

Site Council Minutes

Date: January 15, 2015

Attendees:

- Suzanne Smith, Site Council Chair & MMS Teacher
- Kerrie O'Brien, Site Council Secretary & MMS Teacher
- Michelle Meekins, MMS Teacher
- Amanda Hollenberg, MMS Vice Principal

8th Grade Dance:

We need to get started on planning this year's 8th grade dance. Our office manager will send out information to the 8th grade parents, particularly the ones who offered to help with it at the beginning of the year. We need one or two parents who are willing to take this project on. We hope to find coordinators within the next few weeks.

Field Trips:

Now is also the time for the grade levels to start thinking about planning for the field trips. All the grade level field trips are coming up in May, and the 6th and 7th grade trips need at least forty parent volunteers for the zoo and OMSI.

Academic Night:

In the past, we have based our academic awards on GPA. With our new standards-based grading system, we are not sure how we could work it to decide who qualifies for the awards. The initial thought was to have students who are exceeding the standards come, but there aren't always opportunities to exceed. We also considered making it an effort-based award, but we have so many of those already. We need to consider if we can make it work with the new system. One possibility would be for teachers to select the top five students for each of their subject areas; these would be students who really excel at the subject and are showing strong mastery of the standards. This may be students who are exceeding, or it may be the students who are meeting the most strongly. We would have to have some sort of rubric or guidelines to choose these students. Another possibility would be to eliminate the Academic Night awards; our parent member pointed out that her student is feeling adequately recognized as it is, and she could do without it. There are a lot of grey areas at this point for standards-based grading, maybe it would be better to take a year off and try it again when we have a better feel for the new grading system.

Standards-Based Grading:

The standards that have not yet been taught will need to be marked as "not assessed" in Pinnacle. Next Tuesday there will be an impromptu staff meeting so that teachers can learn how to do it. They will also have an open drop-in forum for help with Pinnacle during our grading day on Monday, January 26th.

For some subject areas such as Science and Social Studies, Pinnacle contains the state standards for content areas as well as the Common Core standards for literacy and writing in the content areas. The CCSS standards do not need to be assessed and entered into Pinnacle for these subject areas; they should focus on assessing the standards for that subject.

Some standards that are more performance-based can be assessed by teacher observation. The students should get a rubric that will make it clear to the students how they are being assessed, but they don't necessarily need to receive a formal paper grade for these standards.

Report cards will be mailed out this semester to make sure that grades are clearly communicated. There have been very few questions from parents this year, and hopefully this will keep parents in the loop.

Assessments for the standards do not need to be huge, formal things. They can be much smaller so long as they are authentic and really assess the standard being addressed.

For some parents, Pinnacle is being used in a different way. Last year, our parent used Pinnacle to keep an eye on grades. This year, she is only using to make sure there are no missing assignments. She feels like her children are learning just as much this year, but there is a lot less anxiety about grades because there is no letter grade. Between the new system and having Bear Den time to complete homework assignments, she feels like her kids are a lot happier with their school experience.

The new system also helps teachers be more cognizant of the purpose of what they are doing in class, and making sure all of the assignments tie directly to standards. The system gives you excellent feedback on how each student is doing on each individual piece, but it does make it a little more difficult to get a "big picture" sense of how each student is doing in your subject area.

Smarter Balanced Assessment:

Our administrators will get the next training towards the end of February; they will train teachers soon after. Our current schedule has us starting the assessment at the beginning of March. The current plan is to do the testing by subject area (start with 6th grade LA, then 7th grade LA, then 8th grade LA, then math) so that students will not double up and end up taking back-to-back tests. We are somewhat concerned about how to get all of the testing completed before the window closes, so we may need to make a few changes to the plan to fit it all in. There are two pieces to the test; there is one piece that is going to be direct instruction, which will be specifically for background information for the second piece of the test.

If a student is absent from class during the direct instruction piece, they will need to watch a video of that lesson. The students only have ten days from the day the test is opened up to complete it; this ten day period includes weekends and non-school days. The entire testing window is only forty-five school days total.

At our Smarter Balanced training, we were told that any unanswered questions left in the section at the end of a testing session will be marked incorrect. Since then, there has been some different information saying that they would be able to start from where they left off, but would have new questions. The administration is currently looking into which information is correct.

Healthy Teen Survey:

Our 6th and 8th grade students took the healthy teen survey in their Science/Health classes last spring. The entire results packet is over 100 pages; we will only look at a few select pieces with key information.

We have been working hard over the past few years to create a positive, supportive atmosphere in our building. The survey results overall seem to show this, but there are a few areas of concern.

The rates of depression, considering suicide, or actual suicide attempts are alarming, with over 20% of our students reporting that they have felt sad almost every day for two weeks or more, and 12.1% of our 8th graders reporting that they have actually attempted suicide. This data shows us that we need to do more in our building to address mental health. Our health teacher brings in our school counselor and outside agencies to talk to students, but we need to increase access school-wide.

This can be a difficult issue to address because people who are experiencing mental health issues often try to hide it, and there can be a stigma attached to it. As educators, we are not only teachers, but we are

sometimes social workers as well. We need more support in our schools to help these students. Our building really has a need for two full-time counselors; our current 1.5 counseling time serves as more of a Band-Aid for students' problems since so much of the counselors' time is taken up with scheduling and other duties.

There is also some concern about drug use; our numbers reflect very low drug use, but any at all is still too high. In particular our community is currently having an issue with heroin use, which is something that we need to be on the lookout for.

The data in these surveys is not always 100% accurate; some students answer dishonestly as a joke. The charts and graphs included in the results packet are also somewhat unclear in the way they are labeling.