

**Vassal Lane Upper School  
School Advisory Council Meeting  
September 12, 2014**

**Attendees:**

Natalie Beaumont-Smith  
Sue Vargo  
Lissa Galluccio  
Rachel Cobb  
Brian Gellersterin  
Laura Sylvan  
Tucker Fischer  
Nancy Tauber  
Heather Kelly  
Elisa Bronfman  
Lisa Laskin  
Mary Ann Matyas  
Jeb Sharp  
Palo Coleman  
Katie Ehresman  
Kathleen Moore  
Fran Cronin (school committee)  
Liz Vandermark  
Jamel Adkins-Sharif  
Lissa Lesser  
Helen Moschapidakis  
Whitney Allen, Tobin parent  
Sachi Tanaka Rodes (5<sup>th</sup> grade parent and chair of Friends of Tobin)  
Fred Fantini (school committee – end of meeting)

Noting the transitional nature of this committee, with 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents rotating off and new faculty to be coming on. Norma Casaya was elected last year and would like to join as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade parent, once the number of faculty members is clarified; number of faculty and parents needs to be equal.

Reviewed and accepted amended minutes

Agreement that we are sticking with Friday 7:30 a.m., waiting to see from Jamel if the first Friday can work as our regular meeting Friday.

**Item 1:** Jamel reviews the decisions made last year about bringing in a leadership coach for the Administrative team; Stephen Gould's resume and proposed plan is distributed. he has come to meet the Leadership Team; he will begin his engagement with the community next week during community day on Tuesday. Other aspect of the plan is Restorative Justice approach to student behavior and school climate. Over the summer Jamel and Tanya revised the student code of

conduct which was distributed in the school handbook. Superintendent challenged schools to not suspend any students in first ten weeks, which VLUS has agreed to. Chandra Banks from the district is piloting Restorative Justice here and at the high school. Faculty has received a reference book on Restorative Justice.

Nancy Tauber raises the question, are staff working on prevention? Jamel says yes, this is why advisory was re-implemented for all students at the beginning of each day. (Developmental Design strategies)

Kyrk Morris and Brendan Grim the health teacher were both trained by Chandra; they are charged this year to train some of our students as peer mediators. Kyrk is also charged with launching student government this year. Also flagged a couple of relationships between students and addressed them through groupings of students; also are planning to hold a number of parent meetings to provide a restorative justice lens.

Fran Cronin raises question, how do faculty feel about this approach given that they may feel they need consequences for student behavior.

Jamel says, we have had a number of home visits; there is also a behaviorist named Charles available to the school, shared with other schools. Brian clarifies that Susan the counselor is the point of contact; faculty can request Charles' involvement through Susan.

Example: there was a theft of sneakers last week; the student's family and school counselor are involved in a restorative justice response to that event.

Lissa asks, how are students being made aware of code of conduct; Jamel says, through advisory, an upcoming assembly, and hopefully through parents.

Elisa notes, a new tone this year of focusing on students deserve to feel safe and to be able to learn, rather than emphasis on punishment.

Jamel notes, last week's assembly where they introduced the Viper Way: talk about what you want the school to be like; consultant has tweaked those questions to focus what is discussed at community day, to gain parent and student voice to mission and vision.

At Community Day, parents will participate in advisory to experience what the "circle of power and respect" is like; parents and students will participate in the visioning protocol that the faculty has also done, to gather and share those responses. In the afternoon, the consultant will work with faculty to process that information.

Lisa raises, tough timing for working parents. Is there a way for parents who can't come to provide input. Communication was unclear and late. Would be possible to send an email with a link to Google forms beforehand; Brian has the expertise to do that and will work with Jamel. Can it be sent today to increase response and make the data available to the Tuesday process?

**Item 2:** Discussion about School Council elections: Jamel will email with an attachment that is a form to submit a nomination. Jamel will loop back with Brian to determine how many faculty members, which determines how many parents can join. Voting will happen at Curriculum Night.

**Item 3: first two weeks.****Successes:** First week of school for sixth graders has gone very well, pays extra attention to making students comfortable in the building, familiar with the staff.

Good first assembly: rolled out social contract and some of the goals for the year.

This is paraphrase of student-written, social contract:

*Persevere; persist and challenge yourself to climb towards success; respect others; make your voice heard; be prepared to give help to make a difference*

Good summer reading experience: each student was given a book to read, 4-5 students got the same book along with a faculty member. These small groups met and discussed their book on the first Friday.

Brian says, this was huge in terms of shifts of perspective for both students and faculty about each other; really engaged kids in the books; we should do this more. School improvement funds or instructional materials fund paid for the books; kids could donate their books back.

Nancy raising the point, let's communicate this to parents as kids don't always report it.

Laura noting the success of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade orienteering activity which prepares them for their October 2<sup>nd</sup> field trip to the Middlesex Fells

**Challenges:****schedule problems** especially around specials, electives, and world language, lockers not assigned to all students

Jamel acknowledges he did not allow enough time to work out problems that emerged from the schedules. There are still a few issues around a couple of **classes that are bigger than 25** that need to be resolved. Students can have music as an elective and as a special in order to have a year's worth of music. Our strength in the diversity of programs in the building also creates scheduling challenge.

Why **lockers** not on day 1? Laura says, meticulous process of assigning them.

Wrong locks were ordered; sixth grade team decided to go ahead with locks in hand as temporary. 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders should receive locks either today or Monday; they were ordered in the spring but wrong ones arrived in the fall.

**Class sizes:** problems with French and Spanish both with size, and with integrating some students who are beginners with others who are in their third year of language. District's stance is that world language in middle school is exploratory; teachers are using strategies like pairing inexperienced with experienced students.

**Other issues:** need for more supervision at dismissal at the secondary door near the bike racks; website information like staff listings and calendar is out of date; Sam to work with Lisa Waters to update. 7<sup>th</sup> grade supply list not available until school started. In general, the suggestion to over-communicate, especially during the first weeks of school, in order to quell rumors and reassure parents about issues being addressed.

**Concern about 7<sup>th</sup> grade science**, second year in a row of long-term subs and confusion about the curriculum. Jamel has added Kathleen Moore, the building sub, to supplement the substitute in 7<sup>th</sup> grade science, plus the district science coach in the building on most days; district is working to provide candidates for interview, Jamel will interview someone this afternoon (Friday the 12<sup>th</sup>).

**Next Meeting: Friday, October 3, 2014 at 7:30 a.m.**