Montclair High School Review Minutes

October 21, 2009

Meeting called to order at 7:35 am

School Review (SR) members in attendance: Robin Kulwin, Parent Co-Chair, Jeff Gannon, Faculty Co-chair, Mr James Earle, Principal, Glenn Jenkins, Carol Larkin, Helen Mazarakis, Carol Eweretsen, Wil Adkins, Stephen Engelberg, Paul Roder

Faculty, Parent/Caregivers, Students in attendance: Susan Abraham, Erica Appel, Jim Aquavia, Melissa Bigelow, Marnie Brand, Dewitt Cannon, Caryn Cooper, Maryann Cushman, Deb Ellis, David Ellman, Jamie Fanous, Holly Feltham, Isabelle Foley, James Gaither, Susan Gifford, David Herron, Glenn Hersh, Pamela Jenkins, Paula Kaufmann, Mary Knowles, Noah Kulwin, Shelly Lombard, Robin Meretab, Sherri Neuwirth, Mara Novak, Lisa Pearlstein, Joanne Petrigliano, Dede Portas, Joanne Rodgers, Mindy Schoen, Howard Schostack, Michelle Snyder, Lois Stith, Karen Straim, Deborah Villarreal-Hadley, Scott White

Approval of September 23, 2009 Minutes by SR Committee: The draft of the minutes of the September meeting was distributed in advance to members of the SR Committee. There was a motion to accept the minutes as presented, it was seconded, and approved.

Robin Kulwin proposed that in the future the SR Committee review, comment, and vote to approve minutes via e-mail so that they can be put on the website and e-blasted more quickly rather than waiting for the next monthly meeting. There was a motion to approve future SR minutes via e-mail, it was seconded and approved.

Upcoming Events: Montclair Schools Rock will be Saturday evening October 24. The proceeds of this event benefit the public schools. The first District Parent Workshop for this school year is scheduled for December 1, 2009, 7 pm – 8:30 pm, at the 9th Grade Academy. The topic is “Choices and Consequences - What to Do When A Teenager Uses Alcohol & Drugs.” To view the brochure announcing all of the parent and family activities planned for this fall and winter, please visit the Montclair Board of Education website, www.montclair.k12.nj.us.

Mr. James Earle, Principal

- Welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular the students who will be encouraged to come to SR meetings to speak so we can hear from them what is important to their education.

- Work in Progress: This will be an agenda item at all SR meetings. Mr. Earle will report on topics when he has information to share. He is willing to form a group to address any issue relating to students. Decision making process – we meet, make recommendations, the school drafts proposal, SR reviews, then revisions considered.
Mr. Jim Aquavia, AP Committee Chair: Introduction of DRAFT Advanced Placement Policy

Mr. Aquavia said the charge last June to him as the AP Committee Chair was to lead a committee comprised of teachers, guidance, parents, and students and the following questions were to be considered:

- Should AP designation be on transcript if the student doesn’t take test?
- Should families pay for test?
- How many tests need to be taken if a student takes more than 3 AP courses?
- Should there be a final exam?

(The AP Committee Report can be found in the September, 2009 SR Minutes.)

The Proposed Revisions were distributed and reads as follows:

Proposed revision to the Montclair High School Program Planning Guide for 2010-2011:

High Honors and AP courses are equally rigorous. A course carries the AP designation if it corresponds to an AP test offered by the College Board. Some colleges award college credit and higher placements to students who pass the AP test.

AP exams are standardized, objective assessments of a student’s knowledge and skill, and while there is no penalty for choosing not to take an AP exam, it is recommended that students taking AP courses also take the College Board AP exam for those courses.

All students in AP courses are required, however, to complete an in-class final exam, paper, or project aligned with College Board AP requirements.

In summary, AP exams will not be required to for a student to earn an AP designation, there will not be a penalty should a student elect not to if don’t take exam, won’t take AP designation off transcript. Recommend that students take the exam. In class final exams are required across all departments aligned with the College Board requirement before senior option.

Following the policy presentation, there was discussion.

It was stated that in some classes, once the AP exam has been taken and seniors go on Senior Option, juniors remain in the class but there is no longer any teaching. One student suggested that this time could be used to start on summer homework. Another student pointed out that since AP courses prepare students for the AP exam, after the exam, rigor should be reduced. In AP English, a poetry section could be taught after the AP test.

For purposes of the calculation of GPA (Grade Point Average): High Honors and AP classes are the same - 5 quality points.
Question: Will colleges look down on MHS if students are not required to take the AP test?

Answer: Scott White, Director of Guidance, stated that the profile does not say that students are required to take the test. AP test scores should rise if only serious students are taking it. He further stated that in the future the College Board will release the multiple choice results. If so, that could be used as the final exam.

AP courses cannot be offered by any high school if they are not audited by the College Board.

Question: Was benchmarking done with other comparable high schools? What do other schools do? How do other schools compare?

Answer: Mr. Aquavia said the Committee reviewed a national report which calls for lower gatekeeping. We are not like other schools in that it is relatively rare for students to be required to take the test. Mr. White said that the new policy is consistent with most schools.

Question: How is this policy aligned with goals of the school?

Answer: Mr. Aquavia said that anyone who wants to challenge themselves can take AP courses. Mr. White spoke about MHS having a philosophy of choice. Anyone can take AP test. Who should take AP course? In some schools, only top kids can take AP test. Here, students should be able to take course and challenge themselves, but they should be able to keep up to some extent. District policy allows as many students to choose to challenge selves and take courses.

A concern was raised by a parent that there should not be a final exam in June since students have already by then taken the ACT, SAT, and the AP exam. On other side, another parent pointed out that teaching and learning should not stop doesn’t want school year to end 6-7 weeks before the school year end and so wants final exam.

Question: How to pay for test? If students are required to take the AP exam, do they have to pay? If not required to take the exam, financial need is a way to assess financial support. Mr. White stated that students with free and reduced lunch get a reduction of $20 from the College board and the school will pay for the balance.

An explanation of the process for adopting this policy was then given – if School Review approves the policy, the recommendation will go to the principal for review and comment, then to the Superintendent for further review and comment by staff, and then to the Board of Education.

There was a motion to approve the policy as presented, it was seconded, approved.
SUMMER ASSIGNMENTS

What is the goal? We need to have a consistent answer.

Do all students have equal access to resources?

- If a student is not prepared, difficult to have success – we need support in the summer
- What drives summer assignments – how do we get info on whether student is prepared.

Should we have summer assignments?
How much time should students spend on them?
How should assignments be assessed and when?
Should we allow flexibility?
Are summer assignments serving their purpose?
How do we evaluate their effectiveness?

Topics for Summer Assignment Committee

- Do we need them?
- Timeline – how much time is needed to complete the assignments
- Assessment – should specific and timely
- Evaluation – need a tool to evaluate policy
- Clear goal – review and preparation
- Flexibility – common summer assignment program – then can move further by doing more, but only assess a certain portion – just ideas from conversations
- Appropriate resources – paper, calculator, etc.
  
  Does this include books? Some assignments require kids to buy books and there are not enough to service the population from the public library. How do we step in to deal with equity of resources?

- Support – who do they see when they struggle – could be a parent, tutor – but not so as to lose integrity of learning on own

Parent Comments

- Appreciate what is being done by addressing this issue. Many kids (and their families) are tortured by some of these assignments. Someone central should be looking at the assignments in advance, on-going review of assignments in totality – evaluation. Mr. Earle is
in control and suggests that he assign someone to be in charge. Teachers are on a 10 ½ month contract, students are on a 10 month contract but many are expected to do 11 or 12 months work.

- Kids who decide over the course of the summer do not sign up – want to move from Honors to High Honors – don’t make it so onerous that kids who are not encourage to step up.
- Mr. Earle should see the assignments from last year
- Students have to be taken care of and summer assignments should be looked through their eyes as well as the teachers.

Mr. Earle will come back to School Review in November after having met with teachers, parents and students with a suggestion for the direction in which we will go.

**ROBOTICS**

We need some new structure in Robotics.

- Student led
- Structure the program about what the students say
- Students will decide what type of robot they want to build
- Define the role of the mentors
- Who will we need to provide help

Mr. Earle said that more information will be forthcoming including a code of conduct, the instructor will have a calendar of events, there will be a clear understanding of how it will be done and the expectations for parents/caregivers, students and mentors.

**Gym/DRIVER ED**

Issues have been identified with the Driver Education On-Line Course in that there has been minimal support for students and it is difficult reading material. Background - MHS wanted to introduce an on-line course to give students and opportunity to get the feel for taking such a course.

The manual is not easy reading and can be a challenge for students who have trouble reading. Study Hall teachers will provide support and students will have the use of computer labs. Mr. Lebida is working with special need students.

There is not a great fix for this problem at this moment but Mr. Earle and staff is looking for a way to support students. We are going backwards this time to try to fix this issue. We must build support for any programs such as this.

Mr. Earle asked that parents let him know if you have a student who is struggling.
Parent/Caregiver Comments regarding Drivers Ed:

- It can be difficult for students to get on the computers at school or the library and not everyone has access at home.
- As part of Drivers Ed, discuss the rules about parking around the school, traffic, etc.
- Look at the timing for students taking driving education. Some students become eligible during the summer don’t get the course until the 4th marking period.

Parent/Caregiver Student Comments regarding Gym:

- Parent: There are several gym classes scheduled during 3rd and 4th period with each class having 40 – 50 students. Too many kids are in the same room at the same time and some students report that they don’t do anything. Some students may feel uncomfortable in such an environment.
- Parent: Concerned that the staff in the gym could be better leaders and this needs to be better handled. It is a safety issue.
- Student: Commented that gym is fun, not threatening at all and there are opportunities and activities available to students – students just need to do them.

Mr. Earle said that he would look into this immediately.

**STUDENT TEACHERS**

Mr. Earle stated that we (MHS) are responsible for the education of our students. Students should always have access to the cooperating teacher. The cooperating teacher should always be in the classroom with the student teacher. Instruction should not suffer. The teacher is responsible for reviewing the student teacher but the principal reviews the quality of instruction in the classroom.

We need to identify earlier which classes will have student teachers and we need a better time line for student teachers to begin. Perhaps the timeline is not comfortable for us and it needs to be moved out a bit. Maybe the teacher needs to set a foundation and the student teacher gradually move is, them moves out in December or January. We want to partner, but not sacrifice. We will work on a policy for the 2010-2011 year. Partnership, but has to work.

Parent/Caregiver Questions
How many student teachers do we currently have? We have 7-8 student teachers and 2 interns in the Guidance Department whose work is closely monitored.

What are the advantages to us? MSU is a teaching college and so they have a much more intense educational program for their students. We can recruit MSU graduates as teachers knowing that they are well-trained. Sometimes a young student teacher has energy and enthusiasm – fresh face for the classroom.
Professionals have a responsibility to educate the next generation. Also, teachers can be isolated. It is important to engage with new professionals and new theory.

**STAR PORTAL**

We have had some technical difficulties with this program which will allow parents to have access to student attendance, grades, discipline. The roll out target date is the end of October but we want to get as many of the glitches out as possible. We will probably start with attendance and then add other features. Parents should still be able to get information from the teachers. Next year students and parents will be able to see all assignments, their weighted value and then monitor the grades. SR can do overview. Please give feedback so can correct glitches. There is a way to communicate with teacher through star portal.

A parent asked if there is a policy or what should be considered a reasonable time from teachers on test results and assignments. It is difficult for students to learn from the feedback they get if too much time has passed since the assignment or test.

Mr. Earle said he would like to see normal assignments returned in a week, a major assignment may take a few weeks.

**ADVOCATES FOR POSITIVE SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE (APSA)**

Vision and mission

Issues that affect climate and culture
- Attendance/tardiness
- Alcohol and drugs
- Open campus
- Smoking
- Sexual activity/pregnancy
- Intimidation
- Bullying
- Dating violence
- Gangs
- Low performance
- Interaction with stakeholders
- Dress code

This Committee will create action plans with input from the students. Our students must feel safe and secure and ready to learn.

The Committee will also address professionalism by staff to create a nurturing and caring environment. Staff needs to be in the right location. We will have sensitivity training for staff. Listen, try to share, move forward.
ATTENDANCE POLICY FOR STUDENTS ARRIVING LATE TO SCHOOL (8:01 -8:14 am)

There currently is no detailed written policy for tardiness. Mr. Earle is proposing an addendum to the Attendance Policy.

- Students who are late get detention. To avoid detention, parent must write a note requesting that student be excused. Parents should share information with Mr. Earle.

- Will work on a new policy for next year. Need consistency and a standard operating procedure on everything. Will take a look at the existing system and see how to change. The goal is to have one centralized place to record information.

Non agenda items

- Teachers should take care to use the proper Scantron so that the numbers match.
- In freshman history, some teachers do not use the textbook while others do use the books. How will students be prepared for a standard, department wide mid term and final? Would like more consistency among teachers in teaching. Should there perhaps a uniform study guide for mid-terms and finals?
- Student question re AP requirements. If final exam must be on AP material, why take the same test again?
- Student – this is a wonderful school, and if you act reasonably, everything will be ok.

The next MHS School Review Meeting will be held on November 18, 2009 at 7:30 pm in the Library.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20 a.m.