

CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MINUTES
October 30, 2015

Attendance: Laura Schulkind, Deirdre d'Albertis, Rick Walker, Joe Phelan, Marvin Kreps and invited guest, Ed Davenport.

Electives at RHS

Dr. Davenport met with the committee to share his perspective on the wide range of electives now being offered at the high school. He brought enrollment data from this year and the five years previous (not including the many AP and honors courses that may be counted technically as electives). Electives, broadly speaking, are courses that students take for personal interest or enrichment; they are not required by the state or the school in order to graduate. What trends can we see? As Rick pointed out, we have spent a lot of time on the core offerings this year and last—it is good to understand this part of the district's curriculum as well.

As a general trend we see tremendous interest in Psychology. Art courses tend to be smaller; there may be some thought given to creating different pathways to more specialized offerings in the art department. Clubs and electives might be more closely connected and some teachers have expressed interest in making such connections explicit.

Dr. Davenport outlined the extremely complex task of creating a master schedule each year for the high school. He pointed with some pride to the school's attempt creatively to address conflicts whenever possible, stating that guidance has been flexible in accommodating student requests. With the first run of scheduling about 65% of students are set. That means that many requests are received and that many changes to the initial schedule are in fact made. "Singleton" (one section) courses with the highest level of demand are scheduled first. Of course there are always students who are frustrated in their attempt to take all the courses they desire. Again, guidance tries to find solutions. Language faculty, for instance, have agreed to allow students to attend every other day through a half credit course so as not to have to abandon Spanish or French due to schedule conflicts. Late requests are harder to accommodate once the master schedule is up and running.

Members of the committee noted that this process is not well understood by parents. The fact that the schedule is tailored each year around student demand is worth communicating widely. Being driven by student requests makes the master schedule hard to predict from year to year. Students are known only by their ID numbers as this process unfolds, not by names. No student receives preferential treatment, in other words. The schedule is predicated and built upon identifying the fewest number of conflicts for the good of all.

There was some discussion of AP courses and how the open or modified open enrollment system functions in Rhinebeck, as well as courses that MAY be added at some point in the future. Deirdre asked about exploring the option of APs organized in tandem with nearby schools; this is something that BOCES, in theory, should be able to provide to all districts in our county. Demand has remained high and consistent in Rhinebeck High School for AP coursework. Close to 180 AP exams are administered each year.

This year's junior class will be the first to graduate under new requirement that students must successfully complete four years of both math and science.

Following on our discussion, Dr. Davenport departed with a promise to include specific details about construction of the master schedule in his January or February newsletter home to parents.

Update on BMS Computer Lab

Marvin reported that Laurie (sp?) Keating just completed a day-long visit to BMS. Progress with the curriculum for the new lab has been interrupted by the MAPP testing that was conducted in that space (two weeks of instruction time lost). The room itself is nearly finished, wiring is being completed. Curriculum materials have been set up correctly and are aligned. The next "big lift" will be to get the "container" projects connected to the curriculum. Keating will return in late November or early December to work with faculty on these challenges. Adherence to best practices is, as Marvin puts it, "a work in progress." We are making measured steps towards the goal. Keating is helping our teachers to create "a tech rich experience" phase by phase this year—due to a late start with the grant itself, Marvin reminded us, this is to be expected. There have been glitches, an expected challenge with new technology. Reliability is much higher now (in terms of stability of the system) and our hard-working tech staff has become ever more rapid in responding to calls for support in the classroom. Teaching TO the problems that arise with technology is part of the point—empowering teachers and students to "build capacity" is crucial. Marvin expects to keep the process moving while managing expectations even as the district works to "deliver what was promised."

Agenda

- How can this committee interface most productively with CDEP?
- Possibility of cross-district planning with BOCES (Dr. Hooley will be visiting the board soon)
- In an extremely austere fiscal climate, how can the district preserve the academic program? Are there cooperative arrangements/practices that could be tried in Rhinebeck?

Next Meeting (subject to change): November 17

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d'Albertis