

Site Council Minutes

Date: April 9, 2015

Attendees:

- Suzanne Smith, Site Council Chair & MMS Teacher
- Kerrie O'Brien, Site Council Secretary & MMS Teacher
- Michelle Meekins, MMS Teacher
- Ken Gilbert, MMS Principal
- Amanda Hollenberg, MMS Vice Principal
- Jaycee Smith, MMS Student
- Hannah McClure, MMS Student
- Tyler Chipman, MMS Student
- Casey Brooks, MMS Student
- Levi Welker, MMS Student
- Mya Brewer, MMS Student
- Riley Lloyd, MMS Student

AVID:

Next year, MMS will be introducing the AVID program. We need to make decisions about what we would like to start school-wide and how we want to use our electives. Several of our staff members will be attending an AVID training this July in Colorado.

We are planning to have an AVID elective next year during Bear Den; the question is how many do we want to try to do and who will be doing it. Most likely next year we will start with an 8th grade elective, and then we will look into expanding to other grades the following year. The AVID elective includes lessons in study skills and organization as well as Socratic seminars with student-centered homework help sessions. (For example, if a student is stuck on a problem, they can walk through what they have done and where they are stuck. The group then asks questions to help the student figure out the answer.)

The AVID program includes a planner for each student. The planners contain detailed information for all classes. The planner entries aren't just a brief summary of the class topic; they include specific agenda and homework items. Their planners are similar to the ones we have been using, although the structure is slightly different. The planners are regularly checked; they are checked on a daily basis in the AVID classes and on at least a weekly basis in other classes. Planners as we currently use them don't necessarily work for all students; one student mentioned filling out the planner as being more of a burden than a help. Even many students who do fill out their planners do not look at them again. The current planners are also a bit smaller than what we used to have; for some students the space is too small and crowded for legible writing.

A system of organization for student binders is another key feature of AVID. Each student gets a large binder that has a dedicated section for each class. The planner is kept in the front of the binder. Each class section contains a spiral that is used for notes as well as handouts for the class. The binders are personalized to each student's schedule. The binder helps students who are lacking organizational skills to keep their school work organized. It will also be helpful for our high school students going to West who will be transitioning into an every other day class schedule.

Cornell notes are also a part of the AVID program. Cornell notes are divided into three sections. The right-hand section is for the main notes. On the left-hand side, there is a small section for questions,

connections, key ideas, etc. At the bottom of the page there is a section for a summary of the overall idea of the notes. This system works to help students keep organized and also helps with student engagement and memory. The notes are part of the "10/24/7" system. Every 10 minutes, the students pause to add key details/questions/connections/etc. to the left-hand column. Within 24 hours, they complete the summary at the bottom of the page. Within 7 days, they should review the notes at some point. In our current system, students often never look at their notes again once they have finished writing them down. With the Cornell notes system, reviewing the notes is built in.

We need to make sure that we are pacing ourselves in bringing in pieces of the AVID system so that we don't overwhelm students and staff next year. One place to start next year could be with the Cornell notes. We can use Cornell notes school-wide and evaluate how they work before moving forward with the next step. Cornell notes are simple and useful enough that they would be easy to implement but they would also help all of the students. In the AVID electives, the trained teachers could bring in the binder organization.

We need to order our school planners soon, so we need to decide what if anything we want to change about our planners now. We also want to make sure that we are not scrambling to get things figured out after the staff training in July. We should start thinking about next year's supply lists for students as well.

Different organization systems work for different students. Some have different binders for morning/afternoon or for certain classes. Others like to use one binder, but not too big. There is also the key piece of making sure that you actually are consistent about cleaning out and keeping your binder organized.

Master Schedule for Next Year:

For next year, we will have an FTE of 22.39 for teachers. We will have 21 full-time teachers, one teacher who is .25, one who is .6, and one who is .67. That adds up to 22.52 FTE; we are hoping the district will let us round that up. Each full time-teacher can teach six classes, which adds up to 126. We will have nine sections from our part-time teachers; this adds up to 135. We need to delete twelve sections for our two counselors and three for our Dean of Students. This leaves us with 120 total sections. This year we had 129 sections; that means we need to reduce our sections by 9 next year. Our administration has figured out how to make that happen and keep class sizes in the upper twenties. (There will always be some bottlenecks in the schedule, so there may be one period with a class of 22 and another with a class of 34; that is just the way scheduling goes when there are only certain periods where advanced and SpEd courses and specific electives such as beginning band are offered.)

We are planning to complete our forecasting for electives for next year in the coming month. Our current 6th and 7th graders will complete their forecasting during Bear Den in the next few weeks. For next year's 6th graders, we will be doing things a bit differently. Ms. Louk and Mr. Graham always visit 5th grade classrooms in our feeder schools. In the past, they would complete forecasting during these school visits. This often caused problems are registration when parents would discover that they did not approve of their student's elective choice. This year we will distribute information about the different electives at the school visits, but we will complete the actual forecasting during our 5th grade Open House, which will be happening soon. We will have three groups this time; one will be with Mr. Graham forecasting electives, one will be visiting classrooms, and one will be with Mr. Gilbert getting an introduction to the school. The groups will rotate. We will have our leadership students help out to ensure that everyone knows where to go. We will need to have some good advertising this year to encourage people to come and to be on time so that they don't miss an important piece.

We may lose our Math 180 program for next year; we had this program through a grant, and if we lose the grant we will not be able to fund the approximately \$30,000 bill. The only other changes we see for programs for next year is that our SSC class will be moving to North Albany Middle School. We will be getting

their Communications program, which is a specialized program for Autistic students. This choice was made due to the availability of staff for the SSC program at NAMS, as well as wanting the Communications program at Memorial because Liberty and West Albany both have comparable programs. The district is currently working to decide which SCA's will be moving with the programs and which will be staying.

Student Feedback:

Last year we found it helpful to elicit feedback from our outgoing 8th graders on what they have enjoyed and got the most out of in Middle School and what we could improve. For example, we got the idea to move our Bear Den study hall to the end of the day and expand the time from students last year. This is an idea that our current students support.

One student concern is in regards to grades. Having homework and classwork as an Effort grade is something the kids are okay with, but they don't like the 1-4 system for our Academic grades. The students feel that you could reflect standards-based grading with a letter grade system; an A could show mastery of the subject in the same way that a 4 is meant to show that the student has exceeded the standard. The students do not find the current grading system quite as rewarding and are often confused by it. Many students have spent prolonged periods of time trying to figure out the new grading system but still don't feel like they fully understand it. They also expressed concern about the lack of opportunities to exceed in Academics. One student also expressed frustration that in Academics, the whole grade could depend on test-taking ability; there may not be a way to make up for that if you are a nervous test taker or if you didn't sleep well the night before the test. Another student said that he finds the 1-4 system less descriptive because there are only four levels of grades, whereas the A-F system includes five.

As a school, we do not have any control of the grading system. The district made the decision to go to a 1-4, standards-based grading system. However, we do have some control over the parameters of the grades. One thing that we can control is opportunities for exceeding the standards on assignments. We also have worked hard to make sure that there is an emphasis on Effort as well as Academic grades. Most jobs require a good mix of effort and ability to complete.

Another issue that came up with our students was the new Smarter Balanced assessment. The test is weighing heavily on some students because of the difficulty and time commitment required. Some of the questions seem excessively detail-oriented and require more background knowledge and in-depth explanations than many students have. Another concern was that the Smarter Balanced assessment takes place 100% on computers; some students type very slowly. Others simply prefer writing things out by hand for the thought process. Other students enjoy the test because it is more real-world and reflects the actual work that they do in class.

Our principal asked the students how the bullying/harassment situation is. One student said that she thinks it has gone down significantly since she was in 6th grade. Some of it could be maturity and perspective – students are better able to let things roll off their backs and move on. The issues are more pronounced in 6th and 7th grades, where students are often mean to one another. One student who came to us from another middle school said that he has noticed that the students at Memorial are a lot nicer to one another, and that things with the staff members are more relaxed. There is less tension in the building, which reflects on how everyone feels. Another student said that she has noticed that the name-calling and gossiping has gone way down, but that things are more likely to become physical in the 8th grade. However, she also said that students are more likely to intervene. Another student mentioned that students are very accepting, and do not pick on others because they are different. They are more likely to be friends with everyone, and students they don't typically hang out with are generally trustworthy and kind.

Our principal also asked about drug use. The students said that they have not heard talk in the hallway about drug usage; they mentioned that they learned about the negative effects of drug usage in Health class. Most students don't think that drug usage is cool. They mentioned that some students without strong family support may be more likely to perceive drugs as an option, but that others could be good influences on them. Our principal also asked how long it takes for the gossip to get around when the drug dog visits. The students said that they know as soon as class gets out, or even sooner if someone has a cell phone. The students said that they also notice that they notice anxiety from certain people when the drug dog visits. The students expressed sympathy for students whose home lives are such that they are exposed to drugs from their family members. They suggested that a support group for students with family drug issues could be useful.

Standards-Based Grading:

Our students mentioned that they don't always have the opportunity to exceed. Sometimes the requirements to exceed are not clear to staff or students. This is something that we want to continue to work on.

Something we are considering for next year is reducing the number of standards for effort. The one that is the most meaningful for parents is the "Turns work in on time" standard. We could include just this standard, or this standard plus one or two others. There are some standards that aren't necessarily relevant, and others that are very similar to some of our citizenship standards. We could include other standards, and ask that teachers include the standard "Turns work in on time" for each effort assignment. This would mean that teachers would have to enter each grade twice. We also discussed whether missing assignments should be entered as an effort score of "1", which means little or no effort. This could cause issues with students not knowing that the assignment was missing because it will not show up on the missing assignment list. We would like to continue the policy of entering assignments as Z's and then changing them to 1's once it is too late to take the assignment.

Field Trips, Speakers, and Assemblies

We have had some teachers who are upset that students are missing class time for multiple field trips. We are planning to show an Earth Day video during Bear Den during the Monday and Tuesday of Earth Day week. We also have a volunteer who is willing to come to our school and do a presentation on recycling for us; this is something that we could do during Science classes. We also had a Holocaust survivor who is willing to come in and speak to us.

Our PTC had a suggestion that we do a Jog-a-Thon fundraiser. We have had so many fundraisers this year, and with all the fundraisers currently going on to benefit South Albany High School, we think that this might not be a good time to add something new.