

MINUTES

Sage Ridge Parent Association Minutes

Tuesday, November 12, 2019 in Sage Ridge Loft

The meeting was called to order at 8:12 am.

In attendance

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|----------------|-----------------|----------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Robin Soran | Pauline Klein | Cindy McKenzie | Gina Barth | Heather Power |
| Maggie Browder | Nicole Gangloff | Kim Aldrich | Joanne Romberg | Jenny Fellows |
| Tobin Bechtel | Jay Howard | Jill Strawder-Bubala | Tara McGann | Eric Eads |

NEW BUSINESS/UPDATES:

Minutes

- Motion made and seconded to approve October meeting minutes. Vote was taken. Minutes approved.

English Pathways [Dr Tara McGann]

- With the addition of a 3rd grade, a whole new layer was added to the English curriculum pathway. In grades 3-5, the classes are focused on building the skills needed for “Language Arts.” Lessons are concentrated around reading, writing, spelling, grammar, and an introduction to analytical skills.
- In 6th grade, the course is designed to drill down on determining various kinds of writing via “Literary Analysis.” As well, students are introduced to learning how to put together essays.
- Grades 7 - 8, students are introduced to World & American literatures, which are reinforced and spiraled in again during 10th & 11th grades. With each grade, there’s a passing of the baton to solidify skills and practice concepts. Freshmen Seminar in 9th grade compliments Ancient & Medieval literature.
- In 10th grade, there’s a break-out for students to take either a College Preparatory (CP) or Honors level English class. Both options fully prepare students for college, but the Honors class requires more reading and writing, a higher order of thinking skills, and students are held to a higher standard.
- 11th grade is where Advanced Placement (AP) English Language & Composition is offered. The focus is on American literature and Sage Ridge students are well prepared for the AP exam. They learn how to effectively compose their arguments for essays, analyze writing strategies, and apply rhetorical tools.
- Senior year, British literature drives their learning. They can pick either the CP or more challenging AP English Literature & Composition course. In this final year, they demonstrate all their English skills by preparing an extensive Senior Thesis research paper.
- Overall, students in the Upper School complete five units of English. They can competently hold conversations with intellectuals and understand how & why authors often reference historical events.
- Heather Power asked why the Middle School seems to have less emphasis on non-fiction literature.
 - Maggie Browder offered the students get to read non-fiction via newspaper articles and other primary and secondary sources.

- Dr McGann felt the Middle School students do handle very complex issues and obtain their non-fiction reading across all the disciplines, not just English. However, she'd take Heather's comments under advisement.

History Pathways [Mr Eric Eads]

- The Sage Ridge history classes follow Nevada state guidelines, though they aren't beholden to them and can adjust. Mr Eads wants to ensure students survey the entire world and not miss out on key parts of history.
- The emphasis is to integrate history across all the grades and for the students to effectively learn how to analyze, identify the cause and effects, determine the logical fallacies, and develop investigative skills. He also wants to incorporate an understanding of the social sciences within the discipline to include the following: geography, anthropology, and economics.
- Middle School focuses on Ancient World and US history, which are again spiraled back in at the Upper School levels to build a greater understanding.
- In 10th grade, the classes are differentiated between CP or AP. For the AP course, they don't teach to the test, but ensure students have the skills to successfully pass the exam. In 12th grade, the students all converge together again for the Senior Seminar class.
 - Pauline Klein explained the Senior Seminar is like 300 or 400 level college courses in which pupils lead the conversations and debate the issues.
- Heather Power asked for clarification between the Senior Thesis and Senior Seminar requirements.
 - Mr Eads clarified that Senior Thesis takes 2 days out of the 10-day Senior Seminar cycle to review how to prepare a research paper and complete assigned benchmarks. The current Senior Seminar was designed by Dr. von Nagy (former SRS History teacher) three years ago. Mr Eads is currently developing a new curriculum for Senior Seminar.
- Gina Barth and others requested more information on the three electives identified in the History curriculum pathway photocopy (US Politics & Government and Micro/Macro Economics). When will parents receive details on these classes?
 - Jill Strawder-Bubala said she's working on determining when these new classes will be offered. Science electives are offered every year, but the history electives aren't always available. Ideally, such classes should have at least five interested students.
 - Mr Eads reminded parents that students can always learn a subject via the Independent Studies option. There are some students currently taking German, Italian, and even sign language to meet their graduation requirements. The new Politics & Government class is more civics oriented and focuses on understanding the administrative practices of the US government, Supreme Court cases, role of media, etc. It's very different from the 11th grade US History course.
- Heather Power requested the school reconsider the summer reading of "The Alchemist" by Paulo Coelho. She felt the novel went completely over her son's head and wanted to know how often the teachers re-evaluate the summer reading books.
 - Mr Eads replied the teachers review materials every three years. The good news is "The Alchemist" will probably change. The 11th graders already had a change this past summer too. The concern is to not rotate too quickly as it would get very expensive for families.
 - Dr McGann chimed in the English and History departments have great collaboration and concentrate their focus on the "humanities." They mesh all the critical thinking skills together to understand the historical context in literature. The goal is to build up students' reading

stamina for college, especially if students decide to major in English or History; both of which are reading intensive and less power-point/textbook oriented.

- Heather Power asked if the school considers how to better incorporate “history” into the Outdoor Education program. Grades 7, 9, 10 are currently visiting sites with historical elements.
 - Mr Eads responded the Outdoor Ed program is more geared to develop leadership and team bonding; however, the school doesn’t want to ignore the history if it’s available. For example, Angel Island offers a unique look at history.
 - Mr Bechtel added he wants to add environmental and sustainability components to the Outdoor Ed program. He’ll take Heather’s comments under advisement, though requirements and/or locations can change suddenly due to unforeseen circumstances.

Head of School Updates [Mr Tobin Bechtel]

- Pardon our appearances as the school is changing out some of the furniture in the classrooms, the Loft, and other spaces. Various charities are coming by to pick up the older pieces, though scheduling was a challenge, The Brodsky family very generously donated the new furniture (\$300K worth) and it had to be delivered by 15 November.
- Mr Bechtel was pleased that parents completed 109 “pulse” surveys the other week. He now has 26 pages of open feedback comments to review. Dr Thomas Burnham, one of the SRS Board members, will do the analysis. After a quick initial look, Dr Burnham reported the school was in ‘good shape.’ Mr Bechtel was also happy with the 8.6 score that parents would recommend SRS to others.
 - Several parents commented the survey seemed shorter and it was difficult to evaluate the school if they had two or more students in various levels (For example, the Middle and Upper Schools are two very different experiences).
 - Mr Bechtel noted the pulse survey provided the exact same questions as last year. He suggested that for the next survey in the spring, parents of multiple students should submit multiple survey responses. The survey is short enough and shouldn’t take up too much time.
- The Impact Report (former “Annual” Report) will get mailed out this week. He’ll soon be signing many thank-you letters to parents and others in the greater Reno community.
 - Jay Howard added the goal for the Annual Fund is \$175K this year.
- The Capital Campaign is solidifying and Mr Bechtel is very excited about the progress being made.
 - Jay Howard noted more details will be revealed in the upcoming weeks.
- The newly launched Mindful SEAD program is progressing nicely and the faculty is getting a lot from it. More needs to be done to better integrate the material into the advisory program, so students can fully benefit from the program. Some of the advisors aren’t quite comfortable with how to promote the information among the students.
 - Heather Power expressed concern that some of the advisors still aren’t effective. Further, some of the teachers weren’t the right ones for the Outdoor Ed programs.
 - Mr Bechtel acknowledged her concerns and indicated he’s having discussions with Move Mountains to incorporate more of its staff into the Outdoor Ed program, but this will cost extra money. As for the advisors, many schools struggle with this issue. There’s plenty of discussions on how to strengthen such a program and develop a good baseline.
- Mr Bechtel recently attended the Fall Head of School Northwestern Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS) Conference. NWAIS acknowledged Sage Ridge School’s report submission. That’s good news for Sage Ridge’s accreditation process.

- A huge thank you to the Parents Association and all the volunteers who helped the grandparents & veterans during Gather. It was very successful, and the clean-up went quickly.
- Heather Power recognized Ms Strawder-Bubala with a big 'Kudo's" for cc'ing parents on the weekly Upper School Loft Notes. She commented it cut through much of the clutter and keeps parents better informed.
 - Ms. Strader-Bubala confirmed there aren't any Loft Notes for Middle School, but it's something to consider.

Student-Led Conference (SLC) Program Feedback [Robin Soran]

- Many of the Upper School parents didn't schedule a meeting. Communication with teachers is strong and the parents felt they could contact them easily if there was an issue. Upper School parents are more concerned about the spring SLC when courses/pathways need to be understood and reviewed with advisors.
 - Gina Barth suggested the school develop a "Portrait of a Graduate" template for Upper School students. This document would allow advisors to review, in a more holistic manner, all the tasks students are fulfilling to meet graduation requirements. Advisors should have visibility into the student's outside interests and understand how these activities impact their academic efforts.
 - Jenny Fellows suggested advisors develop a relationship with students over four years. As well, advisors might have a better understanding of students if he/she taught them in a class. Otherwise, she was very happy that her son's advisor, who created a positive environment during the SLC. She came out of the meeting knowing she had an "advocate" for the family.
 - As for the four-year proposal, Mr Bechtel countered that the chemistry between an advisor and a student might not always work. Such dynamics need to be taken into consideration.
 - Robin Soran wanted clarity on the 9th grade SLC format.
 - Ms. Strawder-Bubala discussed the fact the 9th grade SLC acts as a bridge between Middle and Upper School. Dr McGann revamped the old format. Now, 9th graders work on their reflections during Freshmen Seminar. The new format provides continuity and acts as a guide on what to do and say during the SLC.
- For the Middle School parents, there was a request not to focus on the negative but identify action steps forward in a positive manner. They want the SLC sessions to incorporate social aspects and not just academic learning concerns. The environment should be one of caring and reviewing the students' achievements and growth over the years.
 - Ms. Strawder-Bubala wholeheartedly agreed with the comments. The dynamics between the parents, advisors, and students are critical and if the conversation takes a different direction, then that was a good thing. Body language and other cues can provide the advisors with insight into the students' lives outside of school.
 - Heather Power expressed concern some of the questions posed to the 8th graders/parents weren't appropriate in the spring SLC.
 - Ms. Strawder-Bubala indicated such questions were going to be shifted to Ms. Charlotte Carpenter, the Director of Enrollment Management. Ms. Carpenter will contact the parents directly for further information.
- Representing a Lower School experience, Nicole Gangloff felt the SLCs for her 3rd & 5th graders were super positive, though her 5th grader found the reflection task quite challenging.

- Ms. Strawder-Bubala added that each of the Lower School SLCs are unique in nature. The 3rd graders write an essay on their strengths & weaknesses, 4th graders prepare presentations on their efforts, and 5th graders reflect on how the SRS Value Pillars apply to them.
- Mr Bechtel and Ms. Strawder-Bubala felt having the SLC's scheduled on Wednesdays isn't a great day of the week. The SLC timetable cuts into the staff/faculty dedicated training sessions. They're going to review the scheduling and may reduce the SLC timetable down to one day vs. two days.

2020 – 2021 Draft Calendar Review [Mr Tobin Bechtel]

- The draft calendar compares with the Washoe County School District calendar. And no, summers aren't getting shorter.
- He wants to stick with a Monday start date with staggered arrival times. There are many benefits to jumping right into the academic cycle and he received lots of positive feedback.
- Based on feedback, he recombined the Outdoor Education program into one week in September with a single day break afterwards to recover. The Fall Break and Thanksgiving break both reflect Washoe County's schedule. Of note - Thanksgiving wouldn't be a full week off. Winter break would start a few days earlier and the February break is to be reinstated. Spring break would be only one week as he's advocating for shorter breaks to keep academic learning moving forward. Even though the school hasn't evaluated shifting the Sage (or Mini) Sessions to the end of May, he'd like to keep them at the end of the school year.
- He's proposing the 12th grade graduation take place on a Friday vs. Saturday to allow for more of the student body to enjoy the ceremony. There may be pushback on this idea and the SRS Board members will have the final vote. The last week in the draft calendar, 7 June is reserved for reviewing final exams and getting closure/feedback. June 8 would be the final day and the Middle School Promotion.
 - Several parents appealed to him to return Thanksgiving to a full week off. They offered suggestions on how to recover the two days in other areas of the calendar. Mr Bechtel will take their suggestions into consideration.
- The Nevada state requirement is 180 days of learning. Due to Sage Ridge's extended hours, the school is closer to 185 days, so it doesn't have to worry about making up snow days.
- Gina Barth pitched for SRS to reduce the summer reading requirements, especially for the Upper School students. Summer vacation is short and Upper School students are trying to squeeze in family time, jobs, internships, and community service hours. They need a break from the intense academic schedules during the school year. She recommended one book vs. two.
- Maggie Browder voiced her appreciation to Mr Bechtel for considering the PA's input in the calendar review.
 - Mr Bechtel is happy to receive the feedback, though he warned there's sometimes knock-on effects which he needs to be mindful of. Not always can he accept the recommendations.

COMMITTEE OVERVIEWS/UPDATES:

Events [Maggie Browder]

- Gather was a great success and a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped on multiple days to bring it all together. At the end of the day, many students lent a hand and the events team was very appreciative of their assistance. The RSVP system worked beautifully and only three extra guests showed up who weren't on the RSVP lists. As well, a big thanks to the SRS faculty and staff, who helped make the space beautiful with all the artwork and signs.

- Ms. Strawder-Bubala noted there was some confusion among the grandparents about classroom numbers etc., despite the fact the program clearly listed all the locations.
- Maggie Browder confirmed the check-in team made sure to point out those facts, though the program was inside the welcome bag and guests might not have pulled it out to reference.
- There are a couple of events coming up before the Winter break. The 7th grade families will be surprising the staff & faculty with something special soon. As well, the 12th grade families will be providing the Holiday Luncheon for the staff/faculty on 20 Dec.
- Several parents provided feedback on Gather. While it was nice to combine events, some students grumbled there was too much downtime during the day. Mixed messages were coming home that students didn't have to attend school if they didn't have a grandparent or veteran guest(s).
 - Ms. Strawder-Bubala noted it was made very clear to students that they should attend school. She was most impressed with the seniors, who asked permission to go off-campus for lunch and returned promptly to serve pumpkin pie to the afternoon guests.
 - Mr Bechtel mulled over an idea to add a community service component for those children without guests. There's plenty of things that can be done on campus if they're bored.

Parent Education [Heather Power]

- The team finally got a date scheduled for "Like", the documentary film exploring the impact of social media. It will be held on 28 January 2020 at Renown Hospital's Mack Auditorium, 1155 Mill St, Reno (Enter Mill St. Entrance on the Ground Floor. ● Take the Tahoe Tower Elevators or stairs to the 1st Floor). On Jan 29, there will also be a screening at Sage Ridge too. The documentary is appropriate for students ages 10 and older.
 - Mr Bechtel asked if an additional evening could be scheduled at Sage Ridge.
 - Due to licensing issues/cost, Heather and Robin Soran decided not to add another showing.
- Mr Bechtel's book club session is tomorrow. Please join him even if you haven't read the book. Mr Bechtel found the book "pretty haunting, but it offered good advice."
 - Heather recommended Mr Bechtel push a message out to the entire school to remind the community of this opportunity.
 - Multiple parents confirmed that while the new Friday Notes format is very nice, it's cumbersome. One must click into multiple links to view all the details. Folks might now be skimming the headlines and not digging deeper for further information. Thus, an email reminder about book club.
 - Mr Bechtel said he'd provide this initial feedback to the Director of Communications.

Next meeting on December 10, 2019 in the Loft.

Meeting adjourned at 9:52 am.