

Vassal Lane School Council Meeting
October 4, 2013

Present: Tara Greco, Brian Gellerstein, Jamel Adkins-Sharif, Sarah Bell, Sue Vargo, Natalie Beaumont, Shaun Berry, Laura Sylvan, Katie Ehresman, Tahsin Ozcar, Robert Cowherd, Duncan MacArthur, Kathleen Moore, Kemi Tayo, Hamza Abdurezak, Angela Browne, Fred Fantini, Lissa Gallucci

Agenda:

NORMS:

We had a brief discussion about what we want the groups' norms to be, and agreed we would share the floor, not speak over each other, be respectful of others and assume the best intentions on everyone's part. UNANSWERED QUESTION: Should Jamel and Sue continue to facilitate, or should we rotate that duty?

SCHEDULE:

Our schedule will be the first Friday of each month, starting in October, at 7:30 a.m., followed by the first Thursday of the next month, e.g. November 7th, at 6:00 p.m.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS: The Council will try to use multiple channels to reach parents with the minutes. Katie Ehresman will circulate minutes before meetings. We agree to post minutes on the VLUS page of the CPSD website; have them available at coffees; post them on Parent Square and the Yahoo listserv; and send them out as part of the Tuesday backpack. There will also be an effort by room parents to determine which of their families need to be receive paper copies. UNANSWERED QUESTION: Should the Council have one or two primary means of communication, or try to use all of the above?

COUNCIL COMPOSITION: Current parent members are Sue, Bob, Hamza and Duncan; current faculty members are Laura, Brian and Shaun. Jamel will look for a community service rep to replace Benjamin Greene. Shaun volunteered to take Ellen's place. Faculty will check with staff at Monday meeting to see if anyone else wants to join.

**The law requires an equal number of representatives for parents and staff.*

Teachers can be appointed rather than elected. We want to create a model where everyone doesn't turn over each year. For elections make sure that we reach out to the feeder schools; spring elections for all grades, including incoming 6th grade parents.

Bob and Lissa recommended holding an election*, working with room parents; the goal is to hold Council elections before the next Council meeting in November 2013.

**At the meeting, we were working from memory of the School Council Law and mis-defined parity. Also, we cannot target a specific group for elections.*

MATH DISCUSSION: Math in Focus curriculum is being piloted in 8th grade

here, and other grades at other locations. In January 2014, there will be a decision about whether to adopt Math in Focus as part of the K-8 curriculum in the CPSD

Algebra response proposal was presented at the last school committee meeting. This will achieve Algebra 1 for all thru 8th and 7th grade starting in 2014-2015.

Starting in January 2014, CPSD will offer additional (voluntary) math classes for 8th graders. These classes will be offered outside of school hours with VLUS holding this class in the morning before the start of the school day. Two CPS upper schools will offer classes in the afternoon and 2 will offer classes in the morning. Students can take elementary school bus and come in early, or take late bus home. The online resource may support learning while this new math class will be face-to-face lessons with an Algebra teacher. Option to go to the high school is no longer available. Kids can choose to attend this math class at another upper school (not their primary middle school) if parents can provide the transportation. Morning/afternoon class is for this year only, after that Algebra 1 will be integrated into 7-8th grade math.

There were some additional questions including: Eligibility? By teacher discretion? Will there be an exam with a standard for advancement...they just have to pass the class, not 80%? Not determined yet as proposal still being considered. January exam would test students on the curriculum to that point to see if they are eligible for this math class.

DIFFERENTIATION DISCUSSION:

Bob asking about 8th grade differentiation support. 8th grade teacher and parents are working together to have tutors and a plan to achieve that. What about 7th grade math? Math in Focus has a lot of differentiation built into it. Christina Gavin is a District Inclusion Specialist who will support all classroom teachers around differentiation and inclusion practices.

What is the focus for parents around math? Differentiation on both high and low ends. Difference between challenge and acceleration? Jamel and Shaun will organize a parent meeting in early November to address questions about differentiation including a broad overview of math differentiation.

SCHOOL CLIMATE:

School improvement plan went back to district as a useful draft but we had begun a broader conversation about school climate.

Progress: all but 4 teachers have taken Developmental Designs (DD – the social curriculum for grades 6-8 in CPSD) this summer. Staff is using those techniques during faculty and other staff meetings, as well as in classrooms to explore the practices of teaching that should be used during curriculum delivery. DD is used throughout school, not just advisory. Teachers are observing each other and sharing best practice. Examples: use of games, small group work with report outs www.originsonline.org/developmental-designs

Kirk Morris was hired as school support, mentoring middle school students is his specialty. He is not to become the dean of discipline, but help individual students make plans for classroom success. He attends teacher team meetings. He runs "Do Something" as an elective; certain students were steered there.

If a student is sent out of class, he meets with them, they create a "fix it" plan for going back into the classroom. Another tool is a meeting with student, teacher and family to create action plans. Pace is slow, perhaps one per day. Kirk works with about a dozen kids. Kathleen reports that 8th graders at least are feeling some relief about classroom disruption. TAB-out (Take A Break outside the classroom) is still being used but refocused...TAB-out buddy room might be a different grade so kids are less comfortable with continuing their misbehavior. TAB-in (inside the classroom) or TAB-out is used to help kids collect themselves. When kids TAB-out they have to fill out a form that is reflective about their behavior, that then goes to advisor who is responsible to take some kind of action for follow up with Kirk or somebody.

TAB-in or -out are not escalating interventions but different choices by teacher about what might be helpful. Brian gives example of pairing consistently with another teacher so that they talk to each other about patterns. May lead to an action plan meeting. Focus is, what does staff need to do to support the student? The advisor is sometimes present but always gets a copy of the action plan, as does Jamel and the teacher in the classroom where the behavior took place. Suggested that advisor hold copies to see patterns across classrooms so students will get discussed at teacher team meetings.

When are MCAS results coming? School got preliminary results but not allowed to share until now. Results are in the mail.

Parents' concern about the brevity of lunch is noted and will be on the agenda for next month's meeting. There are limits to solutions as district mandates recess of 20 minutes, schedule is stretched already.

EMAIL LIST:

Lissa Galluccio	LGalluccio@cpsd.us
Tahsin Ozcan	tozcan@law.harvard.edu
Katie Ehresman	ktehresman@hotmail.com
Laura Sylvan	lsylvan@cpsd.us
Shaun Berry	sberry@cpsd.us
Natalie Beaumont-Smith	Natalie@beaumont-smith.net
Sue Vargo	suevargo330@gmail.com
Robert Cowherd	cowherd@alum.mit.edu
Sarah Bell	sarahbell57@gmail.com
Brian Gellerstein	bgellerstein@cpsd.us

Tara Greco taragreco@hotmail.com
Jamel Adkins-Sharif jadkins-sharif@cpsd.us
Duncan MacArthur maccoco@verizon.net
Kathleen Moore Kathleensmoore@gmail.com
Kemi Tayo olukemit@gmail.com
Hamza Abdurezak abdurez@fas.harvard.edu
Angela Brown abrown@hyamsfoundation.org