

School Site Leadership Team Minutes

February 13, 2013
Arcadia High School
Room C1

Chairperson: Oliver Beckwith obeckwith@ausd.net

Members Present: Oliver Beckwith, Winnie Chin, Vania Fong, Caroline Lefever, Alex Ye, Vicky Stiles, Niroo Dev, Ginger Stemnock, Catherine Merel, Brent Forsee, Michael Feraco-Eberle, Christa Heinrich-Josteis, Linda Mackessy, Julianne Curry, Robert Ilgenfritz, Terri Darr

Guests: Kathy Heintzman, Kim Sobieck, Kathy Yamane (PTA President), Lori Philippi (School Board Member), Kay Kinsler (School Board Member)

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

Meeting called to order: 3:09pm

3:09-3:14 - WASC Updates Discussion (Brent Forsee)

Forsee: Part of our school plan was presented to the Board last night.

Merel: I discussed with the Board the fact that we're still under the Action Plan from three years ago; we've had three goals, and we've been updating our progress each year. Addressing our D/F rate, making sure our students are connected and balanced, and focusing on students who entered the district after 5th grade. I discussed our Latino/Hispanic task force that we started this year, as well as our AVID and Link Crew programs – all of these help us make progress towards our goals. There are many action steps and tasks under each goal; we've decided to do some of them, but not all of them. That said, we still have a lot to do before our next WASC report and review. I wanted to re-state that this is what's really driving our efforts as a school.

Beckwith: Perhaps we could meet and have discussions about specific areas? "Agendize" it for action, etc.; we need to start putting this on the radar.

Forsee: We do from time to time when issues come up, but this truly is what moves us forward, and it needs to be a focus.

Beckwith: I think we're making progress.

3:14-3:20 – ASB Poster Policy Change (Ginger Stemnock)

Stemnock: Our campus has undergone a number of significant changes in the wake of construction. After collecting the kids' observations, adults' observations, etc., we got together in ASB and reviewed our posting policy. For example, there are certain areas where even "friendly" blue tape can become unfriendly (if you leave its adhesive in the sun for a long time, bad things happen, etc.). We need to amend the policy to refer to the PAC – we don't want to post in the PAC. We also took away the line that says "this is a tape-free campus" and made the type of tape you can use clearer. ASB has approved the revised policy, and we also presented it at House of Reps so that students could chime in – elections are coming up, and it'll affect them. We got no feedback – actually, we got an OK – so this is the last body we need to present it to before taking it back to AC on Friday. And we're open to suggestions – one we heard was about the brickwork, and we decided that we're not allowed to post on brickwork (i.e. Lecture Hall).

Beckwith: I've noticed some freestanding structures in the pathways; is that going to increase? Will that become an obstruction?

Stemnock: No – hopefully not...

Tung: You're talking about the wooden posts? Those are retained by the school site – they'd (students or groups) have to have permission to get them...

Beckwith: I was noticing things like the theater posting.

Tung: Yeah, those are approved by ASB.

Stemnock: Mr. Volpe adds that into his posting, gets it approved, makes sure it doesn't obstruct the few pathways we have left...and we've recommended that he use the showcase as an alternative.

SSLT: Approves altered regulations by consensus. We will add it to the election code as well.

3:20-4:28 – Arcadia High and School Safety (Oliver Beckwith)

Text from PowerPoint (“Arcadia High and School Safety”)

Recap

January's meeting brought some issues to light involving different aspects of school safety. Recent events in the nation, our state and at our school have heightened awareness that schools should pay attention to safety issues. In the past month I have met with teachers, classified personnel, students, parents, administrators, and counselors. I also spoke to an FBI agent in Washington, D.C.; all groups bring their own perspectives and concerns, all are concerned with the safety of our school. What are the issues, and what can be done?

Why is SSLT Focusing on School Safety?

SSLT's Mission is to “Advise the administration and the school staff regarding local school related real and perceived needs, issues and problems.” SSLT must also “Monitor and assess school policies and their implementation.” SSLT is responsible to advise administration and staff about School Safety; we should assess school policies regarding School Safety as well.

Question: How Safe Are We?

Good News: Despite the excess media coverage of the Sandyhook event and others, the likelihood of this type of event occurring here, or at any school, is extremely low.

“Although even one school homicide is too many, an event that affects an average of 8.58 schools out of 119,000 means that the average school can expect a student-perpetrated homicide about once every 13,870 years (119,000 divided by 8.58; Dewey Cornell, 2006).”

Source: Cornell, Dewey. (2006). School violence: Fears versus facts. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Nuts and Bolts

Arcadia High is a wide-open campus. Some doors, even on our new buildings, do not lock from the inside. AUSD is aware and is moving to fix this, but it is a district-wide issue with hundreds of potential doors to fix. There is no timeline as of yet. Fencing around the school is not likely to be completed for a couple of years, but fencing would not stop someone determined to enter the school.

School Safety – The Best Answer

From the January SSLT Meeting:

“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.”

Det. Jason Davis, Arcadia P.D.

Parents, Politicians, and AUSD

Parents have a strong desire to see their children become educated and successful, so they spend more money and move to Arcadia with very high expectations for their children. A culture has developed that sometimes involves putting pressure on children for grades. **Students** also pressure each other and measure their self-worth through grade attainment as a part of the culture.

Politicians promise education reform – laws passed which change the requirements for school districts. **School Districts** like **Arcadia USD**, feeling pressure from politicians, often with unfunded mandates, go into “survival mode,” and this puts pressure on teachers. In the past 6 years AUSD has had reduced funding, pink slips, and RIF’s.

Administrators, Classified, and Counselors

Administrators can sometimes feel frustrated with the actions of some teachers who do not always act in the best interest of students.

Classified Personnel have been subject to cutbacks and are working hard to keep the school safe.

Proctors have a hard time overseeing a large school, and **Attendance** personnel have a far more difficult job when teachers do not take attendance in class. **Counselors** are available to help students who are feeling stressed out but they too have been subjected to cutbacks.

Teachers Under Pressure

Teachers feel stressed with ever-increasing demands on what they do in the classroom; pressure is put on students to perform at higher and higher academic levels (ex. 900 API goal @ AHS).

Some Teacher Responses:

1. Acting territorial
2. A negative classroom environment
3. Opposing any change
4. Fearing another pink slip, teachers may be giving too little or too much work; the latter tends to keep students up until all hours of the night.
5. Teachers sometimes feel unsupported by administrators.
6. Classroom issues: Quantity vs. Quality and communication issues.

Students Under Pressure

Students feel pressure to succeed from parents, fellow students, and teachers. Based on Oliver’s conversations with students a week before finals.

The Students respond... How?

- No sleep or social life.
- Bottling up their emotions.
- Feeling like a failure.
- Turning to drugs to stay awake.

- Cutting and other forms of self-abuse.
- Depression and/or suicidal thoughts.
- Acting out – Facebook postings and threats which result in lockdowns and police investigations.

So, what can be done to make this situation better?

Are We Missing Something?

9 Characteristics of High Performing Schools

1. A clear and shared focus.
2. High standards and expectations for all students.
3. Effective school leadership.
4. High levels of collaboration and communication.
5. Curriculum, instruction and assessments aligned with state standards.
6. Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching.
7. Focused professional development.
8. A supportive learning environment.
9. High levels of parent and community involvement.

Source: <http://www.k12.wa.us/Research/pubdocs/pdf/9characteristicsRresourceList.pdf>

AUSD Policies: Communication

Go to the Staff Portal

Click on GAMUT

Username: guest Password: policy

Oliver Beckwith: Check it out!!

“We don’t need to change policy. We need a change of heart.”

Some Recommendations

We must work on making a better classroom environment for our students. Communication and collaboration will help.

Find ways for students to handle pressures in appropriate ways. We have some good programs like Link Crew but these do not always reach the students who need it most.

All stakeholders, i.e. administrators, teachers, counselors, classified, and students, must work on better collaboration and communication with each other to create a safer environment for everyone.

Any other ideas?

Discussion:

Darr: I don’t think any organization can collaborate enough. We’re a dynamic entity, with a lot of both staff and student changes. Our counseling staff does a fantastic job of reaching out to new students, scheduling parent orientations, etc. – the focus of that meeting has concerned the academic side of becoming a ninth-grader, but maybe a greater focus from student services could help take the attitudes of incoming ninth-graders into account. I could probably tell you who’d on the D/F list just from looking at who’s always in the office with Mary and me! Parents need to understand not just what our policies are, but how they impact their child’s well-being at our school.

We hand out syllabi – why not put in things like “Tardy sweeps x3 will do _____ to your child’s performance” to underscore the importance of their child’s presence in class? If we don’t set the tone with our 9th-graders, it’ll be lost on them when they’re juniors and seniors. If we can get on the same page with respect to the little things, we can make a difference in how kids treat attendance and move from there.

Heintzman: While I completely agree that these issues – these macro issues – are vital, I think that we do need direct policy to deal with things like what’s happening now with our colleague. I think we can have clear policies that are district-wide – that’s critical, because – for example – it’s difficult for Brent to make a site-based decision when the district can’t agree on how to respond, or when district policies are unclear.

I think it would be hugely helpful for the Board and Dr. Shawn to put together things of that nature. We have an increasingly violent society with gaps in our mental health-care system, and a population of students under tremendous stress who may not be getting the help that they need – it’s an increasing problem. All I can tell you is that this isn’t going to get better anytime soon – it’ll probably get worse. Parents are having a meeting at Baldwin Stocker tonight, especially in the wake of the “bullet at the elementary school” incident.

And there’s something that our generation is sort of blind to: our students can think of these incidents as having a “performance aspect,” and as something they can get away with. The question becomes: in this gap between protecting a student’s right to an education and protecting other students and teachers, what do you do? Shouldn’t we have specific policies, contracts – we have tardy contracts, so can’t we have threat contracts? Why can’t we monitor these students and *make sure* they get the help they need? I know the district is concerned with legalities, and that things aren’t clear-cut and are therefore difficult. But I think we need to look here first as well as at the macro issues.

Beckwith: If a teacher doesn’t know that we have a policy, they don’t know how to report something; if they don’t know how to identify warning signs – that’s a communication issue. Maybe administrators could do a bit more to let teachers know what to do in certain situations, offer guidance in advance – we do, in fact, have a threat assessment policy.

Forsee: I think that what Kathy’s referring to is more a protocol than a policy...

Heintzman: And any term is fine. If there’s a protocol, a procedure – I agree, Oliver, we need communication, and if we have it we can agree to follow the same guidelines with more information. We can spread awareness any number of ways – via in-service, during conference periods, and so on. I just get concerned that in the face of some event, an administrator wouldn’t be sure how to respond or react, and in that space something horrible could happen. That worries me, and frankly that isn’t something where administrators should ever be forced into those positions.

Forsee: I want to say, publicly, that I feel very supported by our district and our board. Now, a formal protocol can be helpful but also inhibitive. Protocols generally involve going through specific steps (interviews, etc.). In that instance, that takes time – While you’re doing that, the possible threat is not being addressed.

We keep going back to lockdowns, but: I would hate to get something and say, “Wait, we need to run this through a threat protocol to determine whether this is _____” before we act. I would rather err on the side of acting. That’s not to say protocols can’t be useful – particularly in a debrief format. Personally, I don’t think a piece of paper makes you safer...but could there be guidelines? Yes. It depends on the nature of the threat, and that takes a call – I don’t know that a protocol speeds up that response. Is there something I

haven't seen that could be useful? Maybe. The ones I've seen have been cumbersome and take a lot of time. What do we do with the individual while we're assessing the threat?

Beckwith: Would it be possible for administrators here to share with us something – perhaps about the general guidelines that you would use to assess a threat?

Forsee: What kind of threat?

Dev: What about the one you just had?

Forsee: When I am aware of a threat, I take immediate action. The big inhibitor here is not protocol – and I'm fairly new here, so maybe that factors – but communication. I think communication inhibits the fluidity of many situations. We can have the best protocols in the world, but they're worthless without communication and trust. I don't want you to leave thinking I'm opposed – Think of it like a wrench, a tool. Put it in the hands of a master craftsman, you can get a house.

Heintzman: I'm not suggesting that we separate the two. I think we have to start somewhere – we can invent the wheel here, we don't have to use the cumbersome ones you've seen. I think we can form some in committee that will give us a place to start and preserve fluidity of response.

Forsee: I'd absolutely support that. But as I've said time and again, as soon as a threat is communicated, we act immediately. If we don't have enough information, we don't – we can't – act. If it seems like we're not reacting out of a lack of caring or concern, come talk to me – it's never about that. In the worst-case scenarios, we're all here together – we can almost strip the titles away, because all we'd have is each other.

Beckwith: I was going to ask, “Well, why don't we just e-mail the school?” – now I realize it's going out in the minutes. I was silently steaming yesterday when numerous people at the staff meeting claimed they hadn't heard anything about the issue – we sent out the minutes! That's part of the communication problem – we all know we can send an e-mail out, but we all get a lot of e-mail, and sometimes we respond to e-mail like triage.

Forsee: Kathy and I get more accomplished in a two-minute conversation at bowling than in 20-30 e-mails. However, we have to commit to increase our communication – face-to-face, over the phone, collaboration.

Dev: As a parent, I feel like we are both the key to a solution and the root of the problem. We need to be able to talk about parents – what are they doing that's affecting the school? How can we help them? – openly, and I'm not sure we can right now.

Beckwith: We can certainly talk about those things, and deal with those issues as well. Vicky Stiles sent me something interesting from Punahou school in Hawaii – although the resources at other high-performing private schools versus our own are different – and I'll send it to the rest of SSLT and our guests as well. Maybe we can hammer some things out when we come back – find a way to help our kids.

And it comes back to WASC – we said we need kids to feel more connected, and they're less likely to do these things voluntarily in a place where they feel connected.

Merel: I wanted to say for the benefit of students and parents here that a threat is like a fire alarm – we drop everything and look at what's happening. We aren't standing around – I feel like there is a

procedure, because we immediately try to ensure the safety of our students. Our team is absolutely clear about that – it’s our first priority as a school.

Heintzman: Oh, we know you’re doing that – when the threat is clear and immediate, you’re on it. It’s for things like a Facebook page – out of our purview, vile and horrifying – that we don’t have specific guidelines for response. We’ve had a rash of incidents, both actual violence and threats, and there’s so much psychological and emotional bullying – it’s a giant issue, and it feels like we just aren’t able to deal with those very real and immediate threats that go beyond the idea of the symbolic fire-drill episodes. They’re things that are new to us.

Forsee: The nature of an investigation is that you tend to get pieces of info, and then when you get to the end, you think, “Well, if I’d known all of that…” but you usually don’t, and sometimes it gets murky.

Heintzman: Right, but my own experiences last spring – I wasn’t even told about it last year, and I had to seek out the information, I had to talk to other people, there were huge communication gaps that left me feeling incredibly nervous and unsafe. I felt better when I knew that the parents were on the ball, but I honestly felt I wasn’t being given information that could’ve helped me keep myself safe and my kids safe. That can’t happen.

Forsee: Kids? You haven’t said a word…we all exist here because of you guys.

Lefever: I’m sure that someone like my mother doesn’t know something like this is happening; does the law prevent us from saying that it is?

Forsee: In a perfect world, there would be no gray areas…

Dev: If someone brings a knife, you can’t say anything?

Forsee: To the whole community?

Lefever: The thing that happened with Miss Bishop, information spread fast and kids knew right away – if the school took the initiative to get the information about things like this out there to the community, it might help.

Beckwith: I think some students, if there’s an issue, would feel better talking to specific teachers - but that’s something we could help with as professionals, raising awareness that we’re available even with our kids.

Heintzman: I think this is a good point – that students know things, but it’s not public, it’s under-the-radar. I think if it’s a rumor all the students know anyway, why not make it more transparent? Why not bring it out into the light of day and discuss it?

Lefever: Yeah – while some people know, it might not be the right people knowing – the people being targeted might not know.

Additional:

Darr: We’re supposed to have seven teachers on SSLT. We don’t have Robin…

Beckwith: I would hope that Robin feels good enough soon to come back. I’m a history guy and this reminds me of when Charles Sumner was absent from the Senate in the Civil War era. I don’t feel

comfortable filling that seat; I'd rather leave that seat empty. It's appropriate. You can disagree with me, but we still make quorum as long as we all show up.

ACTION ITEMS: NEXT MEETING

- Pending...

Oliver Beckwith adjourned meeting at 4:28pm

Respectfully Submitted,
Michael Feraco-Eberle
Secretary, SSLT