

Academics Minutes  
December 2, 2019  
Room 12A at 8:00 A.M.

Members present: Lisa, Tom, Joell, Emily, Cheri, Hannah, Noah, John, Jen, Wendell, Angie, Tara, Noelle, Teresa and Kirstin

1. Discussion about school-wide reading goals for departments who do not have specific goals (Lisa)
  - a. General discussion:
    - MCA data have identified deficits in students' nonfiction reading strategies, deficits which were not noticeable in years past. However, what we do not know is the specific deficits we're facing and/or the specific students who experience them. Faculty in various departments want guidance in identifying the NF-reading improvement goals and guidance on implementing specific strategies that each department can use to reinforce these specific skills and strategies.
    - Art dept wonders if it's possible to let the English department absorb more of the nonfiction reading focus, which would allow the art dept specialists to focus on other aspects of learning goals that need improvement. It was agreed by the committee that we should continue with some sort of middle-school-wide focus on improving NF-reading skills.
  - b. The English Teachers have created a template that they will share at the meeting. (Teresa)
    - There was some confusion about what was requested at the last Academics meeting. Some thought that Maggie and Teresa would create a single strategy that would be used school-wide (or rather, by all 6-8th grade teachers not teaching English, science or math), but Maggie and Teresa thought they were asked to create a "toolbox" of resources from which teachers could choose according to their needs and circumstances. The latter is what they did create, ie. a "resource packet" of a bunch of ideas for faculty, including question sets & strategies.
  - c. How long should the other departments have to learn how to use the template? And how often should they use it this year?
    - For a school-wide strategy, teachers would need to learn the strategy in professional development in order to successfully model and teach it to students.
    - Unfortunately, the earliest PD day available for this is February 5, 2020, at 8:00am. Teresa and Maggie will teach one strategy at this time for a 30-minute block. All faculty should come to the Feb 5th PD with a nonfiction reading of their choice (one that they would teach to students).
    - Teresa and Maggie will meet again this Monday 12/9 as a team and will choose one strategy that they will teach faculty on Feb 5th. They will also

make available to all faculty the resource packet that they've created, which will be made available much sooner (ie. in the next week or two).

- Follow-up after the Feb 5th PD training will need to occur so that we can track the progress and success of the intervention(s). Faculty will do this at the March 25th PD day.
- In the meantime, do we even know which skills are lacking? There was discussion of various ways that faculty can pinpoint specific NF-reading deficits, such as KWL charts, entrance/exit slips, pre- and post-assessments, etc., to get a better understanding of which skills students are actually struggling with.

d. Update on Staff's use of Fastbridge data?

- According to Tom, the info is there, but we will need additional training for teachers to access and interpret specific student data about NF reading skills, training that would likely be optional. Tom will investigate and bring specifics to the next Academics meeting.

2. Update on the Progress of the WBWF Report and GTTM staff grants (Tom)

- WBWF: BOD approved, and John & Tom will get it sent to MDE. They meet tonight for this year's WBWF planning.
- GTTM grant request forms go to teachers today. \$10,000 in total is available for GTTM grants

3. Did all of the Departments send their goals to John? (John)

- All depts had to send in their plans to meet SAM goals (except for art & gym).

4. Modified Transcript Update (Lisa)

- Meeting is set for this month.

5. Electives (Joell)

- Registration forms were due last Tuesday. FINAL TOTALS: students applied for 332 courses. Clearly, decisions will need to be made.
- In future, if an AP class has two sections, they will look very closely to possibly reduce that to one section only, depending on class enrollment. We have had issues of offering two sections of the same AP course, but after final registrations have come in, each section may have only enrolled a small number (eg. under 10 students per section). Going forward, we will be consolidating sections as needed.
- ELECTIVES: All depts received a Google share document that's due Friday 12/6.
- ONE ISSUE: Many committee members agreed that MSA doesn't offer enough high school science electives, eg. Computer Science among others. As we explore the possibility of adding more courses, we will need to readdress coming changes for required courses, eg. Personal Finance will become an MDE-required course in future.

6. IEPs/504s: Should the modifications and accommodations be printed on the Teacher's Form, so if teachers cannot be at the meeting, they can indicate which ones would be appropriate for that class? (Lisa)
  - Sometimes teachers can't be at IEP or 504 meetings, and occasionally, the modifications or accommodations that are agreed to during those meetings are not applicable or implementable in a particular class. QUESTION: Can these meetings produce a list of possible accommodations that any particular teacher can choose from?
  - The SPED teachers and 504 coordinator (Emily) shared that it's better to deal with specific changes to modifications and/or accommodations before the meetings since those meetings are where all options are raised, and making changes after the meetings can be difficult for parents since any big changes will require discussion and agreement with parents again.
  - POSSIBILITIES: MSA has a maximum of 2 weeks after the meeting to have parents sign off on the plan agreed to in the meeting. Maybe there can be an after-meeting followup with all of a student's teachers to be sure that no changes will be needed. Another meeting with parents may be required.
  - NOTE: SPED can call a team meeting (with parent participation) at any point to address any problems with implementing specific accommodations, and not have to wait until the next "official" meeting date.
7. Revisit the weighted or unweighted GPA (Joell)
  - Joell and Emily would like to stick with ONLY unweighted for all students, ie. no longer honor special requests to estimate what a student's GPA \*might\* be if it were weighted. This has been occasionally requested by students in special circumstances such as particular scholarship applications that don't differentiate between weighted and unweighted GPAs. Not only is this special process unsound since we do not offer ANY weighted grades; in addition, doing this for those families savvy enough or "in the know" can create major equity imbalances. It can also be hard to justify when more than one student applies for the same award at the same place and one student offers a theoretical-only weighted GPA while the other does not.
  - Because we have already done this once this year, we will still honor any more of these special requests for this year's seniors, but not after this year.
8. Discussion and decision on adding grading category W-M (withdraw-medical) for students who withdraw from a class because of a medical reason (Joell)
  - Per the MSA Grading Handbook, if a student withdraws from a course for any reason after the 11th day of the school year, a "W" will be marked on the student's transcript. The grade at the time of withdrawal is only listed

on the transcript if the withdrawal happens after week 8. This year, Joell was instructed to change this notation to “WM” for one student who withdrew for medical reasons after pressure from the family.

- **QUESTIONS:** What do we do if this issue comes up again? Now that we’ve made this decision for one student, do we need to offer a “WM” as a possibility for other students this year even though our procedures don’t give it as an option? Should MSA revisit the issue of adding a “WM” for withdrawal for medical reasons for next year?
- **DISCUSSION** was varied and animated: Our committee went through a full process to decide on the current procedures. We agreed not to add a notation for medical withdrawal for various reasons, including the fact that we do not have the expertise to judge “appropriate” medical reasons or distinguish between various reasons to withdraw (eg. ‘physical’ illness, ‘mental’ illness, bereavement, etc) and the fact that presentation of a medical note in cases like this are not always clear-cut and can be manipulated in various ways. Our decision to simply notate with a “W” make it possible to state the fact of a withdrawal without any judgement as to why. This is published in MSA’s Grading Handbook. This decision was made in part with the understanding that students in this position could get support from MSA’s counselor to help explain the withdrawal to potential colleges during the college application process, just as students might want to explain to colleges any other unique aspects of their academic record.
- Various questions were raised about how this particular special case happened, including who made the decision (and directed Joell to make the new notation)? Why does our committee complete weeks/months of policy review to make a decision that was ignored? Is it wise precedent to allow pressure from a particular family to change a procedure that MSA has agreed to follow for their particular student? Doesn’t making such exceptions create imbalances of equity so that families with the knowledge, time and/or ability to exert pressure on MSA’s administration enjoy privileges that other students do not?
- **OTHER QUESTIONS:** Do we need to readdress our policy to not list the letter grade at the time of withdrawal (assuming the withdrawal is after week 8)? How does this issue relate to the issue of modified coursework, if at all?
- **DECISIONS:** The committee decided that MSA will maintain the procedures that we’ve created, ie. we will NOT note a “WM” for withdrawals for medical reasons. We also decided that this exception was made in error and should be reversed, and our published procedure must be followed for any future cases that may arise.
- **ACTION:** John G. will lead a followup meeting with the parents and student in this particular case to let them know that MSA will mark the

student's transcript with a "W" and not a "WM," per our procedures. The family will be offered help in explaining to potential colleges the reason for the student's withdrawal even though a medical reason will not be notated on the transcript.

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**OUT OF TIME**

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9. Revisit students who fail MS, (not Spanish/Math) (Joell)
10. Math Graduation Requirements for New 9th graders (Noah)
11. Final date to drop a class? (Joell)
12. Course Guide (Emily)
13. Diverse Staff Recruitment taskforce
14. Overall Yearly Achievement Goal (Lisa)
  - a. How is the goal determined?
  - b. Who gets paid and how much?
15. Supplemental Online Learning Update (Joell)

Next Meeting Date: Monday, January 6th at 8:00 A.M., room 12A