



Mountain Ridge Junior High
School Community Council Meeting Minutes
November 16, 2017

In Attendance:

Mark Whitaker	Lisa Gallagher	Heather Morgan
Michelle Bagley	Amber Bonner	Ashley Berg
Jaime Ward	Amber Gardiner	Jose Carrillo
Karen Rasmussen	Robyn Rhoton	Tiraje Earnshaw
Briawna Hugh	Joyce Harrison	Jonathan Keller
Amy Mullins	Jennifer Bitton	

Excused: Ryan Nield, Sherry Kramer, Marie Pavich

Co-Chair Heather Morgan conducted the meeting. A motion was made by Robyn Rhoton to approve the minutes from the October SCC meeting. The motion was seconded by Mark Whitaker; all were in favor and the motion was unanimously carried.

SCC Member Briawna Hugh reported on the Digital Citizenship conference she attended. It was geared more towards students than adults; there were many high schoolers at the conference along with some junior high kids and teachers. Principal Whitaker asked the committee if they wanted him to look into scheduling another digital citizenship opportunity, maybe with KSL's Jay McFarlane. Members who have heard Jay McFarlane speak agree that his presentation is quite valuable, but that it might be a better idea to arrange this as a cluster. Principal Whitaker will look into what kind of digital citizenship curriculum is currently being covered by our health and CTE teachers through NetSmartz and will report to SCC members by email. The members can determine how to move forward depending on his findings.

Smart phones are used in class only at the direction of the teacher. iPads and Chromebooks are available for all students, so no parent should feel pressure to purchase a smart phone for their child.

Administration will look into whether LanSchool works in all classrooms. This program allows teachers to monitor what students are browsing without having to physically walk around the classroom. LanSchool is currently available in our computer labs and it would be valuable to have the program accessible in regular classroom.

Principal Mark Whitaker discussed the last meeting of the sub-committee on grading practices. During the meeting, the pros and cons of traditional grading vs. standards based grading practices were broken down. He passed out an article regarding

simplifying responses to interventions, it is attached to these minutes. The primary purpose of education used to be to reveal student potential by sorting and selecting, a process still used by colleges. Now, the purpose of education is to prepare ALL students for higher education, truly assessing student learning and communicating that assessment with parents.

There are many variations in grading scales at MRJH. Principal Whitaker talked to parents, teachers, and students about the good vs. bad of standards based grading. He met with students in Mr. Attridge's history classes 3 times. The discussions revealed:

- 3 in standards based grading should not be a C
- The 4 point scale converted to a letter grade is an issue
- Dislike that there is no standard grading policies among all teachers
- Does the standards based grading scale have the expectation of proficiency or high-proficiency?

It was a productive meeting. The concise articulation of the problem is that the translation from the 1-4 grading scale to the A-F grading scale is confusing and sometimes unfair. This is something we are going to work on as a school. The purpose of the sub-committee on grading practices is to examine and give feedback as the SCC is not a decision making body.

SCC Member Amber Bonner opened the floor for community discussion. She has a concern regarding students who are not placed in secondary A.L.L. classes after participating in elementary A.L.L. classes. She expressed her belief that they are not being sufficiently challenged in regular classrooms. Differentiated instruction is meant to target those students in classrooms who may struggle to keep up or may need some additional opportunities to be challenged.

Assistant Principal Jennifer Bitton, our Administrator over A.L.L., attended the meeting and presented data regarding program placement. This year, we had 82 students take the A.L.L. math placement test, 33 were accepted in the program with scores of 83% or higher. Testing procedures currently in place are the most fair and accurate measurement of student readiness for the rigors of A.L.L. classes. Of our 412 7th graders, we have approximately 50 in our A.L.L. classes which is 12% of our 7th grade population. We feel the number of students admitted and the range of scores accepted are reasonable and appropriate.

There are other options for students who are not placed in the A.L.L. program. They can participate in programs such as Knowledge Bowl and Math Counts that are created to enrich learning. Band and orchestra classes, AP classes and honors classes are also available for students. Additional programs available to higher achieving, self-motivated students include UVU's concurrent enrollment program, and East Shore High School's on-line studies program where accelerated learners can complete extra high school credits on-line.

It is important to remember that placing a student in the A.L.L. program when their test scores do not demonstrate readiness can be detrimental to student success. There are, however, procedures in place for students that do not qualify for A.L.L. classes to help them get on the desired track. A motivated 7th grade student can complete a BYU Independent Study course then come with evidence of understanding and test for the A.L.L. program. Another option is to take 7th and 8th grade math concurrently in 7th grade, 9th grade math in 8th grade, then A.L.L. math program classes in 9th grade.

SCC Member Briawna Hough shared some additional community concerns. Some parents of incoming 7th grade students were unaware of the fees charged in junior high. Our finance secretary has added school and course fees to the registration workbook that the kids/parents fill out to plan classes and we've posted course prices on the counseling website.

The other concern is that all the curbs are painted red on the road to the west of us, by the field/B-hall. Police and Principal Whitaker say they do not know why. This is a city issue, not a school issue.

The members were thanked for their attendance and participation. Members who have items they wish added to next month's agenda, please email them to Mr. Whitaker, Heather Morgan, Lisa Gallagher, or Shelly May. With no further business to conduct, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:45 p.m. until the next regularly scheduled SCC meeting on **Thursday, January 18, 2018 at 1:30 p.m. in the Mountain Ridge Junior High media center.**

Asking the Right Questions

If a school begins with the mindset that RTI is a means of raising test scores, implementing mandates, staying legal, and/or identifying kids for special education, then those outcomes will guide staff thinking throughout the process. In turn, these misguided principles will often lead to misguided actions. The purpose of RTI is to ensure high levels of learning for every child, and our actions must be guided by that purpose.

If the previous questions are the wrong questions to guide our thinking and actions, then what are the right questions to lead our work?

Why Are We Here?

As Judith Bardwick recommends, “the most important question in any organization has to be ‘what is the business of our business?’ Answering this question is the first step in setting priorities” (Bardwick, 1996, p. 134). If this is the case, educators must begin by asking, why are we here? Our schools were built neither to give educators a place to teach nor to give government officials locations to administer high-stakes standardized tests each spring. If we peel away the various layers of local, state, and federal mandates piled on schools, the core mission of any school system is to provide students with the skills and knowledge they will need to be self-sufficient, successful adults.

As educators, we should provide every student the type of education we would want for our own child. Ask parents what they want school to provide, and it is doubtful they’d answer, “I just want my child to score proficient on state assessments,” or “I want my child to master standard 2.2.3 this year.” As parents, we see the bigger picture. Learning specific academic standards and passing state tests are meaningless if the child does not ultimately become an intelligent, responsible adult who possesses the knowledge and quality of character to live a rewarding adult life.

What Knowledge and Skills Will Our Children Need to Be Successful Adults?

If the fundamental purpose of school is to prepare our children to be successful adults and citizens, this is logically the next question we should ask. To be sure, the world for which we are preparing our students today is not the world most educators entered when we transitioned from childhood to adulthood. During the 20th century, the United States became the most powerful economic force on earth based on an economy driven by industry and agriculture. One hundred years ago, almost half of America’s adult population farmed for a living, while another third worked in factories (Hagenbaugh, 2002; U.S. Department of Agriculture, Utah State University Extension, & LetterPress Software, n.d.). These honorable, labor-intensive professions did not require a high school diploma or college degree, yet provided sufficient wages and benefits for most Americans to maintain a middle-class standard of living.

Today, less than 1 percent of our population directly farms for a living, and less than 10 percent works in factories (Hagenbaugh, 2002; U.S. Department of Agriculture et al., n.d.).

Our new economy is driven by technology, innovation, and service. Because technology and human knowledge are changing at faster and faster rates, educator Karl Fisch (n.d.) states: "We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technologies that haven't been invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet." Due to this acceleration of human knowledge, Alvin Toffler (Toffler & Toffler, 1999) says the definition of literacy in the 21st century will not center on whether a person can read and write, but rather on whether a person can learn, unlearn, and relearn.

How do we prepare students for jobs that don't exist? How do we teach our students knowledge that has not been discovered? Teaching comprehension and computation skills will not be enough; we need our students to be able to analyze, synthesize, evaluate, compare and contrast, manipulate, and apply information. Our state tests measure these skills inadequately at best. Think how low we are setting the bar for our students if our only goal is to get every child to be proficient on state assessments. If we truly focus our efforts on the higher-level thinking skills that our children need for their future, state tests will be downright easy for them.

How Effectively Are We Preparing Students for These Future Challenges?

Because our traditional educational system was designed to prepare students for an economy driven by farms and factories, it was assumed that only a small percentage of students would learn beyond high school. Consequently, schools did not expect all students to learn at high levels, but instead ranked and sorted kids along a bell-shaped curve, identifying those few expected to reach higher education. In such a system, it is reasonable to expect that "a few people will excel, most will be satisfactory or average, and a few will fail" (Fendler & Muzaffar, 2008, p. 63). This approach assumes that student learning is more a function of each student's innate ability and socioeconomic status, and a teacher's job is not necessarily to develop each student's academic ability, but rather to reveal it. Yet as Benjamin Bloom (1971, p. 49) states:

The normal curve is not sacred. It describes the outcome of a random process. Since education is a purposeful activity in which we seek to have the students learn what we teach, the achievement distribution should be very different from the normal curve if our instruction is effective. In fact, our educational efforts may be said to be unsuccessful to the extent that student achievement is normally distributed.

It is unrealistic to expect our traditional school system to ensure high levels of learning for every child with practices designed to have only a small percentage of students achieve at these levels. In fact, "the bell curve serves as both a model and a fitting symbol of an archaic public education system. It describes a broad swath of mediocrity flanked by a sliver of excellence and a ribbon of failure" (Wallace & Graves, 1995, p. 24).