

1/6/17 Academic Choice Advisory Council (ACAC) Meeting
January 6, 2017, 7:30-8:35AM Berkeley High School Conference Rm. B

Minutes

In Attendance:

Who	Role	E-mail address
Amanda Marini	ACAC Co-Chair and AC Lead English Teacher	amandamarini@berkeley.net
Felicia Phillips	AC Vice Principal	feliciaphillips@berkeley.net
Caroline Bettendorf	AC Parent	crbettendorf@gmail.com
Sheryl Drinkwater	AC Parent	
Erica Etelson	AC Parent	ericaetelson@gmail.com
Catherine Ference	ACAC Parent Rep at Large	candsfer@gmail.com
Shelley Horwitz	AC Parent	sahorwitz@comcast.net
Peter Kozelka	AC Parent	
Jodi Levin	AC Parent	jodi@sweetpickle.com
Susie Marcus	AC Parent	
Rani Marx	AC Parent	
Lisa Miller	AC Parent	lisa@classroommatters.com
Bethany Schoenfeld	AC Parent	
Christine Staples	AC Parent	christineannestaples@gmail.com
Donna Storey	ACAC Secretary	donnageorgestorey@gmail.com
Hugo Wildmann	AC Parent	HLWildmann@yahoo.com

Academic Choice Vice-Principal Felicia Phillips chaired this meeting.

Email Vote: Funding a Catered Lunch for AC Teachers on January 5, 2017

Amanda Marini asked by email on December 15, 2016 if ACAC parents would fund an

appreciation lunch on January 5 for about thirty AC and Special Ed teachers since they had had two intense community-building meetings in December and would not be able to meet together until February 13. Caroline Bettendorf offered to order a catered lunch from Market Hall.

Donna Storey moved by email on December 16, 2016 that we approve \$650 for a teacher lunch on January 5, 2017. Shelley Horwitz seconded the motion.

Action: Eighteen ayes by email. The motion carried.

Public Comments

Jodi Levin thanked the members of the school community who created the petition to ask for more information on the status of Principal Sam Pasarow, who was put on leave by Berkeley Unified School District Superintendent Evans without any detailed explanation due to privacy policies. She asked if this has been disruptive to the school and the learning environment. Ms. Marini said the staff and students are not feeling any disruption, because there is a good administrative team in place. She reminded us that privacy is a right, even if it's frustrating. Ms. Phillips said that from the administrators' perspective, nothing has slipped through the cracks. The administration had a summer retreat and developed signposts they continue to follow. The situation is not ideal, but they have to keep moving. She also emphasized that she doesn't know anything more than what the public knows.

Christine Staples said the PTA Council launched the petition. She worked with Mr. Pasarow and thinks highly of him. She suggested if anyone wants to give him support, write to the Superintendent and School Board and attend the next School Board meeting when the PTA will present the petition. Rani Marx said that students are affected by the rumor mill and find this situation unsettling. What have they been told? Ms. Marini said she doesn't feel the kids are upset, they're just moving on and things are running smoothly. Ms. Phillips said two days after the situation was announced, Senior Vice-Principal Erin Schweng came on the morning announcements, and she repeated the message the next week. Ms. Phillips said she would repeat the news in that day's announcements.

Erica Etelson, the parent of a freshman, wanted to address the issue of homework at Berkeley High. Her student has a lot of homework and it's been stressful. She's heard that older students have even more. She's just seen *Race to Nowhere* (a documentary that challenges current thinking about how we prepare children for success in our schools), which is encouraging a national conversation about stress and homework. She would like to start a conversation about this at Berkeley High in which we discuss the pros and cons of homework and form a committee devoted to a creative approach to homework policy. She distributed copies of a *San Francisco Chronicle* article, "Stress is making our children ill; here is what we can do about it" by Ro Khanna, Vicki Abeles and Tarun Galagali (January 2, 2017). Rethinking the value of homework is one of the key recommendations in the article. Ms. Phillips said we would talk about the issue further later in the meeting.

"Classroom Matters" Family Workshops

Based on the successful turnout for these workshops in the fall, with 80 people

attending the workshop in December, Lisa Miller wanted to schedule two more workshops in the spring, one on time management and one on test preparation. She thought it was best to open the workshops to the entire school, since that drew optimum participation. Ms. Phillips said they would try to schedule the time management workshop in February and the test preparation workshop after spring break. Ms. Bettendorf asked if they have data on who attends. Ms. Phillips said Elisabeth Ross keeps data and attendees are ninth and tenth graders and their parent/guardian. Ms. Storey mentioned that Ms. Ross wanted to hand over the registration and publicity duties for the workshop. Ms. Levin volunteered to take on that task.

Ms. Etelson asked if there were free SAT prep workshops. Ms. Phillips said People's Test Prep give free workshops at Berkeley High in the fall and spring. Ms. Phillips said the school encourages students to go to the online test preparation site, Khan Academy, when they get their scores to make use of their free resources. Ms. Marx pointed out Khan Academy tailors the exercises to the individual student based on which problems they find difficult, so it's a great resource.

December Budget Committee Report

Ms. Marini said in December the following requests were authorized:

\$154 for classroom supplies for Ms. Rigley

\$800 for Ms. Godner and Ms. Bynum to take their classes to the Black Panther exhibit at the Oakland Museum

\$225 for Ms. Rigley to take her Economics students to the Federal Reserve

Ms. Phillips reminded us that based on a vote made in the fall, the Budget Committee has the power to review and approve funding requests under \$2000. Ms. Staples asked about the status of a request by Glenn Wolkenfeld for Bio Tech supplies. Ms. Phillips said they are currently reviewing that request to see if funding is available through the Berkeley High Development Group.

ACAC Fundraising Efforts

Catherine Ference stated that we currently brought in about \$13,000 in donations from the AC newsletter fundraising appeals. This seems low. Ms. Storey said that \$25,000 is the average annual amount over the past few years. Ms. Ference said only about 30 people have contributed and she wishes more families felt invested in helping, even if they only gave a small amount. She suggested the ACAC form a fundraising committee to get the message across to the parent community. Several parents were interested. The following suggestions were discussed:

Have a fundraising table at the upcoming Open House and perhaps have AC leadership students staff it

Change the cycle from the usual October-December fundraising season for other organizations to avoid giving fatigue and/or making it a year-long effort

Focus on percentage of participation no matter how large the gift

Have Ms. Phillips include an appeal in a robo call; have a student's voice on the robo call

Peter Kozelka asked how the Berkeley High Development group decides which requests they will fund. Ms. Staples, co-president of the Development Group, said that small learning communities with large balances in their individual fundraising accounts, such as AC and BIHS, are asked to use their own funds. The other small learning communities, who do not have such resources, make an application directly to the Development Group, which votes on the merits of each request at its monthly meetings.

Vote: New ACAC Treasurer

Our current treasurer, Rakhi Rao, is stepping down from the position. Freshman AC parent Karen Chapman volunteered to take over. As she was unable to attend the meeting, Ms. Phillips read her statement:

"I welcome the opportunity to step into the role of Treasurer of ACAC. My son, Devon King, entered BHS as a freshman this past fall so this role would be a great way to volunteer some of my time, get to know and work with fellow parents and BHS staff and be involved with the BHS community. I have 25 years of experience in the accounting and financial field and more recently held the role of Treasurer at Northbrae Community Church in Berkeley of which I'm a member. I offer my energy and skill set to liaise with the BHSDG Treasurer, attend necessary and/or applicable meetings and produce ACAC financial reports on a monthly or as needed basis and will work hard to ensure reports are accurate, relevant and time sensitive."

Ms. Staples moved that we vote to appoint Ms. Chapman treasurer of the ACAC. Ms. Levin seconded the motion.

Action: The motion carried unanimously.

AC Graduation Celebration Planning

Ms. Marini said that she'd recruited three seniors to work on the graduation committee. She anticipates that the graduation planning committee will be asking for other parent volunteers to help in March.

Food Donations to the Newcomer Small Learning Community

Ms. Marini read an appeal from Marcela Taylor of the Newcomer Small Learning Community that serves students who have been in the United States for less than five years.

"Dear Parents,

We have a special need right now that we think you can help with. The teachers in our Newcomer Small Learning Community are in need of food donations for their students who are unable to have breakfast at home or at school. Many of our newly arrived

immigrant students face daily struggles. Some students are here on their own, some are reunifying with their families and all are learning to navigate a new way of life. There are about 65 students in the Newcomer program and the Academic Language Development class. Once newly arrived immigrants achieve an advanced level of English proficiency many of them choose to become part of the AC community. In this sensitive time of transition for our nation, our immigrant community is particularly affected. Our teachers could use some additional support from us so they can sustain the crucial work they are already undertaking on behalf of the Newcomer population.”

The Berkeley International High School community posted a Sign Up Genius and parents volunteered to provide fruit, granola bars and sandwich fixings to the Newcomer students through February. Ms. Phillips wondered if AC parents wanted to take on the task of providing snacks for a few months. Ms. Levin asked if it would involve individual parents signing up or if we would approve funding for supplies only. Mr. Kozelka offered to shop for the food and deliver it every week, if he was reimbursed by the ACAC for the supplies. Ms. Storey said it would be helpful if the Newcomer teachers would provide us with information on amounts and which foods are popular with students. The attendees came to a consensus that this would be better than trying to recruit many parents. We will pursue this issue at the February meeting.

Student Voice Subcommittee

Ms. Phillips said she is writing a paragraph, in tandem with the counselors, on what students should do when they have a problem. She and the counselors will be visiting all freshman English classes the week of January 16 to give a five-minute presentation and provide counselor contact information. She is also working on convening a student leadership group to discuss student voice issues.

Berkeley High Homework Policies

Ms. Staples said the PTA Council is working on a homework reform program focused on the elementary and middle schools. Berkeley High is a stand-alone entity. The limited-homework policy at Thousand Oaks Elementary School is a good model, and they are trying to put in pilots at other elementary schools. Ms. Staples has reached out to Berkeley High teachers and administrators to get a conversation going to look at the root of the issue: What is homework for? Do you really need a lot of homework? If you know how to do a problem, you *don't need* to do it over and over. If you don't know how to do it, you are *unable* to do a lot of problems.

Ms. Marx reminded us of the parent survey on stress and homework that Ms. Staples directed last spring. She thought we could use those survey results as a launch point for discussions with the staff. She said the simplest fix would be to encourage teachers to honor “dead week.” Ms. Phillips explained this is the week before finals when no new material is supposed to be covered. However, there is no rule about assigning homework during dead week. She said the autonomy of teachers is valued at Berkeley High. The teachers’ union agreement refers to this as “academic freedom.”

Ms. Marini said she doesn't give much homework to ninth graders, and there is a movement in AC not to use homework in grading, because homework grades are hardest on students at risk who don't feel entitled to ask for extensions.

Ms. Phillips said math and science classes tend to assign the most homework and Ms. Bettendorf added that some Spanish teachers also assign a lot of homework. Ms. Etelson remarked that there seems to be great variations in the homework assigned, and it comes down to the luck of the draw with your teachers.

Ms. Marx added that the dead week policy includes no tests or quizzes. Ms. Phillips said teachers are allowed give tests or quizzes if it's part of the learning plan. Ms. Marini said dead week is nothing official, teachers learn it through the grapevine. It's a culture not a policy.

Thanks for January 5 Teacher Lunch

Ms. Marini thanked the ACAC for hosting the New Year's lunch. She said there was high attendance and teachers welcomed the chance to take a break and get together and build community.