

Newton South High School
School Council Minutes
January 5, 2010

Members Attending:

Joel Stenbridge, Ariel Kaluzhny, Eleanor Richard, Prevenya Harris, Ryan Augusta, Marcia Okun, David Deutsch, Ellie Wood, Sue Kirshenbaum, Mona Hochberg, Debbie Linder, Tom Lee, Bob Parlin, Deena Davis, Jeanne O'Reilly, Jane Starkman, Barry Wanger, Marci Sapers, Chip DiMarco

Others Attending:

Meaghan McCormick, Mary Scott, Charlie Myette.

Introductions:

With the addition of four student representatives, one from each house, the Council is complete. Joel led introductions.

Principal's Update:

Joel spoke briefly about the timeline for revising the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP sub-committee synthesized the results of the December brainstorming session. They defined five priorities:

- Identify achievement gaps at NSHS.
- Develop and implement a plan to reduce achievement gaps.
- Provide consistency of instructional practices among classrooms and departments.
- Ensure rigorous content and instruction for all students.
- Expand areas of success to increase opportunities for all students.

Joel has asked the data team to examine data that can inform decisions about the SIP, and they will report at the February School Council meeting.

Update from the By-Laws Committee:

Marci presented the first draft of the School Council's By-Laws. This discussion took up much of the meeting and focused, among the several sections in the draft, on the purpose and responsibilities of the School Council; membership issues like the election of parents and faculty and the nomination of students; and meeting schedules and procedures.

Massachusetts has established guidelines for the purpose and responsibilities of School Councils. The committee's draft addresses these guidelines, in which there is considerable flexibility. Our discussion focused on 1) how best to structure our School Council; 2) whether we were in compliance with state mandates; and 3) suggestions for clarifying the language of the draft. The draft states several major responsibilities, including a review of the school's annual budget, the review and implementation of the SIP, and a review of the Orange Lion.

With respect to membership, the draft uses the current makeup of the Council as the model for future Councils. The state mandates some aspects of a School Council's composition: it calls for the school's Principal and a parent to serve as Co-Chairs (we have two co-chairs in our current configuration), an equal number of staff and parents, and a Community Representative. Our School Council also includes four student representatives as active voting members, and several invited staff members will attend regularly though not as voting members. The PTSO will have a representative at meetings, but not as a voting member. The School Council will broaden its discussions by inviting members of the public, encouraging students to participate, and publicizing the Council's work. Joel

has already begun to put in place a school-wide “decision matrix,” and the School Council plays a significant advisory role in this matrix.

The by-laws’ draft proposes that we continue to elect parent and faculty members in the same way we elected the current Council. There was some discussion about the details, but the general idea is that the PTSO will arrange the election of parents in the Spring. The teachers’ union will conduct the election of teachers, ideally before the first meeting of the School Council in the fall. For student representatives, Joel suggests keeping the method we used this year in which each House Master nominated a student from his or her House, but Joel is open to discussing changes. This last point seemed the least settled.

The tenure of members remains under discussion, and the committee will redraft its original proposal. The group’s opinion seemed to cohere on the proposal of a two-year term. We also seemed to agree that some kind of term limit should be set, but left open exactly what that limit should be.

The committee proposed two options for Meeting Guidelines. One option was more detailed, with proscribed times and dates for meetings and rules for things like agendas, minutes, and deadlines. The second option was more general and borrowed the language of the state’s statutes. After discussion and some suggested changes to the second, less specific option, we agreed to go with a variation on the state’s language. The understanding is that the School Council will hold general, open meetings each month while school is in session; will publicize the date, place, and time of meetings; will publish an agenda in advance of meetings; and will publish minutes after. Though the details for publicizing meetings and publishing documents are incomplete, we expect to use email, a School Council website, and the newsletters from the Principal and the PTSO to make the work of the School Council widely and easily available.

Marci invited members of the Council to continue thinking about the By-Laws draft. She asked people to email her any further thoughts or comments. The committee will consider today’s discussions and any additional input when they prepare a second draft.

Data Review:

In the last part of the meeting, Mary Scott presented “a numerical look at NSHS.” Following December’s brainstorming session, several Council members asked for such an overview in order to provide context for our discussions. Mary’s presentation distilled information from the class size reports and called attention to data like enrollments (historically and projected); student indicators like graduation rates and absenteeism; technology indicators; class size breakdowns; and correlations between MCAS scores and curriculum levels.

There were several lessons to learn in the data. For instance, enrollment projections for South are increasing – from 1333 students in 2000 to over 1800 in 2014. Student indicators were good: South compares well with other Massachusetts districts with respect to these data. However, we have fewer “modern” computers per student (one for every 5.8 students) than the state average (one for every 3.6 students).

Much of Mary’s analysis focused on how to read the data on class size breakdowns. Her purpose was to show us how these data inform decisions to allocate the school’s resources. As an example,

and in the category of good news, South has reversed a trend toward more classes with 25 or more students: last year there were 125 such classes, this year there are 88.

The meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.