

Long Range Planning Committee Meeting Minutes

July 10, 2017

Attendees: Deirdre d'Albertis, Diane Lyons, Laura Schulkind, Joe Phelan, Tom Burnell

Invited Guest: John Kemnitzer

The committee invited John Kemnitzer to join us and share the organizational structure of the Middle School. To be sure, BMS is directly affected by shifts in both the elementary and high schools and has been working to make adjustments in teaching assignments to meet the needs of incoming and rising students. In many respects, due to teacher certification and tenure areas, re-assigning staff becomes more problematic as class sizes shrink. With the most recent retirement in BMS English, John notes that his teaching staff is certified in 7th-12th grades with the appropriate extension for 6th grade (elementary) instruction.

Planning in secondary science is most difficult as different certifications and seniority preclude shifting teachers from one grade to another. While there is no particular certification requirement for middle school science, our teachers tend to specialize in living environment. With the "Next Gen" Science standards due to come online in the next year or so, planning becomes that much more complicated as subject areas will shift within grade levels.

John and Ed Davenport have already begun preliminary discussions about the future structure of the MS and HS as the first wave of smaller class sizes hits the High School in the 2017-18 school year. They have begun imagining how teachers might be required to cover multiple grade levels in the future. There are inherent structural problems with sharing staff across the 2 schools. Of greatest concern to John is the loss of the Middle School identity. Special programming like Madagascar Day and Artists in Action day are special to BMS. Currently RHS has to make accommodations for that special scheduling. When teachers at BMS are teaching RHS classes, these opportunities would be limited as high school students would be adversely affected by absent teachers.

The committee asked John about the difference between a Middle School philosophy and a Junior High School model of K-6 elementary, 7-8 Jr. HS, and 9-12 HS. John explained that Rhinebeck's philosophy of working through pro-social skills with a whole child approach, especially in 6th grade prior to the transition and rigor of the 7th grade curriculum has been a strong part of Bulkeley's success. At the middle school level, teachers are able to work in an interdisciplinary fashion with cross-subject area exploration. Once students reach the high school, Regents requirements become a limiting factor. It will be important in all of our planning to keep our ability to stay responsive to student development in mind. If we create different kinds of transitions for students in any grade level, the process needs to be considered thoughtfully.

As the smaller class sizes begin moving up into the High School, the master schedules for both schools will be affected as we will need fewer sections of particular courses. Over the last 3 years, opportunities have risen to provide additional supports at both the Middle and High Schools that previously had not been available. Though it was a stop gap measure, it has been good for kids. John reported that, this year, Rhinebeck had the fewest number of failing or at risk 7th and 8th graders he can remember. He attributes this success largely to the core teachers working in conjunction with AIS sections.

John outlined each core subject and the potential flexibility within classes. Currently, middle school math continues to be a circular curriculum with the exception of 8th grade accelerated math. So too, Social Studies classes are relatively flexible. In ELA, there is very little content coordination 7 through 12, but the middle and high school english departments are working closely on skill development. The middle

school Tech class has benefited from the smaller class sizes as it is such hands on content. In the earlier GTT years, classes were beyond “comfortable” capacity. Music and Band classes will need to be considered carefully in the coming year as the smaller classes dilute robust participation. Language requires a proficiency exam at the end of 8th grade though many students accelerate into high school Language I in 8th grade.

The committee had many more questions for John and asked that he join us again after we’d had the opportunity to meet with Ed Davenport. He is happy to provide any information we’d like and suggested that it might be beneficial to have a joint meeting with Ed and John to share thoughts on our future needs.

Next meeting: July 31,2017

Invited Guest: Ed Davenport

Respectfully Submitted by Laura Schulkind