

Site Council Meeting Minutes

Date: November 14th, 2013

Attendees:

- Suzanne Smith, Site Council Chair & MMS Teacher
- Kerrie O'Brien, Site Council Secretary & MMS Teacher
- Amber Prucha, MMS Parent
- Becky Moyes, MMS Parent
- Veronica Taylor, MMS Parent
- David Jazmin, MMS SEA
- Ken Gilbert, MMS Principal
- Dan Rothwell, MMS Teacher
- Michelle Meekins, MMS Teacher

Spaghetti Feed Recap:

We received \$500 worth of donations from five different people; we also had donations from companies such as Costco, MegaFoods, and Denny's. Our total profit was around \$2100. The music program received \$530. Overall it was a success; the PTC met yesterday to discuss things that went well, things that needed to be changed, etc. Those minutes will be on the website today. The donation from McDonald's of drink containers fell through due to a miscommunication, so the PTC decided to purchase some large drink containers for next year to make things easier. Everyone had a great time. The prices were appropriate and we got many people who donated their change.

The PTC this year had virtually no notes this year since our previous president had moved to another state. This year's PTC did a great job of improvising and things will go more smoothly next year after experience.

The Ducks game was on in room A-1, and the band was playing so guests were able to enjoy some entertainment with their dinner.

Other School Events:

The school play happened last weekend; our students put on a collection of Edgar Allan Poe's works. The next play is called *A Dark and Stormy Night*; it is more of a comedy, while Poe's work was a little more dark and literary. The play went very well.

Our band marched in the Veteran's Day parade on Monday. Our principal and vice principal marched with the band; parents and students really enjoyed seeing them join the band. Next year we will try to recruit more staff and possibly some leadership students to march with the band and help distribute pencils to the children watching. We might consider adding a float next year as well. Our band came in second overall.

Pinnacle Grading:

At our last meeting, we discussed some of the features of our altered grading system. It came out that we needed some sort of informational video to help parents use Pinnacle and give more information about

the new system; Ken is halfway through creating the video. He hopes to have it finished and posted on the school website next week. This will hopefully help parents get information about grading so they won't have to ask about the new system at conferences; they'll be able to focus on their students. We will also have an information station set up in the lobby for parents to get help using and understanding Pinnacle.

One frequent parent question is about the codes in the grading system; not all parents know what X, Z, etc. stand for. This will be addressed in the video, and we could include a link on the website. Unfortunately, we don't know a way of getting that information embedded into Pinnacle itself; Ken will look into it. There will be a link in the next school newsletter to the Pinnacle video and we will get one onto the Memorial Facebook page.

Site Council Plan:

At the September meeting, we talked about what our Site Council plan should be for this school year. We want to make sure that we are using this time effectively to make our school a better place for students and staff.

Conferences:

They are coming up next Thursday, November 21st from 4-7:30; Monday, November 25th from 4-7:30; and Tuesday, November 26th from 8-12:00. We want to know what our parents are looking for at conferences.

Some teachers have more of a "here's what we're doing" check-in rather than an actual conference. One parent has said she would rather have some serious discussion to spend time talking about how the student is doing; she doesn't need to have her student tell her what he's doing in class or what his grades are, because she knows that already. This could be an opportunity to discuss strengths and weaknesses and brainstorm how to make the most of the school year. It can be difficult to make that happen with the numbers of students each teacher has; it is much harder to sit down with one student for a long period of time. It is possible to schedule an additional conference if parents don't feel like they've gotten enough time.

It is very difficult to have those one-on-one conferences at the middle school; many parents don't come because they don't think it's worth coming in just to have a quick, how's it going conference. One parent mentioned that she prefers to email teachers to get quick check-ins, although some teachers aren't as reliable about getting back to parents.

The conferences last year felt a bit more like an Open House than a conference; it would be helpful to be able to sit down and look at Pinnacle together and discuss. Conferences can also be an opportunity to help students get caught up, and to get some feedback. It's also nice for parents to feel like their teachers actually know their students and to have some personal interactions about things that the teacher has noticed about the student.

It would be nice to have some portfolio pieces with student work, goals, test scores, grade printouts, etc. for parents to see and so that we can have some samples to use to have that discussion about the students' strengths and weaknesses.

The expectations for conferences have changed a bit since we got the Pinnacle grading system that allows parents to track their students' grades. Conferences don't need to be a check in about grades anymore since parents can get that at home. We need to have some training and guidance for our staff about how to make conferences more productive and useful for everyone.

Are printouts something that we should have available for parents at conferences? Parents have access to Pinnacle, but they are still helpful to have so that parents, teachers, and students can go over the grade together.

Overall, one parent said what she really wants to get out of a conference is whether the teacher is worried about the student. Are these bad grades a serious problem, or is the student going to be successful eventually? Parents and teachers see whole different sides of the students, so it is nice for the parents to get feedback on that part of the student. Sometimes you discover that parents and teachers have had the same concerns.

Parents also need to feel like they can stay or come back in order to have that time with the teacher to discuss their students.

This year, we will be able to discuss student behaviors and academics as separate topics because of our new effort and academic grading system. While the grading system isn't perfect, it will give us the opportunity to really see what the students know and are able to do. We can see both how hard they are working, and how well they understand. It will be difficult this year since we are transitioning into the new system. It's been a struggle for teachers this year to get used to the four point Effort rubric; what does it mean to be exceptional vs. satisfactory? It's also difficult having the transition year where we still have letter grades and we have the difficult new Common Core Standards. Since teachers are assessing based on these more challenging standards, grades are likely to be lower than they have been in the past. Our goal is for the grades to be a realistic reflection of what the students actually know and are able to do instead of just whether they get things turned in on time.

The big question now is what we can do to help the students bring up their grades and their abilities. We have our intervention classes, but they can only go so far. Next year when we have purely standards-based grading, we expect to get questions when a kid isn't meeting of what we are doing about that. Khan Academy has been helpful for math to assist students in catching up on some missing pieces, but it remains a big issue for our teachers in general.

The district's answer to this issue is early intervention; they are funneling money into the elementary program to help students coming up, but this doesn't help our current Middle School students. The high schools are working on portfolio options for students who don't pass the Smarter Balanced Assessment so that they can still graduate from high school. Currently, only about 10% of our students are meeting the Common Core Standards according to the district assessment. We aren't sure yet how well that calibrates to the nationwide test that will be implemented starting next year.

It's going to be a struggle for our groups over the next few years; they will be tested on the Common Core Standards even though they only got a few years' worth of instruction in them, and they will be taking a test that none of us have seen yet. Long term, this could be a really good thing for the education system, but it will be tough on the kids and teachers now. The increased rigor by the time they graduate is great, but some of our kids' brains are still developing, and they will struggle to process some of the concepts because their brains just aren't ready yet.

What we're doing is good; the new standards are designed to keep pace with the world. Transitioning to standards-based grading is good, too, because we will get better information to parents about what their students know and can do. The struggle for us is the high-stakes testing; it will cause stress for students, parents, and teachers.

How is the district informing parents about the new standards, testing, etc.? This information hasn't really been conveyed to parents. Yesterday our principal received some information about the Common Core for parents from the district, but it's very confusing and may be meaningless without a conversation. Our Career Information System (CIS) program has an online portfolio that students start in middle school that covers careers, education, and more.

We will work on getting our parent feedback out to teachers and discuss how to make conferences more meaningful for everyone so that it will help our students be successful. We may need to adjust things now that we have Pinnacle.

November 25th Staff Development:

The school district is providing our material for the staff development. It will have to do with standards-based grading and assessments, but we do not have the exact details yet.

Next Meeting:

We had a meeting scheduled for December 19th, but we are cancelling that one. Our next meeting will be on January 16th. Some possible topics for discussion may include our new elective system, our master schedule (advanced classes, elective options and grading, school-wide study hall, ways to enrich the student experience, and intervention classes) and community activities. For intervention, we are considering a double block system so that students have two classes for math and reading so that they have a chance to really get caught up. We want to make sure that our meetings are meaningful and productive.

Our PTC is available for requests from teachers who have a project or a need. Some PTC groups have given each teacher a specific amount of money to spend; this is nice for some teachers who are hesitant to ask for money. That's what the Parent Club is for: the school. The PTC is willing to do some extra fundraising as needed.