested updates would bankrupt the district. What they have done is purchase filtration devices for each classroom, strengthen cleaning protocols, provide KN95 masks for all staff, provide free on-site testing for students and staff, test athletes 3x/week regardless of symptoms or vaccination status. Some teachers open windows in their classrooms. Along with teachers, custodial staff is reduced, as well as bus drivers.

Kathleen Cahall asked how community members can support their schools and wondered if there was an opportunity for involvement with Kitsap Strong. Iva responded by saying that while most kids involved with Kitsap Strong need more mental health support that goes beyond mentoring, still volunteers can be really helpful in just engaging with students, especially at the high school level. Students say: I just want you to hear me, I don't need advice. Current Bremerton School Board President Alyson Rotter is one of the team members at Kitsap Strong and would be a great contact.

Kathleen has been enjoying her volunteering as an AVID mentor to Bremerton High School students. She said the time commitment is small, maybe a couple of hours/month. A couple of mentors are linked up with a group of kids; and the more mentors there are, the smaller the groups of kids can be. Bremerton Rotary is the point of signup for this volunteer opportunity, no need to be a Rotarian.

We certainly extend a big thank you to Iva Scott, whose compassion for students and staff comes through very clearly. We very much appreciate her taking time to share all that Bremerton School District is doing to help provide the most effective learning possible in these stressful times. We truly learned a lot from her informative presentation and her thorough answers to all our questions. We join together in thanking her and all Bremerton School District teachers and staff for their dedication and their ability to keep adapting to new challenges. We applaud you!

---

## **OUR NEXT UNIT MEETING: SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 19 @ 10AM**

Raejean is working with Maureen and other unit members to update the two LWV-K pamphlets entitled *Know Your County* (2005) and *Know Your City: Bremerton* (2006). Maureen has downloaded them on the League's webpage. To access, click on Menu, then About Us, scroll down to the Bremerton CK Unit & click on the "Visit the Bremerton/Central Kitsap page for more information".

Submitted by Candy Rankin