

MINUTES

Sage Ridge Parent Association Minutes

Tuesday, December 10, 2019, the Loft

The meeting was called to order at 8:15 am.

In attendance

Robin Soran	Pauline Klein	Cindy McKenzie	Gina Barth	Heather Power
Katie Ditton	Nicole Gangloff	Kim Aldrich	Joanne Romberg	Jenny Fellows
Tobin Bechtel	Jay Howard	Jill Strawder-Bubala	Sallie Armstrong	Beth Schuler
Romina Brodsky	Constance Jukes	Lori Stanko	Carmel Briggs	Mike Schuler
Caroline Moassessi	Michelle Colton	Melissa Burns	Armina Karapetian	Megan Schuster
Kim Kolar	Marissa Garcia	Kim Lundeen	Susie Lewis	Stephany Apollon

NEW BUSINESS/UPDATES:

Minutes

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

D Period Program & Upper School Electives [Jill Strawder-Bubala]

- As you know, the school moved to an eight-period schedule this year, which rotates around a two weeks cycle with every class meeting seven times during the ten school days. Classes will get dropped on holidays to keep the schedule moving forward. The number of total minutes per subject is less than last year's schedule and teachers are adjusting to focus on the most important material. There's no "passing" time built into the schedule, but it all seems to be working out fine, and the kids quickly adjusted.
- Students provided feedback that the day seems slower and classes longer. They also must contend with an additional subject and feel like they have more homework.
- For the Lower/Middle School, the 8th period is "D" Period. Grades 3-5 use this time for enrichment and special projects. There's a lot of flexibility for each Lower School teacher to decide how to utilize the time. Grades 6-8 use their D period for a multitude of activities, from clubs to study hall. The Middle School teachers work with Jill to carve out time in the calendar for specific tasks such as organizational skill building, test review, etc. Key activities are rotated throughout the year. For example, Town Hall meetings take place every Tuesday and clubs meet every other week.
 - Kim Aldrich asked how the students know what to expect.
 - Jill - Middle School students can view items via a Natural Classroom calendar. The Lower School students primarily follow their teacher's lead.
- In the Upper School, Jill is very excited with the new "H" period. This class time is dedicated to a variety of electives the students can now take. For this year, the subjects weren't random and were based on student requests and teachers' expertise.

- Two levels of computer science are being offered as well as Physical Education (PE), Greek Language & Culture (student request), Speech/Debate Competition Prep, Engineering Design & Robotics, Media Arts, Advanced Theater, etc. The most popular is PE. Upper School students still want physical release during the school day. Jill is assisting with the Media Arts class and the students are learning about the differences between news/journalism vs. opinion writing.
 - Kim Kolar, Carmel Briggs, and Heather Power expressed concerns over the electives – more homework, grade impacts on GPA, differences in expectations, loss of 2nd study hall, and taking time away from core subjects. As well, Kim asked if the students can switch between electives in the 2nd semester.
 - Jill - The electives are flexible and enhance each student's learning and/or compliment their core subject interests. Some electives are a year-long commitment and students can't switch out. It was decided the Speech/Debate class would be Pass/Fail and all others are graded. It would be too difficult to come up with standardized grading for the debate students as their prep is individualized and changes each competition.
 - Susie Lewis shared that at Brown University, students can opt for their classes to be Pass/Fail. It takes the stress away. Fitness is an easy grade for most, but others are much more difficult to achieve good grades.
 - Sallie Armstrong wanted to make sure the electives remain inviting & rewarding for the students.
 - Jill added the whole class would have to agree to a Pass/Fail concept and electives couldn't be tailored on an individualized basis. She was happy to follow-up with parents on the subject.
- Two additional courses will be offered 2nd semester. Mr Eads will teach a US Govt & Politics class as well as kids will have the option to take a Chorale course. In the past, students have been interested in economics and politics, so the school is reviving this offering. Sage Ridge wants to build its Upper School music program and the goal is to offer an AP Music Theory class in the next two years.
- The Engineering Design & Robotics class is new and a "work in progress". Mr Kuehn, Mr Arnold, and Ms. Santangelo have been collaborating to develop the curriculum. Back at his old school in Cincinnati, Mr Arnold developed a "Go Baby Go" program, partnering with the local Children's Hospital to have students design motorized toy cars for disabled patients. He's diligently been coordinating to set up a similar program with Renown Hospital in Reno. A dedicated doctor recently identified a young girl who could use Sage Ridge's support. As well, SRS engineering students will participate in the Food Bank's next CANstruction project. The teachers are very excited about these initiatives.
 - Heather Power wanted to know if students could opt to take online (independent study) courses as electives, like Menlo School.
 - Jill – The staff/teachers discussed such opportunities last year, but the overall feeling is to proceed cautiously. The school doesn't want to replace the unique student-teacher relationship. Independent study can be challenging as the faculty does have limitations and must dedicate an incredible amount of time to independent study students.
 - Stephany Apollon expressed concern there is a lull in Lower/Middle School when it comes to coding and language in comparison to her children's previous school.
 - Jill - Mr Arnold is working to ensure the Middle School curriculum supports a more holistic "computer science education" and not just merely coding. He wants to integrate in more engineering and hands-on manipulatives to enhance the program.
 - Tobin Bechtel challenged parents to help the school find sponsors who can provide robust after-school programs to meet expectations. Faculty are being stretched thin and don't have to time in their schedules.
 - Beth Schuler indicated she gave Mr Crain some contact info back in September.

- Mr Bechtel will follow-up with him.

Parent Survey Results & Other Items [Sallie Armstrong/Tobin Bechtel]

- The SRS Board members will thoroughly review the survey results in January. Sallie Armstrong was thrilled to come to the PA meeting, and she appreciates the relationship between the Board & PA. She's committed to coming to two meetings per year, but she'd happily visit more often if invited.
- This is the 3rd survey since Mr Bechtel started at Sage Ridge. He hopes to keep them regular to see ongoing trends. He conducted a faculty/staff survey and wants to develop a student survey. However, a student survey would require an outside entity to administer it (for example, NWAIS), so nationwide trends could be compared.
- Dr Thomas Burnham, one of the Board members, reviewed the survey data and provided the staff with the anonymized results. All feedback is considered, weighed, and valued. Parents submitted 103 responses this fall vs 176 last time. Anything over 100 is statistically significant.
- The best marketing tool is word of mouth and the question about recommending Sage Ridge has consistently gone up to 8.86. The question on student experience is staying steady and Mr Bechtel was heartened to see the faculty-student relationship increased to 8.92. Quality of education was rated the highest and pushed into the 9 range. The Board determined during the previous survey the facilities question was NA (not applicable) as the school can only make small changes without significant investment capital. Parental involvement remains steady and Mr Bechtel appreciated a parent's comment, "If you want to be on autopilot, SRS isn't your school." This comment was prescient as Sage Ridge is all about community, participation, connection, and openness.
- Looking at the open comments, he clumped them by themes: 1) The curriculum and academics are challenging and holistic, 2) Teachers are excellent, caring, respected, and know their students, 3) The Pillars were more divisive as some felt the school doesn't always apply them, 4) The administration/staff do listen, though some are saddened the "family spirit" appears less as the school evolves.
- In terms of "constructive" comments: 1) The new schedule has created a greater homework load, 2) Teacher turnover creates instability, 3) Farm Fresh (lunch provider) had mixed results, 4) When conflict with administration arises, there's a concern over retaliation, 5) Educational value vs. cost, 6) There's a need for teachers to understand and be conscience of the fact that students do model them, 7) Inconsistent discipline standards, 8) Student body not big enough
 - The new schedule should optimize the homework load and teachers are working to balance the requirements. They do know how the kids are feeling and only want to give them the best.
 - Teachers have already received their letters of intention and the school has heard back from 50% of them have already responded. Over 85% of school's budget goes to pay for quality faculty which is comparatively high for the industry.
 - Mr Crain is effectively applying the "restorative justice" program. There are consequences for disciplinary issues and reminders about the rules are getting sent out in the Friday Notes.
 - For the Upper School, a key strategy is to maintain the numbers. Mr Bechtel and the Board want Sage Ridge to be a complete Grade 3 – 12 experience. It's a "hidden gem" in Reno and while there's continual tension to grow it, Mr Bechtel wants to maintain its unique community spirit. Sallie Armstrong added the school's strategic planning process is underway and will focus on how to retain students transitioning from 8th to 9th grade.
 - Heather Power remarked that decisions are being made in 6th & 7th grade.
 - Mr Bechtel loved the request to develop more Dad oriented events. He reminded the audience he needs volunteers to make such activities happen. The school does plenty and parents can take a greater leadership role.

- As for the Retention question, 12 responders marked “I Don’t Know” and primarily expressed concerns over cost affordability. There were only two “Not Returning” responses, but no text comments were provided to explain their decision.
- Mr Bechtel will hold six open roundtable discussions with parents, starting in January. There will be two sessions for each “school” (Lower, Middle, Upper) with one in the morning and one in the evening.
 - Gina Barth wanted to know the dates for the upcoming Young Alumni Return events
 - Mr Bechtel confirmed alumni will meet on Dec 20 for breakfast and Jan 8 to chat with students
 - Multiple parents encouraged the school to invite 7th & 8th graders as well as parents to hear the returning graduates. If possible, could the event be recorded and posted on YouTube, Vimeo, and other social media means? A suggestion was made to have the alumni hold a discussion in the South Reno Library to give Sage Ridge more visibility in the community.
 - One parent commented she has a child at Pine and it’s shocking that no one knows what Sage Ridge is.
 - Jill S-B cautioned that students gave her feedback about just wanting to be middle schoolers and not have to worry about college just yet. Sage Ridge needs to balance the situation and not put too much pressure and stress on them. Confidentiality issues arise with recording students, but the staff will take all suggestions into consideration
- For clarification, Teacher Letters of Intention provide four options: 1) Returning, 2) Want to be considered for greater opportunities, 3) Not returning, 4) Undecided (1st right of refusal). Mr Bechtel wants to ensure an atmosphere of trust with the faculty, but as an organization, he also wants to retain the best and brightest. Positions are already being provided to recruitment agencies to post in January – March. He’s accelerating the process to avoid any surprises in June after teachers’ contracts are finished. Reno is changing rapidly and it’s no longer a challenge to recruit candidates to come out for a visit.
 - Sallie Armstrong indicated the Board supports Mr Bechtel’s initiative. Look sooner to find the right candidates. Retention is important but Sage Ridge wants a strong and diverse faculty.
- Beyond open houses, Sage Ridge has gained more visibility in the community. It participated in the recent WCSD Passport to High School forum and sent representatives to Lake Tahoe School. The school has more targeted social media tools and even is running an ad in the Pioneer Center’s playbills. The Development team considered a promotion at the airport, but it’s currently too expensive.

COMMITTEE OVERVIEWS/UPDATES:

Lunch Program [Heather Power]

- We’re down to three students ordering lunch and the PA Lunch Volunteer Coordinators decided to part ways with Farm Fresh. There were too many students unhappy with the limited menu options and portion sizes. Julie Dyson worked hard to find a replacement and Roundabout agreed to return next semester as Sage Ridge’s lunch provider.
- There will be no significant transitions and Roundabout agreed to use www.myschoolaccount.com to manage the lunch program. Families will need to pre-order lunches as no additional items will be provided the day of.
- Monday – Thursday, there will be hot lunches available as well as salad and sandwich options. Friday will be cold lunches only. Julie Dyson and Heather are really going to need parents to step up and help next semester!!
- Further details will be spelled out in Friday Notes.

PA Board/Nominating Committee for 2020-2021 [Stephany Apollon]

- A nominating committee is forming to identify ideal candidates for the 2020-2021 PA Board. The committee consists of one faculty member (Emily Dolan, 6th Grade/English and History) and three parents. Please contact Stephany if you're interested in being part of the nomination process.
- There are several open positions to be filled. Current PA Board members are more than happy to answer questions about their roles. Job descriptions are being drafted up to outline role expectations.
- Stephany is excited to continue the wonderful work of Robin Soran, the PA President for the last two years.

Parents Education [Heather Power]

- Just a quick reminder of this year's first Parent Education event. Sage Ridge has contracted to show "Like" at Renown Hospital on Jan 28. They heard the feedback, but Renown still came out on top, because it provides good parking and is centrally located. Sage Ridge students will get to watch the documentary during J period.

Next meeting on January 14, 2020 in the Loft.

Upcoming PA Guest Speakers:

January – Sage Sessions

February – Foreign Language Pathways

April – Design/Technology Pathways

Meeting adjourned at 9:48 am.