

MSA Academics Committee Meeting - Minutes  
Wednesday, December 2, 2015, 7:45am, Room 4

**In attendance:**

Romelle Pornschloegl, John Gawarecki, Steve Pullar (Science), Hannah Kostichka (SPED), Cathy Moos (SPED), Maria Sustic (Spanish), Maggie Burggraaff (English), Jen Heydt-Nelson (Art), Bronwen Williams (Math), Jerry Shelton (Music), Marci Patchett (Parent), Noelle Haland (Chair)

**Curriculum mapping update**

- John will follow-up with all faculty at tomorrow's staff meeting to be sure each teacher has submitted his or her curriculum planning (current and projected for next year) so that it's possible to start identifying potential areas for interdepartmental collaboration.

**ELL update**

- John wants to hire a .375 FTE English teacher for hours 1 through 3 so that Teresa Ward can be freed up to teach ELL during those hours.
- MSA has at least 4 identified ELL students, but we anticipate that number to go higher with accurate assessment.
- Discussion: Is .375 FTE high enough, considering this is half the number of courses a full-time teacher teaches? This position would not have a paid prep hour, but John said that the block day schedule would insure some prep time would be freed up for this position. Many voiced concerns about recruitment and retention if it's a .375 FTE appointment.
- NEXT STEPS: John will talk with Joyce about .375 vs. .5 FTE for this position, and then bring issue to the Finance Committee meeting on Monday 12/7/15.

**WBWF update**

- John submitted the report to MDE, and it's on the MSA website under "Board of Directors" and "World's Best Workforce," with a [link here](#).
- Still need to schedule public forum for this year (Noelle, John, Romelle)

**CIS Physics teacher search update**

- Steve will share the U's process for approving CIS teachers next meeting
- UofM has a deadline of April 1st to submit application for new CIS teacher, but that's only for new CIS **positions**. For MSA, we can go past that deadline, in case it takes us that long to hire.
- Steve has one potential person identified. She is a PhD candidate in physics at the U whose current position is being eliminated. She has a Masters in physics as well as a MN high school teaching license.
- We had a discussion about the difficulties hiring for this position given the lower pay rate MSA can pay to someone who has all the credentials the U requires. Will a new hire (eg. this PhD candidate identified) stay past a year? Do we want a "revolving door" of teachers in the position, or should we consider eliminating the CIS offering and offering a "regular" physics and AP Physics to have a better chance at teacher continuity?

**Discussion of AP and CIS**

- AP: Positives are its "known quantity," symbol for rigor to many families, nationwide recognition of the "brand," and it's easier to find teachers who are able to teach AP. Negatives are that AP classes

are not always of higher rigor & may focus too much on “teaching to the test,” and colleges may not offer credit.

- CIS: Positives are high quality curriculum (for Physics, which is the only CIS class we have offered, though there are many more), perhaps better integration of concepts than at the U because of longer time to integrate learning over the year instead of over one semester. Offering CIS Physics by Inquiry has been a great way to keep students here at MSA instead of doing PSEO for the physics requirement (especially Century’s physics offering). It’s a great alternative as it still teaches a strong base of scientific process for more “liberal arts” students versus the more in-depth, math-based physics taught in either CIS Intro to College Physics or AP Physics. Negatives are the difficulty in finding teachers who meet the U’s stringent requirements to teach CIS, and some colleges don’t accept the transfer credits.

### **Larger philosophical discussion of high-school offerings and PSEO**

- Students choose PSEO for various reasons, including the need for more advanced coursework that MSA doesn’t and cannot offer and/or being a college student while still having a “safety net” of living at home, etc. MSA has greatly expanded high school offerings in the last two years so that students aren’t “forced” to do PSEO if they don’t want to. This is a good thing!
- MSA has limitations of money, staffing and space to offer as many courses as other high schools, and many people think that we shouldn’t strive to do so. In order to offer the same variety of coursework, we might have to expand so much that we might lose the “small school feel” and dilute our mission and product..
- Difficulty in planning: Even if students declare they will choose to take MSA offerings, they still have the option of doing PSEO well after MSA will have spent considerable resources making those offerings available, and/or students choose to take different MSA courses which may leave new courses under-enrolled. Conversely, once a student completes PSEO paperwork with our office, MSA no longer guarantees that they can enroll in MSA classes if they change their minds.
- Various teachers offered the historical perspective that this conversation comes up every year around this time and that the overall high school retention rate has remained quite steady over the years. If anything, MSA’s expansion of HS offerings over the last 2 years has increased our HS retention.
- One perspective about students choosing PSEO can be that MSA has done a very good job offering an advanced curriculum and that we have prepared our students well so that they feel ready to take college coursework while in high school. This isn’t a bad thing!
- Maybe we need to focus on maintaining or even expanding our middle school “base” in order to finance the upper grades...??
- How can MSA more successfully market our HS course offerings, both to our own students and families and to colleges and universities (eg. as part of our school profile shared with colleges)?
- Should we consider offering more HS coursework in study skills and career/college preparation?

### **Revisiting grading discussion**

- Currently, transcript shows 3 grades: semester 1, semester 2, and a final grade, which is an average of both semesters. GPA is based only on the final grade.
- Should yearlong courses only have a final grade and not 2 semester grades? Should they have only 2 semester grades and not a “final” grade?
- In the case of students who pass semester 1 but fail semester 2, they would have a “final” passing grade and therefore get credit for the entire yearlong course. This is a concern for some teachers in that the students may not have an adequate mastery of the material and/or may not be adequately prepared for the next course in a sequence.

- Should yearlong courses be officially split into 2 independent semester courses, and if so, would MSA then have to offer placement into only one of the semesters in the case of a failing grade? The committee agreed that we would NOT want to do so for many reasons and that yearlong courses are still the norm of our course offerings.
- Can we have 2 ways to calculate a final GPA, and would that address teachers' and Romelle's concerns anyway? How would Skyward do this? (Noelle will invite Joell into the discussion.)
- Do we still want quarterly grades, especially given that families can check Skyward whenever they want to check a student's' grade and progress?
- Should we have semester grades only as "cumulative progress grades" (like we do currently with quarterly grades)?

#### **ACTION ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING**

1. Noelle will invite Joell into grading discussion, especially vis-a-vis Skyward.
2. Noelle, John and Romelle will schedule WBWF public forum.
3. Steve will bring the committee the CIS hiring process from the U and an update after he talks with the potential recruit for the position.

#### **TOPICS FOR NEXT MEETING**

- Curriculum mapping & results of department meetings
- Grading discussion
- Update on ELL and part-time English teacher

**NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 1/6/16 at 8:00am in Room 12**