

School Site Leadership Team Minutes

January 9, 2013

Arcadia High School

Room C1

Chairperson: Oliver Beckwith obeckwith@ausd.net

Members Present: Oliver Beckwith, Julianne Curry, Winnie Chin, Vania Fong, Caroline Lefever, Alex Ye, Vicky Stiles, Niroom Dev, Francisca Araiza-Kasama, Robert Ilgenfritz, John Tung, Catherine Merel, Brent Forsee, Michael Feraco-Eberle, Christa Heinrich-Josteis, Robin Neuwirth-Bishop

Guests: Kathy Heintzman, Kathy Yamane, Terri Darr, Jessica Summers, Sgt. Wally Ashby (APD), Detective Jason Davis (APD)

Minutes from December were distributed via email, approved by consensus and posted by Alex Ye.

Meeting called to order: 3:06pm

3:06-3:11: Visit from a Medal of Honor Winner (Oliver Beckwith)

Chris Marston has used his military connections to invite a Medal of Honor winner to speak. We didn't want to upset the schedule of the whole school, but we did want to make it available for as many classes as possible. Scheduling it for the Lecture Hall; if it garners increasing interest, we may examine availability for the Performing Arts Center, but it's a very big space if you have limited numbers of people Friday, February 8th, roughly around 3rd and 4th periods; the speaker won't just be stopping at AHS, so as we tighten up the scheduling we'll have a better idea of when he'll speak.

3:11-3:15: Construction – Effects on Foot Travel, etc. (Oliver Beckwith)

Students: Appreciate that the passageway near the cafeteria has been widened a bit, and that students are able to walk on the sidewalk now. Some teachers are being a little flexible re: tardy policy in the early going. Some of Julieanne's students are having a bit of difficulty adjusting to the changes, but she was able to get 100% on-time attendance today. Everyone's adjusting to the routing, but it does seem to be a little faster than before already – less of a bottleneck effect.

3:15- 4:14 Safety of Students and Teachers at School Sites (Oliver Beckwith & Kathy Heintzman)

Kathy Heintzman: Over the years, certainly nationally, we've had problems with school safety. In recent years, we've had specific events of safety concerns that are troubling – me personally, but other teachers as well – and it's come to our attention that we may need to pursue specific policy adjustments. I'd like to have a conversation about these topics today.

There have been threats – student threats towards teachers – I've been involved in one of them, where one of my students had a disturbing incident in class. Part of the lockdown this year was a specific threat pertaining to a teacher. Miss Bishop, who's here today, is currently dealing with a student who's made threats against her. There are gaps in the system that limit our ability to address these issues in ways that are more comprehensive in terms of safety for everyone, and it

frustrates everyone – teachers, admins, and parents. We all have the best intentions, and we all want what’s best for all involved, so how do we get there? How do we deal with these limitations and still approach these problems productively? I think this is a community problem and community concern, so I think we need to pursue solutions together

Francisca Araiza-Kasama: I’m trying to clarify – are we trying to address safety of teachers or the safety of students?

Oliver Beckwith: I think there’s a connection.

Francisca Araiza-Kasama: Not necessarily – one can be addressed more directly, versus an ephemeral threat to students. For example, a person who was obviously mentally not there – we have an open campus, and the gentleman was talking to himself, disheveled, while students walked by – I warned a young woman who wasn’t attentive away from him, called admin, and didn’t get any response. A student that we know about making threats, that can be dealt with in a different manner. But those types of threats are distinct.

Oliver Beckwith: To clarify, we’re trying to look at the big picture – certainly not excluding what you just mentioned. We’re trying to figure out how to fix these issues – physical issues that could possibly be a pretty simple fix.

Kathy Heintzman: The porousness of the campus is being compounded by students now walking on sidewalks...

Dr. Forsee: When we talk about security and safety...first, I want to be clear: I speak as a parent, then as a principal. My first thought every day is the safety and security of the campus, the 3600 students, and the over 200 staff. First and foremost, our security depends on all of us making good decisions and building strong relationships and connections – those things lead to a flow of information, which can allow us to take action in advance of bigger risks. While there are procedural things we can look at and get better at, first and foremost we need to foster relationships between kids and kids, and kids and adults that can make this campus safer. I think we have tremendous students – just to see how they’ve adapted to construction is a testament to you – and they come from an excellent community of parents who care. They’re watched over by an incredible staff who responds immediately to what we communicate. But you’re right – we do have a porous campus, we do have tons of gates.

It’s a school, not a prison, and thus there’s always some vulnerability. But you also have to manage what makes our culture great – the percussion kids getting to go outside through those access points and use the streets, for example. I think these tragedies, as sad and painful as they are, give us a chance to step back and honestly reevaluate how we can be better. But it can’t just be 5-6 administrators or a group of teachers – it has to be a collective effort, focused on relationships and communication.

Terri Darr: Ditto what Dr. Forsee said regarding the work environment – we’re truly blessed. I’ve worked in South L.A., and it was scary; I’ve worked in Pasadena, and they had issues too

We are the best school I've worked at, but there are issues I can see while working in support services that we need to address. Parents are using PowerSchool as a real-time record of where their children are, and it just doesn't work. We all need to take attendance in the first ten minutes – we lose so much time calling administrators, looking for children, and it can be a security issue. So many of our calls are from parents who are trying to check to make sure that, and please make sure that your phone is working – you have to answer the phone if it rings, too! We can't keep calling security to go find someone when we need them monitoring a porous, construction-disrupted campus. And why let kids out of rooms without hall passes? Are we using Keith's restroom sheet?

Jessica Summers: Can we use anything as a hall pass?

Dr. Forsee: We won't solve details today...

Kathy Heintzman: Can we bring this up at a staff meeting? This feels like it's getting a little hijacked...

Terri Darr: It's just that we need to know where our kids are at all times, and following procedures allows us to do that.

Dr. Forsee: On a macro scale, you mentioned coming up with policies – we can have procedures on paper that'll make us the safest school in the country...but if people don't follow them, it won't matter. It still comes down to collective buy-in, and being willing to do the right thing even if it's somewhat inconvenient.

Robin Neuwirth-Bishop: I want to give you a really brief summary. I haven't been at school because a student wanted to kill me, himself, and his parents. He's explained that he's a Satanist, that he hates me because I'm Jewish, and that he posted Anti-Semitic things on his Facebook page. I'm afraid for my safety, for my students' safety, and for this boy – I want him to get well. He's a victim, in many ways, just as I am, and we don't really have a system in place to help him. The only way we're going to be safe is if we can help people like him.

The police are doing an incredible job, Dr. Forsee is doing an incredible job, and the administrators are working hard, but I was scared to walk from my car here. There are a lot of kids at our campus who need help, who are under incredible pressure, and we sometimes don't like to focus on that because it's uncomfortable to consider.

Dr. Forsee: We like to think that we're problem-solvers, but too few times do we ask (*gestures to students*) what you need

Vania Fong: I'm shocked one of us would do that...

Caroline Lefever: It's sort of the school gossip right now, although I don't know the specifics of what happened with Ms. Bishop...

Dr. Forsee: Neither can we. What we're saying is, how do we solve the next thing before it happens?

Robin Neuwirth-Bishop: Expelling him doesn't solve the larger problem.

Forsee: We can go away and feel good for doing something, but if we don't address the underlying issues, we're wasting time. So we might as well grab it by the teeth and talk about it. But we need to hear from you guys. You know there are kids who from time to time need help or don't know where to turn. What do you need?

Vania Fong: It's hard to feel good about ourselves if our parents don't know how to deal with what we're facing.

Alex Ye: A lot of times, I wouldn't want to talk to my friends about something or another adult – we just don't know what to do – I just found out last year that we had a school psychiatrist, and I'm a senior now.

Kathy Heintzman: My students tell me that all the time.

Dr. Forsee: Be very honest, and you're speaking to me – feel comfortable: Do you feel adults are approachable?

Caroline Lefever: No.

Alex Ye: Not really.

Dr. Forsee: For all on campus?

Alex Ye: Probably not. I wouldn't go up to a teacher and just talk. There are some I would speak with, but otherwise...

Niroo Dev: What I'm hearing is that you wouldn't go to a teacher and talk to them if you have a problem. Is that right?

Alex Ye: It depends on the nature of what you're facing.

Dr. Forsee: Let me share something: I'm stunned by the lack of complaints I get from students. Which sounds crazy – you want more complaints? It's that I want to know the real deal – not the façade of *Oh, it's great* if it's not. If you're having a bad week, we need to make sure we have someone you can talk to – about anything. We don't have gates high enough or locks strong enough to make us safe without that. They haven't been built. Our relationships keep us safe. If something's going, you need to feel comfortable talking to us.

Francisca Araiza-Kasama: I'm sorry, but I have a child who comes home telling me about teachers complaining about this and that – having to buy supplies, class sizes. None of her teachers are approachable, and she is new to the district. It pains me to say it, but there is no one

she can approach and she is under tremendous pressure. She's coming from a school of 140 to a school of 4000. She calls it, what – a “Backpack-to-Backpack Highway” – every time she hears the short bell, she thinks it's going to be another lockdown. And my nieces and nephews will tell me the same thing – they don't feel close to their teachers.

Oliver Beckwith: I feel like I have good relationships with my students – but I have 180 of them. How close can you get? How much individual time do you have? 54 minutes, 38 students – you can sometimes build close relationships, but it takes time. Class size is part of it – we used to have 28 to 30 instead of 38.

Francisca Araiza-Kasama: I agree. I tell them if you want closeness, you need to participate in after-school activities, use e-mail, etc. But it's very difficult to hear it as a parent. Please don't take it as an indictment, but hearing about cash limitations and time limitations, after all is said and done...how can I as a parent help, make it easier, contribute, other than keeping my mouth closed and supporting the teachers and telling my daughter to ask questions and do her homework?

Dr. Forsee: This isn't an indictment of anyone. We're a big school. We can't get around the fact that we're going to be really good at things in pockets and really bad at things in pockets. It's the nature of being big. But it's not about going from bad to perfect – it's about making the good pockets bigger and the bad pockets smaller. How we do that...I have ideas, but I'm one person. It takes everyone being on board and being willing to do things that don't come naturally. I can't just talk to the kids who bond with me naturally – I have to go out of my way to talk to the kids who look like they need help. I need to get better at that. And then, when you have 180 kids, your priority is to educate them. Now we're talking about going beyond that, and that's hard, but we have to find ways to do it manageably.

How do we communicate effectively? And piggybacking on what Robin said – we have disciplinary resources, but she's right – it doesn't necessarily solve the problem.

Robin Neuwirth-Bishop: How do we move beyond that?

Oliver Beckwith: The ATA union contract, section 15.1, deals with the need for teachers to be safe in the classroom. Currently we have some safety issues. Some of the doors in A-Building and in the science building need to be locked from the outside – how can that be safe for staff members during a lockdown?

Dr. Forsee: I'm not comfortable with that – none of us are – so it's a matter of solving it as quickly as possible. I went to a couple A-building classrooms myself to see it, and we've taken action to get it resolved – it is a priority of mine.

Oliver Beckwith: Athletic teachers keep running into people wandering around on that end of the campus. When the construction ends, it'll be harder to gain entry, but enclosing the school around the field will take 2 to 3 years. What do we do until then?

Dr. Forsee: With fencing – let’s be honest, this school’s accessible anywhere. There are a lot of people with keys to the gates. We’re making a concerted effort to lock those gates, but the gates get unlocked during the day. Who’s unlocking them? If you open a gate, you need to close that gate, and that needs to be an expectation of everyone. *I’m* not going out there and opening the gates. It can’t be up to Keith and a few proctors to do that multiple times a day.

Kathy Heintzman: I’d like to hear from law enforcement

Officer Ashby: I have an office here on campus, so I work closely with Dean Kerney and Vice Principal John Finn. Any time there’s a matter that needs police resources, my office is contacted. Without sounding adversarial to this, I have a different standpoint. I don’t see the collective wheel is broken, and I think we’re trying to reinvent it. The nature of the beast is this: it’s a public campus. There are access points where you just don’t have gates. You’re never going to build moats. What keeps us safe are the eyes and ears on campus. In my experience, it’s always been students communicating with faculty and administrators, who then contact us. Sometimes the process takes a day, or a lockdown, or taking a student in, maybe making an arrest...

I think if the students feel comfortable talking to authorities, the process holds. It’s a different generation – they’re much more used to hiding in anonymity. They become brazen and bold in what they communicate. They can create personas that are not theirs. We have to sift through and decipher what kids are putting out versus what is credible – is this threat of a bomb, possession, fight after school, credible? And I think our process is great because we have taken those steps – we’ve implemented those communication bridges, and that’s what helps keep our schools safe. I don’t think our processes are broken.

Dr. Forsee: There are different levels – law enforcement may or may not take action – the thresholds are different – and we still may. Sometimes, Wally will bring it to us. That collaborative relationship is important, but we do have different standards.

Officer Davis: First and foremost, safety: We’re doing everything that we can to make sure that all students and all faculty on all campus are safe. We look at credibility of threats – we deal with that immediately, and there’s a systematic approach to the way we do things. We’re not going to let something sneak by – that’s not what we do. Students can’t learn in an environment where they aren’t safe, but teachers can’t teach if they don’t feel safe.

I think this is a time, nationally, when I think teachers, students, parents, need to have more collaborative efforts simply to keep ourselves safe – it’s not simple, but it kind of is. We have 4000 sets of eyes; if someone knows something, we need to know where and when to act. We have to find the teachers and administrators students are comfortable with and work with them. This is a time for us to all change. How do we do what’s best for the high school, for the district? What can we do collaboratively? All the way up to the superintendent.

Logistically, we just can’t take huge steps – laws, money, etc. But we can take a lot of little steps and look back in 6 months to realize that we’ve come far. We need to do it continuously, too – don’t lose focus when the events aren’t immediate. We will work with anybody and everyone with this. Let’s look at lockdown drills, at kids who don’t get to a room on time, at how we lock

doors – let’s go over this stuff. Let’s examine whether the system is adequate, really. We truly need to seize the moment. We can’t let it pass.

Kathy Heintzman: Perhaps we can regroup, potentially talk about a task force – I would be happy to volunteer, for next time.

Oliver Beckwith: There’s a lot we’ve discussed today, and a lot to process. Let’s keep the communication doors open – Dr. Forsee will make time for anybody and everybody.

Kathy Heintzman (*to students*): You guys are fabulous, but you’re the kind of kids who come to SSLT meetings. You’re leaders on things like this. We need a broader sample of students as we move forward. Years ago we used to have diversity summits where all types of students got together.

Julianne Curry: A suggestion: we could go back to something in the past that was successful, like Peer Counseling, where students were trained...look at the nature of teenage life. They don’t necessarily go to elders, parents, teachers – they go to their friends. Those counselors were trained to know when there was a problem that needed to be taken to an adult. We used to get a lot of information on our struggling kids this way, and we need a similar avenue now.

Dr. Forsee: Thank you to everyone for your professionalism, and the way we discussed a difficult topic.

ACTION ITEMS: NEXT MEETING

- Pending...

Oliver Beckwith adjourned meeting at 4:14pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Michael Feraco-Eberle
Secretary, SSLT