

## 3/4/16 Academic Choice Advisory Council (ACAC) Meeting

Mar. 4, 2016, 7:30-8:35AM Berkeley High School Conference Room B

### Minutes

#### In Attendance:

Who	Role	E-mail address
Amanda Green	AC Co-Chair and AC Lead English Teacher	amandagreen@berkeley.net
Felicia Phillips	AC Vice Principal	feliciaphillips@berkeley.net
Alecia Harger	ACAC Student Representative	aleciaharger@students.berkeley.edu
Avi Peltz	ACAC Student Representative	avipeltz@students.berkeley.edu
Sam Arriola	AC Webmaster	sarriola@gmail.com
Caroline Bettendorf	AC Parent	crbettendorf@gmail.com
Alan Dyck	AC Parent	alan@dyck.net
Peter Kozelka	AC Parent	
Rene Kvidahl	AC Parent	
Rani Marx	AC Parent	
Lisa Miller	AC Parent	lisa@classroommatters.com
Johanna Reneke	ACAC Parent Rep at Large	j.reneke@gmail.com
Elisabeth Ross	AC Parent	e@elisabethross.com
Christine Staples	AC Parent	christineannestaples@gmail.com
Donna Storey	ACAC Secretary	donnageorgestorey@gmail.com

**Academic Choice VP Felicia Phillips chaired this meeting.**

#### Public Comments

Ms. Phillips introduced herself and asked attendees to introduce themselves. She then opened the meeting to public comments.

Rani Marx, the parent of an AC junior and freshman, spoke about the lack of a student voice to address classroom issues. (The following is a summary; the full text follows the minutes). Ms. Marx said that the current de facto policy requires students to approach the teacher directly even when the circumstances are uncomfortable. Thus students seldom talk to a problematic teacher because they fear retribution. If they speak to outside sympathetic teachers, that teacher can do nothing to change the situation. When administrators are approached, they tell the student s/he must speak directly to the teacher or file a BUSD grievance. As a result, the student voice and experience is discounted.

Ms. Marx proposed four steps to support and implement open communication among administrators, teachers, students and families so that positive and negative feedback can be used constructively to improve Berkeley High.

--Student Bill of Rights developed by students and teachers (a solid draft was already created by BHS student leadership alum, Shira Wolkenfeld).

--Mandatory twice-yearly implementation of nationally standardized and validated anonymous surveys in each classroom

--Create student ombudsperson position for each small school and grade

--Create a family ombudsperson position

In follow-up discussion, Christine Staples said that these solutions were compelling. Her child's teacher recently shamed the class and the students felt they had no place to go to address the problem. Avi Peltz agreed this is a real issue. He has been able to deal with his issues successfully by approaching his guidance counselor. Many Berkeley High students are unaware of this option and he feels it should be better publicized. Alan Dyck asked if counselors consult with students individually about their schedules for next year. Mr. Peltz said no.

Ms. Phillips outlined the complaint process as she understands it. It depends on the level of anonymity that the student desires. First a student can go straight to the teacher, but if the issue is political or uncomfortable, they can go to the counselor who may get Ms. Phillips involved. She has about ten concerns to work through right now. It's a balancing act because she is constrained by the collective bargaining agreement with the teachers and district policy. Ms. Phillips is in charge of English and history teachers, and she may bring in other vice-principals for a math, science or foreign language issue. The vice-principal then has meetings with the student and teachers separately and together. They try to use restorative justice to deal with the conflict. If a student relies on the formal process through the district, the time frame is longer and students usually want immediate relief. She agreed the system could use some tweaking and thought Ms. Marx had some great suggestions.

Lisa Miller said she fully supported Ms. Marx. Ms. Miller had been both a student and teacher at Berkeley High, and is now a parent of a BHS student. This is a decades-old problem, and she would like to be part of a committee to address this issue. The elephant in the room is that a number of teachers are not responsive to feedback and there is a strong union. Some teachers won't want to participate in a new approach. It's part of the school's culture to have no actionable plan if the teacher isn't interested in

changing.

Ms. Green said that Academic Choice is pushing teachers to give surveys at the end of each semester. It can't be required. The results are meant only for the teachers' eyes. Most teachers want the feedback. As someone who has worked with the teachers' union, Ms. Green said they want the right process for teachers but won't defend their actions if they are doing the wrong thing. She also believes that the evaluation process for teachers does not hold teachers accountable. She as a teacher wants people to get critical evaluations and be held accountable.

Ms. Miller said that all the students know which teachers don't respond to feedback and both student representatives agreed. Peter Kozelka suggested that Ms. Marx prioritize the four suggestions because she can't expect progress on all four.

Alecia Harger said that the Student Bill of Rights could be developed by student leadership. She also said that she was in a class where the teacher tried to figure out who had given certain feedback on the survey and used the results to intimidate students. Donna Storey pointed out that there was a time-limit for student leadership as they only have one year to focus on a project. Ms. Harger said John Villavincenzio, director of student leadership, might be able to guide the process beyond one year. Mr. Peltz said this was a problem. He felt it didn't make sense for seniors to monopolize leadership positions because they are less invested in making the school better for the following years. He thought it would be better to have younger students run for higher offices.

Ms. Green suggested we do a pilot in AC where teachers and students come together in restorative justice. We could ask the newly appointed restorative justice coordinator to train AC teachers to run a restorative justice circle. Ms. Green thought it would be easy to get a critical mass of teachers to agree so others would feel compelled to join in the process.

Caroline Bettendorf asked Ms. Marx if she knew how other school districts dealt with this. Ms. Marx said she mostly knew about surveys. Many districts use surveys and make the results public. A community can't really have a discussion without that. We also need informal communication. She discussed the example of Willard Middle School, which had been troubled for years. When Robert Ithurburn took over as principal, within one year everything changed for the better. He announced that the type of new school culture he wanted to create and why. Some teachers disliked it and left. There was no union involvement.

Ms. Green said it is dispiriting to only hear the negatives about Berkeley High when many teachers are working hard. Ms. Staples said we should take time to thank teachers for the positive things. Ms. Ross said we need to approach this problem from both sides, students and adults. The adults need to be willing to make a change. Ms. Phillips suggested a small group get together to form a subcommittee to make a plan to move forward on this issue. Ms. Green agreed. The sign-in sheet was passed around for attendees to indicate if they wanted to be on the subcommittee.

### **Senior History Collaboration Funding**

Crystal Rigley, the senior lead teacher for AP Macroeconomics, submitted a proposal to

the ACAC for \$300 for herself and Jennifer Campbell, the senior lead teacher for AP Government, to collaborate on the curriculum to figure out how to make the program work for students at a variety of levels. Currently all seniors must take AP Government and two-thirds of seniors take AP Economics. The two teachers would meet for five hours, so the cost would be ten curriculum hours at \$30 each.

Johanna Reneke moved that we approve \$300 to fund the senior AP history teachers' planning session. Ms. Staples seconded the motion.

**Action:** The funding request was unanimously approved.

### **Online Professional Development Funding**

Crystal Rigley is also a teacher of sophomore World History and requested \$225 to take an online course through Primary Source entitled Africans in the Age of Atlantic Slavery. The history department has been working on increasing diverse perspectives in the curriculum, especially African perspectives. This year they taught about the slave trade for the first time and this education would help immensely. Ms. Rigley would take the course and share what she learned with the other World History teachers.

Ms. Staples moved that we approve \$225 to fund the online course. Ms. Miller seconded the motion.

**Action:** The funding request was unanimously approved.

### **World History Planning Session Funding**

Ms. Rigley also submitted a proposal to the ACAC for \$450 for three World History teachers (Sandy Nicholson, Joe Poppas and Ms. Rigley) to make further plans for the second-semester curriculum. The teachers would meet for 5 hours.

Ms. Staples moved that we approve \$450 to fund the World History teachers' planning session. Sam Arriola seconded the motion.

**Action:** The funding request was unanimously approved.

### **Student Representatives' Report**

Mr. Peltz talked about plans for the AC graduation. The AC celebration will take place on Tuesday, June 7, in the Community Theater, although the starting time is not yet settled—late afternoon or evening. Ms. Storey reminded him that the graduation stole design is due by May 1 so the stoles can be produced in time for the ceremony. Mr. Peltz said that student leadership has come up with a list of ideas they have shared with Ms. Phillips. There will be an awards ceremony, teacher speakers and a speaker from outside of Berkeley High, and a partially catered reception. The idea is not to make the official part of the celebration too long. Ms. Ross agreed to help with the catering plans. Ms. Green suggested a dessert buffet over a full dinner. Ms. Phillips said there are 297 students in AC plus their families for a total of around 1000 people attending the event. Ms. Phillips also said it would be nice to get families of juniors to help out so they can get a preview for the next year.

Ms. Bettendorf said that at the Berkeley International High School graduation, teachers say something about each individual student. Mr. Peltz said that would take too long since AC is so large. Ms. Green suggested that perhaps teachers write something appreciative about each student and post it on an appreciation wall. She said she would encourage this in the leadership meeting.

### **Spring General Meeting and Course Selection Information**

Ms. Phillips said that the AC Spring General Meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, April 5 in the Berkeley High Library. The start time will probably be 7pm and she has already gotten commitments from math and science teachers to answer questions about course selection. This is rather close to the final deadline for course selection, which is April 8, but counselors are very busy working with current BHS students on course selection and working with incoming eighth-grade families. Students will still have time to make changes after the meeting.

Ms. Phillips distributed a new handout entitled "BHS Academic Choice: Advanced Placement/Honors Course Commitment 2016-2017." This will be distributed to students in their English classes the week of May 14. The commitment form requires students to remain enrolled in any AP or honors class they sign up for during the entire school year.

If students exceed the recommended number of AP/Honors classes (1 for freshman, 2 for sophomores, 3 for juniors and seniors), they will have to meet individually with their counselors for consultation. Students and parents will need to sign the commitment form. The back of the form is a planning sheet listing all AP and honors classes offered and a chart for students to plot out their other time commitments.

Ms. Phillips said that AC is trying to figure out a way for AC students to pursue rigorous academic classes but have a balance in their lives. Currently some students graduate having taken fifteen AP courses. Ms. Green said that counselors have been upfront about the homework load in AP courses to her freshman students.

Ms. Storey said that the election of next year's parent ACAC officers is supposed to take place at the Spring General Meeting. Ms. Phillips said we should have our ballot ready by April 5. Parents agreed to provide refreshments for the meeting.

### **Stipends for Teachers Participating in the Spring General Meeting**

At our last meeting, we had discussed paying stipends to teachers for their additional time in attending the Spring General Meeting to speak to parents about course selection. Ms. Phillips said we would give two-hour stipends to each teacher at \$30 an hour for as many as seven teachers.

Ms. Staples moved that we approve \$420 or more if necessary to provide stipends for teachers who speak at the Spring General Meeting. Sam Arriola seconded the motion.

**Action:** The funding request was unanimously approved.

### **Continuation of Free Study Skills Workshops**

Ms. Miller offered to provide two follow-up study skills workshops to AC students free of charge, if there were interest. She would like to do a time management workshop in April and a test preparation workshop in May. Ms. Phillips said that AC would definitely like to host the additional workshops, but in terms of scheduling, we need to keep in mind that the juniors would be taking the state standardized tests between May 17 and June 3.

### **Sophomore English Redesign and *Macbeth* Field Trip Chaperones**

Ms. Green said that there was a major push to redesign the sophomore English curriculum, and teachers would be asking for funds to pay for teacher collaboration.

She also asked for parents to volunteer to chaperone the sophomore class field trip to see *Macbeth* at the Berkeley Rep on April 7. BIHS, AC and Jordan Winer's drama students would all be going, so a total of 23 chaperones are needed for 600 students. Chaperones would be on duty from about 11:15am to 3pm. Parents of students other than sophomores are welcome to volunteer. Contact Ms. Green at [amandagreen@berkeley.net](mailto:amandagreen@berkeley.net).

AC also needs chaperones for the Cal Shakes field trip in June. We need 12 chaperones for June 1 and 17 for June 3. This will be an all-day field trip. Interested parents please contact Ms. Green.

### **Treasurer's Report**

ACAC Treasurer Rakhi Rao was unable to attend the meeting but provided copies of the latest Statement of Activities as of March 1, 2016. Academic Choice has a balance of \$80,417. We brought in \$26,977 in donations this year so far.

### **Student Surveys**

Ms. Staples handed out a draft of the "Berkeley High School Homework Survey for AC Parents/Guardians" which asks parents to provide information about their student's homework load and whether they use outside tutors. Ms. Staples invited feedback from Ms. Green, Ms. Phillips and other parents. Ms. Phillips said it would be good to launch the survey at the Spring General Meeting on April 5. Ms. Staples suggested we provide Chromebooks so parents could complete the survey on the spot.

The survey also asks if students cover new material during Dead Week, the week before end-of-semester exams when teachers are not supposed to take their classes on field trips or cover new content, only review material. Ms. Harger said teachers usually don't honor Dead Week and Mr. Peltz agreed. Ms. Green said in her classes the final is performance-based so she uses that time for students to prepare their final presentation.

### **Technology Report**

AC Webmaster Sam Arriola notified us that the AC website had been hacked. This happened once before and he had upgraded the WordPress software. He wanted to move the website to Google sites, not only for security reasons but because people are unable to access the website on their phones under the current configuration. Ms. Phillips said she would be meeting with Ed Tech on Monday and would speak with

them about it. This is a particularly inconvenient time to have the AC website down because eighth grade parents are trying to make a decision about a Small Learning Community for their children.

Ms. Phillips concluded the meeting by thanking Ms. Harger and Mr. Peltz for staying late, Ms. Marx for her great feedback that will help keep students at the center of Berkeley High's goals, and all the other ACAC parents for what they do. Ms. Staples thanked Ms. Green and Ms. Phillips for their open hearts and minds.

### **Next ACAC Meeting**

Our next meeting will be on Friday, April 8, 2016, 7:30-8:35 a.m. in BHS Conference Room B in the D Building.

### **Text of 3/4/16 ACAC Public Comments Presentation—Rani Marx**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

I have a freshman and a junior in AC and am serving on the SSC for a second year.

There is a lot that works well at BHS and in AC, but I'm coming to you today because I believe there is a fundamental gap in the system: the lack of a student voice to address classroom issues.

If a student and especially a group of students experiences a problem with a teacher in the classroom (such as public shaming, racist comments, or routine dressing down of the class), the current de facto policy at Berkeley High requires each student to speak to his or her teacher directly and individually about the problem even if it involves the classroom environment. More often than not, a teenager is very uncomfortable confronting an authority figure who has power over his/her grade and future. This contradicts BUSD guidance which specifies that going directly to someone higher up is permitted if the student feels uncomfortable going to the teacher.

If we resolved this issue, I am confident that an overwhelming number of challenges for students, teachers, administrators & families would be resolved, ESPECIALLY for students who feel less empowered, have fewer support structures and resources, and greater headwinds to contend with.

As my younger son told me: The rules are clearly good rules and make sense. They just don't work.

At what point do you keep implementing the same broken rules and insist that everyone follow suit?

I am not going to tell you anything you don't already know about the issue. I am simply going to suggest some solutions.

First, I want to say something ridiculously obvious: Our students are far more tolerant and flexible than we are. They will put up with an awful lot and adapt. They are HIGHLY reticent to complain; they would rather work around the problem.

On the rare occasion that they are pushed to voice a complaint, either a single event or cumulative exposure, where can they go to get their classroom issues addressed? NOWHERE. They can speak to their teacher or file an official grievance.

How is the system broken?

- Students almost never speak to a teacher. OF COURSE NOT! They feel highly uncomfortable and unable to do so!!! They don't want to be singled out, they fear retribution and they DEFINITELY do NOT want their parent speaking to the teacher.

- Sometimes they speak to another teacher they feel comfortable with, individually or as a group. The teacher they speak with is invariably sympathetic but cannot take direct action to resolve the problem.

- On rare occasion they speak with or email an administrator. Students and parents are told by administrators that they MUST speak with the teacher in question. They are never told that they do NOT have to confront the teacher if they are unwilling or unable to do so. They are NEVER told that they should try to resolve the issue informally with administration or with the department head. You can see these options spelled out on the BUSD grievance procedure form. Students and parents are instructed to file an official grievance, indeed told they must file an official grievance about their individual problem, NOT address problems occurring in the classroom as a whole or with their classmates (NO MATTER HOW EGREGIOUS).

What is the fallout of this broken process?

-no whistleblowing allowed

-student experience is discounted; it is implied that they have no right to a positive learning experience

-students perceive that the problem must be theirs, individually; a hostile classroom learning environment is not a concern

-students who historically are not empowered or who do not have the wherewithal to make their concerns known are harmed the most

-students shut down, turn off, or act out in the classroom, further compounding the problem and negatively affecting academic achievement

-parents get angrier and ratchet up their complaint or they disengage

What are the solutions?

Give students and parents the respect they deserve. Acknowledge their concerns. Let them know their options and direct them to the appropriate person to help resolve the problem. Inform students how to proceed if the problem is not resolved in a timely fashion. Make certain that procedures are publicized, that resources are deployed and, above all that there is the will to discuss, mediate, and resolve problems WITHOUT resorting to official grievance filing whenever possible. SUPPORT and IMPLEMENT open communication between administrators, teachers, students and families so that positive and negative feedback can be used constructively to improve BHS.

To accomplish this I recommend:

1. **Student bill of rights:** For and developed by students and teachers, approved by administration, and discussed and posted in every classroom. An excellent draft was developed by a BHS student (Shira Wolkenfeld) with Superintendent Evans; we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Greater detail is needed regarding resolution of classroom problems.
2. **Mandatory twice yearly implementation of nationally standardized and validated anonymous student surveys in each classroom.** Research shows that anonymous student surveys give students a voice, improve teaching, and accelerate student learning. This useful feedback to teachers cannot be obtained in other ways. Teachers must be given release time to review results and pooled anonymous results must be available to department heads for review. Survey results would not be part of administrative teacher evaluation. We do not now have a system for surveying students that is up to the task.
3. **Create a student ombudsperson (S.O.) position** for each small school and grade; publicize widely. The S.O. will hear student issues, communicate with an adult ombudsperson, and attempt to resolve the issue informally. Students could retain anonymity. Alternatively, engage and involve the new Restorative Practices/Restorative Justice coordinator to address these issues.
4. **Create a family ombudsperson position** to discuss student and family concerns. A sympathetic, knowledgeable professional can counsel students and families about options and act as a liaison with teachers. Students could retain anonymity. This position would work with the S.O. to resolve issues. The Parent Resource Center serves this function now, but only informally and poorly publicized.

I recommend that ACAC lead the school and pilot these solutions as soon as possible so that everyone benefits.

Thank you.