

**Re: Minutes, Academics Advisory Committee  
Meeting of March 12, 2014**

From: Tom Armbruster

To: Distribution

Date: April 16, 2014

The meeting started at 7:10 pm in the High School's College and Career Center, Shelley Enger presiding.

Members Present: Sally Newman, Lisa Link, Shelley Enger, Mary Johnson, Julia Greer, Gary McGuigan, Strefan Fauble, Larry Wong, Louise Hindle, Yu-Wen Taylor, Betsy Felix, Ananth Natarajan, Loren Kleinrock, Brinton Young, and Tom Armbruster.

Minutes: The minutes of the meeting of February 12 were approved by consensus.

Woman of the Year: Tom announced that Shelley has been named the 49th Assembly District Woman of the Year by Assembly Representative Ed Chau.

School Board comments:

Lisa spoke about the role of the Academics Advisory Committee in the context of the School Board and District. (She said that Chris Norgaard, the other Board member on the AAC, is out of town.) Lisa said she was one of five Board members, who all serve as volunteers. The Board sets policy, adopts the budget, approves curriculum. The Board is accountable to the voters in the San Marino Unified School District. The Board "doesn't get to fire people"; the Board directly hires and supervises only the Superintendent, currently Loren Kleinrock.

Regarding the Academics Advisory Committee, the Board cannot hand over responsibility to a committee. When AAC members speak in the community, they should speak only for themselves, not for the AAC as a whole or for the Board. AAC members serve for a three-year term. For the current round of appointments, there were seventeen well qualified applicants.

Introductions: Lisa introduced the four new AAC members and then everyone else present also gave brief personal introductions. Below is background information provided by each of the new and current AAC members.

Julia Greer is Professor of Materials Science and Mechanics at Caltech. She holds M.S. and Ph.D. from Stanford University; her daughter is a student at Carver.

Louise Hindle develops programs at the Institute for Educational Advancement in Pasadena. She holds a BA from Manchester University, an MA from the University of Warwick, and post-graduate teaching credentials from Cambridge University, in English and Drama. She is the parent of three children, all attend SMUSD schools.

Larry Wong, MFCT, specializes in the mental health of children at the Kindergarten through eighth grade level. He is the parent of two children in San Marino schools.

Yu-Wen Taylor, Ed.D. from USC, carries out research on education in the 21st century.

Lisa Link did undergraduate work at Wellesley and then earned a law degree at USC. She is one of the two Board representatives to the AAC.

Sally Newman holds a Ph.D. from UCSD in Oceanography. She is a professor at Caltech.

Tom Armbruster holds a B.A. in Linguistics from UCR, a teaching credential from UCR with teaching minors in Math, English, and German, and a Ph.D. in Psychology from UCI. He worked in the computer industry as a diagnostic programmer and manager in hardware engineering for 15 years, before coming to SMHS in 1993. At SMHS, he taught primarily calculus, statistics, and computer programming. He retired in 2010.

Brinton Young's undergraduate degree is in Physics. He holds a law degree with a specialization in business law. He is retired from Earthlink.

Mary Johnson is Assistant Principal for Instruction and Guidance. She holds three degrees and three credentials.

Loren Kleinrock came to SMHS in 1975 as a teacher. He "loved it." He currently serves as District Superintendent. Loren plans to retire in June.

Ananth Natarajan earned a B.Sc.E. from Duke and an M.D. from the University of Chicago. He did his residency at USC. He owns a medical device company.

Betsy Felix has a Ph.D. from Cornell in Microbiology, Immunology, and Pathology. Her thesis was in parasitology. She now specializes in clinical study management. She has five children, all of whom attended or are attending San Marino schools.

Strefan Fauble holds a Ph.D. in philosophy, and works as a lawyer.

Dr. Gary McGuigan is Assistant Superintendent for Instruction.

Shelley Enger has chaired the AAC for three years. She is an SMHS graduate. Her B.A. is from UC Berkeley, in Microbiology & Immunology. Her Ph.D. is from UCLA in Epidemiology, specifically cancer epidemiology. She teaches the special SMHS course Fundamentals of Research Science and Advanced Topics in Research Science.

#### SMHS update:

Mary spoke in Keith's absence. The WASC visiting committee was here at the end of February for their 4-day visit. They observed that "the teachers and staff take everything so seriously." They suggested a rewording of the school's first improvement goal, and deleting other stuff. We will learn their final recommendation in mid-May, and we hope for a six-year clear accreditation term. The WASC team invited teachers to apply to be WASC visiting team members themselves, because, "You will kiss the front door of this school on your way back."

Next week, we will have the High School Exit Exam. Monday will be a professional development day, with sophomore testing on Tuesday. There are 271 sophomores now. Last year, on the first try, 98% passed math, 96–98% passed English.

At the college "Junior Night," Tim Brunold, USC Dean of Admissions spoke to the students and parents. He said, "What matters . . . is that you do your best, follow your passion."

Recruiting the new Superintendent: Lisa reported that Leadership Associates has been retained to recruit candidates. Their first step is to meet with interest groups in the community. The time scheduled for AAC members to meet with Leadership Associates in Tuesday, March 18, at 4:45 p.m.

#### Common Core update:

Mary said we have a new population of English learners, from mainland China. Some of these kids haven't been in schools for years. We are working on their writing skills in preparation for the upcoming Common Core testing. Overall among our students, oral communication is still not as good as we would hope it would be. Fortunately there is an amazing full time ELD teacher in place. The WASC visiting committee wanted to know, (1) how we know students are extracting critical information, (2) what stress levels the students are experiencing, a concern that came up in meetings with groups of students.

Julia addressed critical thinking and problem solving, discussing that students don't know how to dispute an assertion that  $2 + 2 = 3$ , for example.

Joseph Chang brought up technology. iPads have been bought for all teachers, but many do not use them. But some use them a huge amount, for example Cynthia Chubbuck.

Loren said that the heart of Common Core is not in the curriculum, it's in the approach to learning. Critical thinking is huge. "Depth of Knowledge" is a big concept, a "deeper drilling down." In English, there's an increased emphasis on nonfiction. Overall: "Critical thinking, collaboration, use skills in groups. Communication. Creativity. Can you synthesize." Technology runs all of these. The Association of State Governors and professional organizations agree: Kids don't have real-world capabilities. Part of the Common Core's response is to stop being "a mile wide and an inch deep."

Shelley reported that the AAC was founded because members of the community who interview for colleges felt that our students didn't interview well. The AAC developed and hosted an interviewing workshop for seniors. This excellent workshop was videotaped for posterity. In the fall Debbie Singh in the College & Career Center ran an interviewing workshop. This year we had 25 students attend.

Mary reported that the Junior English teachers now show their students the AAC interviewing video. She also commented on students not appearing for interviews: USC interviews 100 student locally. We had one student get an interview appointment; that student did not show up. Girls' State interviews were last Saturday. Our one candidate did not show up. We need to work on "how to be polite, how to be courteous."

Ninth Grade Honors English: Loren reported that the heart of the matter is in trying to create a better environment. The reason is we want a fairer situation for 10th grade admission. Historically, it was felt that HEH grades were not especially standards-based. The HEH emphasis was different; the high school looks at students differently. The system was loaded against change. We want more equitable assessment.

Yu-Wen observed that when sixth grade GATE classes were abolished, we were told that there would be other forms of differentiation, but there weren't.

Loren said that he had talked to similar schools in our API range, Monta Vista, Mission San Jose and others. One school had ninth grade Honors English, the others "never had them."

Loren concluded that if seven of the nine high school English Department teachers wanted to eliminate 9th grade Honors English, we would do so. If we have less consensus than this, we will keep it.

Yu-Wen observed that we should not cap what students can do at the top. We need structured, challenging curriculum, and students need to understand the curriculum at depth. It is not the top students' job to teach other kids. Advanced learners need to interact with other advanced learners. The Common Core may not challenge these kids enough, because they've thought it through already. All kids need rigorous, challenging curriculum.

Loren said this is not a referendum on Honors, Advanced, or AP courses in general. The final point is not to get rid of Honors or AP, it's who belongs in it.

Yu-Wen said that if we lack a fairer system, we should deal with the HEH teachers and their recommendations directly, not try to solve the unfairness indirectly by getting rid of ninth grade Honors English.

Loren asked rhetorically, “Why is there this disconnect?” HEH teachers change, and in the past they have not wanted to be dictated to by high school teachers on what they should teach.

A parent visitor encouraged everyone to reframe the question. This school and District is not as good as we can be. We should not rearrange furniture, we should deal with the larger issue. There is too much fragmentation in academic programs. Mr. Slimp is building a particular program; music is doing the same. We don’t use these models in the academic subjects. Our kids should achieve at a much higher level.

Brinton pointed out the students’ extremely strong work ethic.

The parent said, we need pathways to high academic achievement.

Julia said she reads for the Westinghouse awards, and we never have a San Marino winner. Tom said we had a winner in 1997. Loren said that proved Julia’s point.

Larry said that the proposal made sense because the jump to the freshman year is unpredictable, but really what we should address is the assessment issue. “Level the playing field” is a misnomer.

#### District update on funding:

Gary reported that the state has changed the way it funds K–12 education. We now have the “LCFF,” the “Local Control Funding Formula.” “Local Control,” though is a misnomer. In eight years, there will be a “base funding” of \$8,000 per student. The LCFF benefits those schools with a high percentage of English Language Learners. The extra funds for these students are to be spent on those students who generate them. There are three categories of students who bring about extra funding: (1) English Learners, (2) students on the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program, (3) students in foster care. (A student who is in more than one of these categories counts only as one student for the purpose of getting extra funding.) The extra funding is about 20% more per student.

SMUSD has one student in foster care and 100 students on the Free or Reduced Price Lunch

The way we spend state funds must be “transparent and accountable.” For the spending of this extra money, we need a parent advisory committee, an “English Learner Advisory Committee.” LEA’s (Local Educational Agencies) may use existing advisory committees for this purpose. The big idea is that “budget follows needs.”

Brinton commented that overall, the humanities are going to be taught in a more rigorous way. How does the development of individual interest programs, “this cool stuff,” fit into the state’s plan?

With regard to accountability, Loren asked rhetorically, how can you improve your dropout performance when only one or two students drop out?

Adjournment: At 9:10, we adjourned to 17 April, 2014.

Remaining action items from prior meetings: Mary will investigate getting a catalog of our curriculum offerings together, and getting it up on the web site. Loren or someone he designates will assemble information on students who have left the district at the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition levels.

The AAC’s On-Going List of Possible Topics: (1) Follow-up on the implementation of the recently adopted AP and Honors course access policy. (2) Assembling and reviewing data regarding improved instruction. (3) Making better use of parent volunteers to support instruction, broadly. (4) Follow-up on improving students’ interviewing/oral communication skills. (5) Student retention when moving to the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades. (6) Partnerships with other institutions. (7) Internship and career presentations and opportunities for students. (8) Assemble and review data on the impact of scheduling on programs and college placement.

Distribution:

Tom Armbruster	tarmbru@gmail.com
Bob Boyd	bobboyd8656@yahoo.com
Sally Buckley	buckley2735@aol.com
Joseph Chang	chihchang@aol.com
Keith Derrick	kderrick@smusd.us
Shelley Enger	shelleyenger@yahoo.com
Strefan Fauble	strefan@strefan.com
Betsy Felix	betsyfelix@earthlink.net
Julia Greer	jrgreer@caltech.edu
Liz Hollingsworth	lizhollingsworth@smusd.us
Gale Inadomi	ginadomi@gmail.com
Mary Johnson	mjohnson@smusd.us
Deborah Kallas	dkallas@san-marino.k12.ca.us
Loren Kleinrock	superintendent@smusd.us
Jason Kurtenbach	jkurtenbach@smusd.us
Louise Hindle	lhindle1970@gmail.com
Lauren Leahy	lleahy@smusd.us
Lisa Link	links4@aol.com
Gary McGuigan	gmcguigan@smusd.us
Ananth Natarajan	ananth@i-biomed.com
Sally Newman	sally@gps.caltech.edu, and at jsctp5@yahoo.com
Chris Norgaard	cnorgaard@regentbc.com
Shelley Ryan	optimacall@aol.com
Colleen Shields	cshields@smusd.us
Yu-Wen Taylor	yuwentaylor@gmail.com
Larry Wong	larry.x.wong@sbcglobal.net
Brinton Young	brinton@earthlink.net