

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
Woodstock Academy Board of Trustees
Academic Committee
January 11, 2010

PRESENT: H. Barlow, K. Caron, B. Child, P. Paquette, H. Singleton, A. Spalding, T. Stokes, S. Young

GUESTS: Mrs. Ann Marie Thibodeau, Ms. Hui Wang

ABSENT: P. Green, P. Harrington, R. Rhault

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by Chairperson Philippa Paquette.

Citizen's Participation – None.

MOTION: (Child, Stokes) To accept the minutes of the meeting of December 14, 2009 as presented.

Abstained – Spalding
All Others in Favor

COURSE REVIEWS

Mrs. Paquette explained that the normal sequence of approvals for the proposed courses would be from the Leadership Council to the Academic Committee. Academic Committee meetings normally follow the Leadership Council meetings with the exception of this month. In lieu of rescheduling the Academic Committee meeting to accommodate that sequence, she suggested that the committee review the proposed courses and provisionally approve/disapprove them at this time. In order for the Counseling Department to begin scheduling, all of the course offerings for next year must be firmed up this month. The committee consensus was to take provisional action on the proposals this evening.

Mandarin III – Ms. Wang presented a proposal to extend the sequence of Mandarin to level 3. She surveyed students to determine their level of interest. Students are taking the language for a variety of reasons: job market, global opportunities, simple interest in the language, and simple interest in Chinese culture and history. Students also indicated that colleges are seeking 3 levels of language for admission. The enrollment for Mandarin II next semester will be 14 students so it is anticipated that there will be enough interest to offer Mandarin III as a completion of the sequence. Ms. Wang stated that in designing the proposal, she worked cooperatively with the World Language Curriculum Coordinator and Mrs. Singleton.

Mrs. Singleton stated that having 14 students next semester shows real interest in going to the next level. She stated that there are 8 students signed up for Mandarin I next semester to begin the cycle again. Mrs. Paquette asked if there was AP Mandarin was a possibility and how far away we would be from that. Mrs. Singleton stated that there is an AP Mandarin course curriculum but we would be two years away from that with respect to leveling to get there. Mrs. Paquette asked if there would be a significant gap for students going from Mandarin III into a college level course. Mrs. Singleton did not believe that there would be. Mr. Barlow asked about the number of languages in China. Ms. Wang noted that Mandarin is the official language. There are many dialects however. Mrs. Child asked if the course emphasis was on speaking. Ms. Wang stated that it was but she is also teaching students Chinese characters. Mrs. Paquette asked if any of the Mandarin students went on the China trip last year. Ms. Wang stated that none had gone. Upperclassmen made up the majority of travelers. She stated that students have asked about summer programs. Ms. Wang is looking into the opportunity. Mr. Barlow asked if we have the minimum number required to run the course. Mrs. Singleton stated that we are obligated to Ms. Wang to engage her full time. The cost is consistent, regardless of scheduling. We will have to schedule to meet the needs of the students. Mrs. Paquette asked if Ms. Wang had extra time during the day and how that time was being used. Mrs. Singleton stated that she uses it for curriculum planning as well as assisting with class coverages. Mrs. Paquette expressed an interest in seeing Ms. Wang used as a resource for other disciplines and the K-12 effort. Mrs. Child suggested presentations to middle schools. Ms. Wang is planning for a mini spring festival promoting Chinese culture and traditional activities.

The consensus was to approve the course in concept.

Spanish III

Mrs. Thibodeau presented a proposal for SCP Spanish III. This will extend the SCP sequence to a 3rd level which does not exist for these students. Many students in the SCP track do not continue to the 3rd level which is ACP but need a 3rd level to go on to college. There are also large numbers in the 2nd level and there is great potential to fill the 3rd level. Mrs. Thibodeau stated that with respect to curriculum, students will not end up at the advanced level of grammar that they would in ACP but will get an appropriate experience to complete their sequence. It has a large component of speaking skills.

Mrs. Singleton stated that there are a large number of students interested and we want them to be able to finish out their sequence at the SCP level where they may not be able to otherwise. Mr. Young asked if staffing was sufficient without needing to add. Mrs. Singleton stated that the lower enrollment in the freshmen classes as a whole will give us the flexibility with staff without having to add. Mr. Barlow asked if there were any native speakers enrolled in the courses. Mrs. Thibodeau stated that there are very few, and those that are, are on the ACP track.

The consensus was to approve the course in concept.

Spanish IV

Mrs. Thibodeau presented the proposal for ACP Spanish IV. She stated that currently there is Spanish I-III ACP, then Spanish IV Honors/ECE (Early College Experience), then Spanish V AP/ECE. Many students are intimidated or choose not to go on to Spanish IV Honors/ECE. The content is aggressive – these students are planning to take the AP exam. There are some students who just want to take level IV without the AP. This course would allow them to continue their grammar without having to study strategies for AP. It would also allow them to have one more level, and if they like it and are successful, move on to the honors class.

Mrs. Singleton stated that there was a strange configuration last year of Spanish IV students. There was major attrition of students who got into the Honors section who couldn't do it and dropped it. They could not make the level but had no other options. She stated that if this new course were available to them this year, there would be appropriate numbers in the honors and ACP levels and better retention of students moving onto levels IV and V. She stated that we want to encourage students to do more than 3 years, do well and continue. Mr. Young asked about staffing. Mrs. Singleton stated that it is really a distribution question – it is the same group of students being distributed differently.

The consensus was to approve the course in concept.

French I & II, SCP

Mrs. Singleton presented the proposal on behalf of the World Language Department. She stated that there have been long discussions about the decline in French at the Academy. In an attempt to cast a wider net, Mrs. Burke has put together a 2-year sequence at the SCP level. Hopefully it will entice more students to take the course. The curriculum was developed with the Spanish curriculum as a guide. It will be open to the SCP population interested in taking a language to meet requirements for college. Currently, Spanish is the only choice in the SCP level for a language.

Mrs. Paquette asked if any thought had been given on how to create excitement around the language. Mrs. Singleton stated that currently, Latin is creating the excitement. There are currently 8 students who are so interested that they are taking Greek after school. There is also the enticement of Spanish as a more useful language and foreign trips to Spain and Mexico.

Mrs. Spalding asked how many were enrolled in the French program. Mrs. Singleton stated that there are no more than 50. Mr. Caron stated that there are no feeder programs, Mandarin is popular as well as Latin. Latin received support from parents and colleges. Mrs. Spalding asked if it were a national trend. Mr. Caron stated that it was and that Woodstock Academy is trying to resuscitate it. Mrs. Singleton stated that if students are looking toward globalism, French is not necessarily the powerhouse anymore. Business is more inclined toward Chinese, Indian, or Arabic. Mrs. Paquette asked what will happen if signups are low, will the course be run. Mr. Caron stated that it would not. Mrs. Paquette asked if there were any discussions about sharing engaging techniques between language teachers and other departments. Mrs. Singleton stated that the experience in Spanish has encouraged some changes and has shared those experiences with the French teacher. Techniques need to be different for SCP students.

The consensus was to approve the course.

LEADERSHIP RESTRUCTURING

Mrs. Singleton reviewed the current structure of the Leadership Council which includes administrators, curriculum coordinators (4), and program leaders (12). She stated that it is a large group and they have been struggling this year with being effective for a variety of reasons. She stated that the change in leadership style from Mr. Foye to Mr. Caron has been such that there was less opportunity previously for decision making. Mr. Caron is much more empowering for teachers and leadership opportunities. She stated that they have also been struggling with the different levels of leadership – there are too many. This is compounded in the fact that Curriculum Coordinators are asked for expertise in multiple areas and there are gaps.

Mrs. Singleton stated that the Council decided that this was not working. A leadership expert was brought in to give a workshop and coach. This person also worked with the administration. The group was able to talk about what they needed to do for effective leadership at the Academy. Mrs. Singleton presented a proposal that came out of the Leadership Council as to how to structure it differently. She stated that it would essentially mean curriculum coordinators would evolve from 4 to 8 that have expertise in a smaller domain. They would essentially be department heads for English, Math, Social Studies, Science, World Language, Business/Vocational Technology, PE/health/Family & Consumer Science, and Art/Music. Program leaders would not exist. The job description would combine the roll of the curriculum coordinator and program leader. The leadership group would now be reduced from 16 to 8 and a smaller leadership committee could be more effective.

Mr. Caron stated that this is the beginning stages of school and leadership reorganization and changing how we do business. He wanted to start with the nuts and bolts of the operation. He stated that the real change is to a professional learning community. This structure gives the leadership defined autonomy to do the job they need to do – working on 21st century skills, using data for informed decisions and improvement on a cycle. He stated that this is the first step in a series of steps in the next few months. He stated that he is enthusiastic about it and particularly pleased that it came from the leadership council. Mrs. Singleton noted that it also happens to save money.

Mrs. Paquette asked if there would be any conflict with the transition of personnel and positions, particularly becoming disempowered and losing a stipend. Mrs. Singleton stated that as a whole, everyone agrees that the current structure wasn't working. The next stage is to work with the WAEA to determine some of the logistics and details relative to positions and stipends. She stated that with respect to certification concerns, the state is bringing back the 105 certification for department chairs which takes out the evaluation piece.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Mrs. Singleton stated that there has been a desire to have more time to talk about kids and success and how better to use professional development time and faculty meetings. The January faculty meeting will be restructured to experiment with the concept of moving toward a professional learning community. Faculty will be broken down to small groups of 10, with leadership to be selected through the curriculum coordinators. They will run a mock learning community experience. This is the first opportunity, so there is no data to look at. Instead, they will look at cooperative learning and sharing teaching experiences and skills. The groups will be structured with a cross section of curriculum. Everyone will be prepared with a one-page summary of an activity, it will be emailed to the leader who will then project the activities on a white board and then share it in folders. The idea is to create a buzz about what people are doing and sharing. Mrs. Singleton stated that the hope is that it evolves into a discussion on teaching strategies among faculty. She will look for feedback after the meetings. Discussion will then take place at the Leadership Council to see how it worked. They will then move onto defining what a professional learning community is and develop leadership to facilitate it. This is the first step and the hope is that there will be a second opportunity later in the year. She stated that the goal is to have this in place for next year and to find time to do it.

Mrs. Singleton noted that, on the PK-12 learning community front, the WIKI for algebra is almost ready to be rolled out for members. This is a step forward in a PLC of a different kind.

MOTION: (Child, Spalding) To adjourn the meeting at 6:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kristen Willis
Board Secretary