

MSA Academics Committee Meeting - Minutes  
Wednesday, February 3, 2016, 8:00am, Room 12

**Present:** John Gawarecki, Cathy Moos (SPED), Maria Sustic (Spanish), Maggie Burggraaff (English), Jen Heydt-Nelson (Art), Bronwen Williams (Math), Lisa Anderson (Social Studies), Tom Johnston (PE/Health), Marci Patchett (Parent), Noelle Haland (Chair)

**Absent:** Romelle Pornschloegl, Steve Pullar (Science), Hannah Kostichka (SPED)

**Semester grades discussion**

- Two issues: semester grades listed on official transcripts vs. semester grades listed in Skyward.
- After some confusion, it was confirmed that it is possible to not list semester grades & only list a final grade *on official transcripts* and to calculate official GPA on transcripts using only that final grade.
- It was agreed that semester grades *on Skyward* are useful to students & teachers and should remain. Also, it would be an administrative nightmare to *not* have the two semesters set up for year-long courses in Skyward, given that semesters must be set up in Skyward for semester-long courses. Having “two systems” in Skyward would be a mess.
- There is still some confusion on whether or not colleges want to see two semester grades for year-long courses on transcripts.

**Quarter grades discussion**

- Quarter grades were implemented in the last few years with the intention of giving poorly performing students a “fresh start” before the end of the semester. Quarter grades are only in Skyward and do not appear on transcripts.
- In reality, there have been many unintended negative consequences, such as increased grade volatility for students and onerous administrative work for teachers.
- Cathy raised the issue of confusion regarding SPED reporting compliance for quarter grades. The SPED department is required to complete student progress reports whenever grades are “posted.” Because quarter grades in Skyward are only “semi-official,” the SPED department has not been doing official reporting to parents then, which may or may not be appropriate.
- Cathy pointed out that quarter grades are really more akin to “mid-term” progress updates and maybe should be called that.
- The group discussed increasing effective parental use of Skyward, noting that every day parents can get a “progress update” and don’t necessarily need to see a quarter grade. However, it was also noted that there may be barriers for many families to do this (eg. no computer and/or internet access at home, limited English fluency, etc).
- Lisa suggested that we might create a streamlined process to send a paper notice to parents about poorly performing students at the quarter points instead of quarter grade reporting in Skyward. The group agreed that a paper notice might be more effective in communicating with parents.
- Noelle will discuss with Joell and begin investigating administrative solutions to do this, including using Skyward to automatically flag poorly performing students at certain points.
- Bronwen reported that she and Joell discussed the possibility of not “locking” grades at the semester point in Skyward, to make it less complicated for teachers to amend grades. (Currently, grades are “locked” at the quarter and semester points.) Joell said we don’t need a real “lock date” until the end of the school year.

- Noelle suggested there be a Skyward working group to work on some of the various Skyward-related details.
- Bronwen will bring the quarter grades discussion to the next staff meeting & report back to our committee.

### **Elective course discussion for 2016/17**

- Most, but not all, departments have let John know of potential electives they could offer next year.
- John intends to share elective offerings at the Parent Team meeting on February 29th.
- In the past, this was the process: (1) Teachers and departments come up with possible elective offerings; (2) students rank their choices in a paper form; (3) based on those numbers, we create the actual offerings, which may or may not be changed or eliminated in the case of too-low enrollment (students changing their minds, etc).
- Lisa pointed out that departments need to know how many sections of each grade there will be before spending much time developing course descriptions for electives that may not even be offered. They need to know how many core classes they'll be teaching since often they have no space in their schedules to even teach electives.
- John said he will be getting all departments those numbers of sections in each grade within a day or two. They should be similar if not the same as last year.
- In the past few years, there has been a huge disincentive for teachers to offer expanded electives because they might create an elective and then the class might be cancelled in the summer or fall due to low enrollment. Then, that teacher's contract might be reduced because the elective that had been planned as part of his or her contract was no longer offered.
- John reassured the committee that this kind of contract reduction would NOT be occurring and that the staffing plan based on the budget is set for next year. He said our staff budget is "robust."
- Maggie raised the issue of considering a "zero hour" for more courses, which may help with staffing and space flexibility as well as elective possibilities. The committee will address this further next month.

### **Discussion about BOD and BOD committees and communicating with teachers**

- There was concern that issues and decisions occurring in various BOD committees are not routinely shared with teachers and teachers' input is often not solicited before decisions are made by the BOD.
- Our committee has been bringing important discussions to the teachers at staff meetings (yay us!), and the other committees should be doing so, as well (eg. Finance). The teachers participating on each committee should be doing this.
- It was noted that historical perspectives by longtime teachers is highly useful, especially given that there are so many new teachers at our school.

### **Update on new teachers**

- New part-time English teacher has been hired, Judy Seeberger.
- There is no update on the CIS Physics teacher search.

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

1. Noelle will meet with Joell about streamlined administrative options to communicate with parents of poorly performing students halfway through each semester, as well as possible creation of Skyward working group.

2. Bronwen will bring the quarter grades discussion to the next staff meeting & report back to our committee.
3. John will give departments the number of sections per grade so that departments can give to him their proposed electives for next year.
4. Noelle and John will stay in touch about electives process over the next few weeks.

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

- Semester grades off transcripts - confirm our final recommendation for BOD
- Quarter grades - feedback from staff meetings & update from Noelle
- Elective courses for 2016/2017
- Extracurricular transcripts (tabled this month)
- Collaborative learning - results of department meetings regarding possibilities (tabled this month)
- Review of our committee goals for this year (including review of last year's goals)

**NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 3/2/16 at 8:00am in Room 12**

#### **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS:**

***First Wednesday of the month at 8am in Room 12:***

**March 2**

**April 6**

**May 5**

**June 1**