

School Council Minutes December 1, 2009

Present:

Debbie Linder, David Deutsch, Tom Lee, Chip DiMarco, Mary Scott, Liz Richardson, Deena David, Sue Kirshenbaum, Charlie Myette, Bob Parlin, Marcia Okin, Ryan Augusta, Barry Wanger, Marci Sapers, Mona Hochberg

Kathleen Cavanaugh – parent guest

Volunteers for Note Taking were identified:

Jan-Chip
Feb-Liz
Mar-Charlie
Apr-Mona
May-Marsha
June –David

Volunteers for Refreshments:

Jan – Debbie/Tom
Feb – Charlie/Mary
Mar- Marci/Mona
Apr- Chip
May – Bob, Marcia, Ryan

Public Comment:

None

Follow-up From Last Meeting:

AP data – Mary Scott shared data on number of seniors taking AP classes in their senior year. 61% of the students take 0 or 1 AP class and, therefore, could participate in the WISE program. We need to pay attention to the kids who may not take several AP classes.

Historical data for APs – our passing rate is very high. The graduating class summary shows that 65.9% of the senior class passed (3 or higher) at least one AP class in their four years at Newton South. 22.7% of the 1763 students in 2008-09 took an AP test.

Although many colleges may not accept AP classes for credit, colleges do look at them as an indicator that the student is capable of college level work.

In summary, this sort of data is important as we look at our curriculum.

School Improvement Plan Update

The SIP that was developed last year was primarily focused on communication, collaboration and connection. The process for development allowed for significant engagement of faculty members. The SIP is already having an impact.

Joel presented an update of goals from the SIP. Each SIP working group has been addressing ways to accomplish their goals. *A suggestion was made to connect the groups and share perspectives.*

There is strong interest in an all day activity.

See full PPT from 12/1/09 meeting for additional goals updates. Joel then raised the opportunity to expand the SIP next year to focus on curriculum or academics as well.

Questions/Comments on Current SIP:

Parents should be part of the dialogue and expectations also need to be set, i.e. email response can be expected in 24 hours, not necessarily within the same day. Teachers expressed concern that setting guidelines could set expectations that they are guaranteed.

Joel said that while he is fully supportive of the SIP approved last year, he believes it needs to be augmented by a more robust focus on curriculum.

Joel led a discussion addressing the following questions regarding a curriculum centered SIP:

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

WHAT WOULD WE NEED TO KNOW

WHAT IS OUR SCOPE?

HOW WILL WE DETERMINE PRIORITIES?

WHAT ARE THE LEARNINGS?

WHO SHOULD BE ON THE WORKING GROUP?

Council members brainstormed ideas relating to a curriculum component of the SIP.

- Class size
- Balancing the work load

- What classes are offered (program of studies) and the distribution of students in levels
- Homework load – too many kids are not getting enough sleep
- What drives distribution? Student choice or faculty expertise
- Distribution of resources? Are the middle 60% of students getting the same attention and resources as the top and bottom 20%?
- Achievement gaps that exist between students and why they exist. Are they based on race, socioeconomic status etc.
- Consistency of teaching strategies and grading
- Summer courses offer students the opportunity for free blocks but there are no honors classes etc. Summer classes may relieve the stress in the school year and balance the load. Summer school grades do not count for GPA.
- Junior year is out of balance in terms of work load and stress because of SAT/ACT testing.
- Who decides how heavy a workload students can/should take? Would kids/parents accept limits?
- Benchmarks – Can they be established for class size, achievement gap, course load
- How many kids access the extra-curricular activities and who are they?
- Is there a way to increase access to the arts? Increase access to the electives?
- The art department is an authentic small learning community as students and teachers spend four years together. How effective are smaller learning communities? have for four years How effective is clustering beyond 9th grade.
- Data on how well the 9th graders are doing in transitioning to HS from 8th grade
- Courses such as Biology, Cur I, Honors Chemistry, Cur I U.S. history do not prepare students for the SAT II tests. Are supplemental courses or tutors possible?
- Kids who are connected to at least one faculty member tend to do better than kids who are not connected.
- What support and mentoring services are needed for struggling students. Is there data on who uses these resources, why and how effective is it in addressing their needs?
- What is the data on kids who want to take a course but can't for reasons outside of their

control i.e. either because the class is full or unavailable.

- Look at classes that are mixed levels – how are they doing and should they be expanded.
- How are smaller learning communities integrated into our community?

A working group to help establish priorities will meet with Joel prior to our January meeting. Members are: Debbie, Mary, Deena, Liz, Tom (Marci, Sue support as needed). Among the issues they will address:

- * How do we create priorities?
- * What data do we need?
- * How do we get the data and bring it back?
- * Planning for the meeting to share it with the council

Mary will develop an overview data presentation for the January meeting.

We adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

- Submitted by Sue Kirshenbaum