



**Old Sturbridge Academy Charter Public School
Minutes of the Academic Excellence Committee**

Draft

Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 4, 2022
Time: 4:00 p.m.
Location: Zoom Video Conference
Members present: Linda Denault, Margaret Ferrick*, Reed Hillman#, Sarah Risotti*
Members absent: Richard McGrath, Jennifer Melendez, Jessica Miller
In attendance: Meg Cunningham, Jim Donahue, Lisa DeTora, Melissa Hogan, Alex McConnon, Steve O'Neil

*Non-Trustee Committee member

#Honorary Trustee

Order of Business:

Public Access 1 on Docketed Items*

1. Approve the minutes of the September 7, 2021 and November 2, 2021 meeting of the Academic Excellence Committee
2. Review of the Academic Excellence Committee goals
3. Middle School Grading Policy
4. New/Other Business

Public Access 2*

Adjournment

Documents and Exhibits:

- Draft Minutes of the September 7, 2021 and November 2, 2021 meeting of the Academic Excellence Committee
- Academic Excellence suggestions
- OSA – Role of Academic Excellence Committee

Dr. Denault called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

Public Access 1 on Docketed Items

Dr. Denault asked if there were any comments from members of the public. There were none.

Dr. Denault conducted a roll call of the Committee. Quorum was established.

1. *Approval of the minutes of the September 7, 2021 and November 2, 2021 meetings of the Academic Excellence Committee*

Dr. Denault asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2021 and November 2, 2021 meetings.

Motion: Ms. Risotti moved to approve the minutes of the September 7, 2021 and November 2, 2021 meeting of the Academic Excellence Committee.

Second: Ms. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Dr. Denault conducted a roll call of the Committee. Ms. DeTora, Dr. Hogan, and Mr. O’Neil raised their hands to approve. Ms. Ferrick and Mr. Hillman abstained.

2. *Review of the Academic Excellence Committee goals*

Dr. Denault asked if anyone had suggestions before approving and finalizing the goals. These goals were revised to put the committee in more supervisory role.

Dr. Denault read through the first bullet. Mr. Hillman suggested inserting the word “and” in between “Executive Director/Principal” on the first bullet which read “Establish with the Executive Director/Principal a shared definition of academic excellence.”

Dr. Denault read the second bullet which read “Review trends and outcomes related to academic achievement of students at all grade levels to ensure progress as laid out in the charter and in relevant school/executive leadership goals.” and suggested that the slash should say “and” as well. Ms. Ferrick asked that this bullet be broken down. Mr. Donahue said when the original charter was written, goals were set for the students which were typically in percentile. Mr. Donahue said he could pull those for the committee before their next meeting. Dr. Denault suggested using the word “detailed” instead of “laid out” in the bullet.

Dr. Denault read the third bullet which read “Monitor teacher credentials to ensure that all educators are highly qualified in terms of the standards established by DESE.” Ms. DeTora said currently, everyone at Old Sturbridge Academy (OSA) is licensed. Ms. Ferrick asked if that language is in the charter. Dr. Denault said she was not sure but it is basic criteria. Mr. Hillman suggested instead of saying “in terms of” that it should read “defined by the standards in terms of DESE”. Ms. DeTora agreed and said it gives flexibility as the teachers become professionally licensed but is still holding the high standards that is expected of the teachers.

Dr. Denault read the fourth bullet which read “Monitor progress of high needs students, particularly students with special needs and the English learners.” Dr. Denault said she wants to be certain that students with challenges are making steady progress. Ms. Cunningham asked if it should read “English language learners” Dr. Denault said she would insert that. Ms. Ferrick said high needs is a category in DESE and asked if this is what this bullet referred to. Dr. Denault said these needs could be defined in parenthesis and the three needs could be added.

Dr. Denault read the fifth bullet which read “Help to foster a collaborative professional culture within and outside of the charter school community.” and asked the committee if they saw it as part of their role. Mr. Donahue said the school is growing, which means adding community professionals and that OSA wants to maintain that to support collaboration. DESE will review dissemination activities as OSA goes into the renewal. Mr. Donahue liked this goal for strategic planning for the committee and will rely on the committees support for this.

Dr. Denault read the sixth bullet which read “Support and/or execute responsibilities as outlined in the strategic plan.” Everyone confirmed that this bullet was appropriate.

Dr. Denault asked for a motion and if approved, she would send to Ms. Brooks.

Motion: Dr. Hogan moved to accept these roles of the committee as edited.

Second: Ms. Ferrick seconded the motion.

Ms. McConnon conducted a roll call of the committee for Dr. Denault, Ms. Ferrick, Mr. Hillman, and Ms. Risotti which was approved.

3. *Middle School Grading Policy*

Ms. DeTora asked for feedback in this policy that will eventually go to the Board for approval. Ms. DeTora, Mr. Burris, and Mr. O’Neil looked at what high performing ELL education schools in the area were doing and got feedback. Ms. DeTora said her team’s goal was to make this as readable as possible for parents, administrators, guidance counselors, and admission officers. Ms. DeTora said the team looked at sending district report cards and from there, they looked to middle school teachers for comments, brought this to the Instructional Leadership team, the Parent Advisory Council, and now it is coming before the Academic Excellence Committee.

Ms. DeTora shared her screen with the proposed middle school grading policy. OSA uses standard-based grading based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks. Ms. DeTora read the proposal. Per Ms. DeTora, the goal as students enter middle school is to make their grades understandable, readable, and transferable. Ms. DeTora said grades will appear as both percentages and letters. The current proposal lists grades 6, 7, and 8. Ms. DeTora asked if fifth grade should be included.

Ms. DeTora showed what a current report card looks like which shows the narrative, describes the habits of character, academic progress indicators, descriptions, and learning targets. Dr. Denault asked if OSA will still break out the learning goals expected as well as a letter grade and percentage. Ms. DeTora confirmed and said there would be the grade and all of the narrative pieces as well. Dr. Denault asked if the percentage would represent a summary of the details in the targets and Ms. DeTora confirmed saying all components such as the habits of character are factored into the final grade.

Ms. DeTora showed descriptions of what each percentage and letter grade looks like, along with what it means if a student gets an “incomplete”. Ms. DeTora highlighted what it means for students to be on the honor roll with high honors and honors. Ms. DeTora spoke about striving for the National Junior Honor Society which are looking for cumulative GPAs.

Ms. Risotti said she was a favor of the model and likes percentages shown. She stated that as a parent of an incoming fifth grader, she is okay with having fifth grade considered as middle school.

Ms. Ferrick asked how the fifth graders are currently identified. Ms. DeTora said there is a right of passage ceremony after fifth grade where students create portfolios to show they are ready to go into middle school and they switch teachers.

Mr. Donahue said OSA will be adding 20 students if the amendment is approved this winter and suggested holding off on making fifth graders middle school students. Ms. Cunningham looked at what the sending districts and the Junior National Honor Society does and said surrounding towns are pushing on the upper grade end. Dr. Denault supported leaving fifth graders with the elementary students. Mr. Donahue suggested that perhaps fifth graders could be oriented to how they will be evaluated academically to help prepare them for the transition. Mr. Hillman said transferability is imperative for grades 10 through 12 and agreed with Mr. Donahue in a transition.

Dr. Denault said this challenges OSA to help those students who are falling behind. Ms. Cunningham said the parents know in advance if their student is receiving a 1 or a grade that is far below expectations on the scale and suggested a similar plan for middle school. Ms. Ferrick said adjusting practice and interventions will shine through.

Dr. Hogan said there are vocational opportunities in Massachusetts where they apply in grades 7 and 8. OSA sends transcripts in the event that they apply. Mr. O’Neil said Ms. DeTora mentioned moving to an online portal and having it readily available where parents and can go and look and see status of their student instead of waiting for the report card. Ms. DeTora said OSA wants the culture to shine through. Per Ms. DeTora, some high schools are credit based, so it is important to ensure they make that transition to high school. Ms. DeTora said the team ended up taking “independently” out of the description in the document because some students might have it in their IEP that they need teacher support.

Dr. Denault asked what the next steps will be. Ms. DeTora said she likes the template idea and teachers are asking for a weighted break down. Per Ms. DeTora, OSA’s culture holds project based learning as high as tests and wants to incorporate the habits of character pieces, giving those weight, and grading them. Ms. DeTora will bring this back to the teachers who will create a template to then take back to the Instructional Leadership team. She will then bring it back to the Academic Excellence Committee before bringing it to the Board.

Dr. Denault asked for the opinions on fifth grade. Ms. McConnon took a roll call vote on the committee. Ms. Ferrick was in favor of piloting it with grades 6 through 8. Mr. Hillman agreed. Ms. Risotti said she was in favor of fifth grade being in middle school but was fine either way. Dr. Denault said she supported keeping fifth grade with the elementary students and using it as transition year.

Dr. Denault asked for opinions of the non-committee members. Dr. Hogan agreed with fifth grade being part of elementary students and transitioning into middle school. Ms. Cunningham and Mr. O'Neil agreed. Mr. Donahue said he was in favor of grade 6 piloting with grades 6 through 8 and thinking more about the fifth graders in the future.

4. *New/Other Business*

Dr. Denault asked if there was any new or other business. There was none.

*Public Access 2**

Dr. Denault asked if there were any comments from members of the public. There were none.

Motion: Mr. Hillman moved to adjourn the meeting.

Second: Ms. Ferrick seconded the motion.

Vote: All in favor

Dr. Denault adjourned the meeting at 4:59 pm.