

SECONDARY SCHOOL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Minutes and Notes of the Secondary School Review Committee Meeting held on Tuesday, April 21, 2009.

The meeting of the SSRC began at 4:00 pm

Members Present:

Alison Allerton	Jenny Byxbee	Al Capasso
Lynda Carroll	Kathy Coon	Denice Crettol
Paige Davis	Jennifer Dayton	Cathy Delehanty
Susan Ellis	Laura Erickson	Jason Foster
Kim Eves	Julie Faryniarz	Laurie Heiss-Grealy
Caryn Furst	Stacey Gross	Jennifer Mitchell
Nancy Kail	Ralph Mayo	Betty Sternberg
Judy Nedell	Damaris Rau	Martha Zornow
Nashoba Santhanam	Truxtun Southworth	Marcia Schenker
Chris Winters	Linda Woods	

The SSRC generated their individual concerns:

Concerns:

1. School serves as a gatekeeper to learning, specifically to acceleration opportunities, and needs to get out of that role. Ties into students' ability to pursue their unique interests, passions and curiosities.
2. Concern that people may imply that Vision leads to tracking to more vocational education—implying that four-year colleges not for everybody. Career and technical education does not require a four-year college is very broad. Ties to unique interests, passions and curiosities. Access to opportunity not school as arbiter.
3. Concern going the three middle schools do not come out at the same place, not coming out with same skills, expectations, resulting in inequities when they come to the high school. Connects to most of the bullets. Vision should not start in 9th grade.
4. Concern that students do not have enough opportunities to share their work, specifically creative expression. Makes it more difficult to collaborate with others to produce a heightened understanding, and to communicate effectively for a given purpose.

5. Concern that teachers feel confronted with covering so much material and so many students per class and per case load in any curriculum area making it hard to accomplish Vision goals due to time pressure.
6. Concerned about attendance and truancy issues at school. Connects to bullet on ethical and responsible manner.
7. Concern about APs which have a defined curriculum and constraints, and don't have the flexibility to address some Vision goals.
8. That a lack of a clear student feedback system (formal process about teachers, classes, courses, assignments, etc.) makes it difficult for students to advocate for ideas, causes and actions.
9. Concern that traditional instructional practices are ineffective to create students who embody the Vision of the Graduate. Need for more "experiential learning opportunities.
10. Concern with lack of flexibility within the schedule makes it so that some students are unable to pursue certain courses (or interests, passions and curiosities).
11. Concern that the current school start-time makes it difficult for some students to achieve in early classes.

Julie Faryniarz presented the process the parents went through to generate their list of concerns.

Stacey Gross presented the process that Western Middle School underwent to generate their list of concerns.

Al Capasso presented the process that Greenwich High School underwent to generate their list of concerns.

The SSRC broke into three groups. Each group synthesized the concerns from CMS, EMS, WMS, GHS, PTAC and from the SSRC:

Find the primary areas of concern that impact the widest swath of the system.

Betty's Group:

Time

- scheduling of available time
- start and end times
- consistent and homogenous grouping-scheduling dictating grouping/tracking
- precludes taking certain courses
- unbalanced nature of schedule

Curriculum

- lack of choices for all levels of students
- amount of content
- depth of instruction compromised –breadth as opposed to depth
- writing-too little opportunities to meaningfully develop skills-grooming of writing

skills

- lack of real world, relevant experiences
- choices/screenings/flexible guidelines
- amount of homework

Instruction

- staffing -allocations
- number of students
- should be informed by student feedback (including homework)
- amount of content dictates instructional strategies
- oversight of special ed model

Student Experiences

- activities that students may or may be part of
- pressure to succeed
- different opportunities across town
- ability to advocate and give feedback –give them voice-afraid
- social/emotional learning

Skills Development – global

- Life skills-financial, parenting, conflict resolution/coping skills
- Collaborative
- ethical and responsible actions (cheating)

Programs for special student populations

- need for regular review of selection, instruction, curriculum & scheduling
- need to integrate into regular programs

Chris's Group:

- Real world, other life and work-related experiences:
 - 1) practical, life skill
 - 2) other kinds of personal growth, exploration, internships, experiential opportunities that are meaningful for students.
- What we teach: Curriculum: tracks, student-focused v. curriculum focused, packed (too many objectives), lack of time to delve deeper into issues (mile wide and inch deep), flexibility
- How we teach: Instruction: feedback to students, collaboration, traditional teaching methods are not meeting the needs of students

- Student response (responsibilities) Social emotional: cheating, attendance/truancy, empathy, stress, formal student feedback on courses and teachers, start time, unreasonably high expectations.
- Organizational structure: class size, schedule, attendance (policy), credits for seat time, weighted grading, equity, start time, lack of flexibility

Allison's Group:

Flexibility in Programmatic Options and the Impact that Has in Scheduling-

- Allow for enrichment to enable further pursuit of broader range of student interests and passions
- Allow for more effective opportunities for students to close achievement gaps without getting further behind
- Allow for flexibility in school start time (period zero, period nine)
- Allow for scheduling to happen without being bound to seat time
- Concern that students are limited in the choices available to them once they decide a part of their instructional program (more connected to MS)
- Concern that weighting of grades limits the options students are willing to pursue
- Concern that student tracking limits students to travel together in small groups that are identifiable to a certain extent by academic, socio-economic, and/or racial similarities

Curriculum Pressure-

- Address student stress and the choices students make about how to deal with that (concerns about cheating, social/emotional health, substance abuse)
- Pace and volume of curriculum is so big that there isn't enough time for inquiry based approach and real-world application
- Not enough time/space for reflection and sharing because constantly moving on
- Concern about homework volume (too much expected outside of school, too little expected in others) and appropriateness given the way the work is used/incorporated into classroom instruction

Student Engagement

- Worried about attendance
- Concern about level of participation of a broad range of students in student council, forums, believing that they have a voice in how the school is run
- Lack of a formal consistent feedback system where students have the opportunity to reflect on what is working for them and what isn't (courses, assignments, teachers)

The next meeting of the Secondary School Review Committee will be on Tuesday, May 19, 2009 in the Greenwich High School Media Center. The meeting will begin at 4:00pm