

Communications Meeting Minutes

March 6, 2015

Attendees: Deirdre Burns, Deirdre d'Albertis, Steve Jensen, Joe Phelan, Laura Schulkind

BoE Goal #3

The committee engaged in a thoughtful dialogue around appropriate ways to “acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of students and staff.” Questions of what makes people feel supported and what global practices we could employ were explored. Practically speaking, the amount of information being Tweeted, the monthly Principal Reports and the coverage in the River Chronicle have all been instrumental in sharing the good work of the District.

The committee is recommending that, as a way to reflect on the year’s achievements, we spend some time during our Board Goal reflection period to acknowledge particular challenges the staff encountered through the year and send a letter of appreciation from the Board. In this way, we will round out our current practice of welcoming staff back on the first day of school, inviting all for Breakfast with the Board and coming full circle with our thanks for the year.

District Website

Steve reported that a suite of tools (“Weebly”) was released to the teacher committee for testing and providing feedback. These tools may be used by the teachers to develop their personal web pages on the District site. A Google Doc was created to gather all teacher input, both positive and negative, which Steve will review once the testing period has ended near the end of the month. If Weebly is not sufficient for the needs of the teachers, different options will be explored. Weebly is free and was chosen to pilot based on popularity and simplicity of use.

A variety of apps were discussed. Steve is trying to find a product that will satisfy a variety of user abilities. To his knowledge, School World doesn’t offer anything more than Weebly which offers a number of additional user options including slideshows, YouTube links, etc.

He is grappling with ways to create a structure that allows for more global updates on the District site.

Technology

Deirdre Burns asked about any feedback from the February Superintendent Conference Day. Steve reported that he received mostly positive feedback with some constructive suggestions for future Technology PD. He was happy to report that, of the approximately 123 staff members, 97 used the online sign-up for training sessions. The balance of those teachers were mostly those that engaged in independent study projects for the day.

Steve has been speaking with staff regarding revised planning around the Technology Plan. The general feedback from staff is that they would like more time to engage with the new devices and applications to thoughtfully implement technology in their classrooms. He was happy to report that the Middle School teachers are engaging in lively discussions about best use of technology for their students and how their curriculum can be enhanced through the use of technology. What tools will facilitate their process? The hope is that the teams will begin to build a community of support through working with early tech adopters to engage newer users while working out logistical issues.

Student Email Addresses

All student email addresses have been uploaded to the District system but are still inactive at this point. Steve is ready to send a letter to parents of students in 6th-12th grades outlining the new system. He will provide time for parent feedback if any before going live with the new communication initiative. It was also recommended that Board Members be issued email addresses for transparency's sake.

New Student Clubs

Deirdre d'Albertis raised the question of how best to address parents with concerns over the development of new clubs. In some years, it has been possible to keep "placeholder" money in our budget to allow for new clubs during the year. In our current budgetary climate, we will not be able to set aside monies for clubs as yet undetermined. In the past year, there have been a large number of club requests. In an effort to outline the process, Ed Davenport has developed and written the procedure to give students who approach him with these requests. This process will also be included in next year's student handbook and on the District Website.

Joe shared that, though our budget may not allow for additional clubs, it is possible for non-profit groups who hold their own certificate of insurance to sponsor student clubs. There is precedent for this type of club in the Interact Club and Rhinebeck Soccer League which are able to use school grounds for meetings and practices but are independent of the school and the school's budget.

Submitted by: Laura Schulkind