

Minutes
For the School Conference Meeting on
13 January 2021 at 15:30 per Zoom call

In attendance:

Administration: Hr. Schulz, Ms. Rolle
Guest: Fr. Althoff

Teacher Representatives: Ms. Geary-Müller, Hr. Schroeder, Mr. Blessman

Parent Representatives: Mr. Bespolka, Ms. Winkler, Hr. Berger, Fr. Albanese
Alternates: Ms. Pedersen, Fr. Salewski, Fr. Tabachnikoff, Ms. Vogel

Student Representatives: Mr. Delfs, Hr. von Kleist, Ms. Winger, Hr. Kraft

Hort Guests: Ms. Heyelmann

Voting members: 13 voting members present

1. Approval of Agenda

Hr. Schulz proposed adding one agenda point: Approval of Food Committee members. This change, and the amended agenda, were approved unanimously.

2. Approval of Minutes from 2 September 2020 and 28 October 2020

Both received unanimous approval.

3. Distance Learning updates

High School:

Fr. Althoff, who has been coordinating distance-learning efforts at the High School, described the process the teachers used to develop standards that have broad acceptance and support.

--High school teachers have been working on the standards document, which is still a work in progress, since May. It is the product of 9 months hard work. They started with an assessment of the situation in the spring and worked to develop criteria and standards that help the whole faculty understand what needs to happen to fulfill the standards at a high level.

--Several parts are in flux. The discussions about video conferencing are ongoing. There have been many discussions about data privacy and security. One outcome: The school purchased a license for Google Enterprise, which has helped to address some of the concerns that were raised.

--The hope is that the elementary school will also be able to develop a similar set of standards. Although there are many differences in learning styles and specific challenges between the high school and the elementary school, we face similar problems with the pandemic and distance learning. Perhaps this crisis provides a chance to come together as a whole school and find common solutions and further ways to enhance digital learning.

--Mr. Schulz noted that he has received positive feedback, especially about video conferences, from both parents and teachers. Teachers have said they are happy to have the tool, not only for instruction, but also as a way to connect more effectively with students. A meeting does not need to be 45 minutes; a 10 or 15-minute check-in helps teachers understand how students are doing and what problems they might be facing.

--Ms. Winger said that in her experience (11th grade diploma student), distance learning has been extremely successful so far. Two or three classes have video conferences each day, which is a manageable amount. Scheduling video conferences during the time a class would usually meet is very helpful. There is much more structure than there was in the spring, and teachers have been fair and considerate in the amount of time allowed for completing assignments.

--Mr. Delfs commended the teachers for how well they have adapted. All teachers are now in regular contact with students. That was not the case in the spring. Some suggestions: Daily 4 pm deadlines can be a challenge, especially when there are multiple class meetings that day. 10th graders are still getting a lot of work even though they were told they would have time to focus on their MSA presentations.

Teachers noted that Fr. Simons has sent an email reminding teachers to assign less work to 10th graders while they prepare for the MSA.

--Hr. Kraft agreed that the amount of work assigned can become a bit overwhelming, especially when it is due the same day it is assigned. However, things are managed much better than they were in the spring.

--Ms. Winkler reported positive feedback from parents as well and thanked teachers and administration for all of their work. The one concern was the amount of work in 7th grade; some students report having 5 hours of video conferences per day plus assignments. There have also been some issues with a few teachers sending worksheets without any additional instructions. This was noted especially among some science teachers. One suggestion would be to have teachers who are teaching the same topics perhaps share instruction videos or coach each other on best practices. Mr. Blessmann said he would talk with his colleagues about this.

Elementary School:

--Ms. Rolle complemented Fr. Althoff on her amazing work. Elementary school needs a somewhat different approach because younger students need a lot more direct assistance from families. This is very challenging for parents.

--All HR teachers in ES-4th grade are using Seesaw. It took some adjusting, but we have heard great success stories. Kids can record voice feedback, screen sharing is possible, and students can write directly

with their finger on a tablet or iPad. The expanded license that the embassy purchased has been very helpful.

--Grades 5-6 uses Google classroom, and they have also refined their approach.

--We have been able to distribute a Chromebook or tablet to all families who have requested it.

--Families report that when they give feedback, the teachers respond. That's what we want to hear.

--Ms. Rolle has put together a video going over the wealth of information and resources they sent out via email and have posted on the website.

--Ms. Winger passed on feedback from a sibling: In general things are much smoother than the spring, but there is some uneven distribution of work. It can be challenging to switch between different video platforms.

--Ms. Petersen suggested adding a few more German resources to the list. Ms. Rolle said they are working on that.

--Mr. Berger requested that teachers spend more time online actively teaching younger students.

--Ms. Rolle said it is very challenging for teachers to differentiate their teaching via video and remote learning. (This is much easier in a classroom.) This does make it challenging for parents, because even when the teachers provide materials, the parents still have to play a role.

Teachers are asked to check in with students on a regular basis, but the form that takes can differ.

--Mr. Schulz noted that the administration can't force anyone to use video conferences. It is important also not to overwhelm children with too many video conferences.

--Fr. Salewski noted that video conferences are important to give the kids a feeling of being in a group. Children are stuck at home, with no playdates, and they miss the feeling that they are in this together. It would be very helpful if each grade level could offer that connection, ideally on a daily basis. She would urge the ES to move toward having some sort of video conference check-in or meet up each day.

--Fr. Althoff agrees and suggests starting everyone at 8:00; Gymnasium Steglitz starts each day with an 8 am class meeting for all students. At the same time, video conferencing is very different from how teachers are used to interacting with students, and it is understandable that some colleagues are hesitant. We need to train that, but it is a process.

--Ms. Heyelmann noted that for the children in emergency care (80 signed up and 40-50 show up most days), there are not enough electronic devices to have everyone log in at 8 am. There is an area at school, supervised by subject teachers, where children can attend video conferences. There is no way to have 40 or 50 kids attending meetings at the same time.

--Ms. Winger noted that 8 am start is a challenge, and 8:30 or 8:45 can be more productive.

--Ms. Winkler noted 6th grade has done a tremendous job implementing a structure in which they offer at least one video conference per day. This provides contact for the kids, not always instruction. It's a way to

break up the mundane working on computer and doing worksheets. Perhaps this could be adopted in other grade levels?

--Hr. Schroeder noted that video conferences are positive but are not the ultimate solution. It is more important to provide consistent routine and regular feedback. Some students have said they have too many video conferences. Teachers can also record videos that students can pause or watch again if they don't understand. Powerpoints combined with an audio file is fantastic and a great tool.

--Hr. Berger emphasized that working parents need more support. Online instruction is only one part of that. Assignments need to be adapted so that children can do them on their own without input from parents. But contact is essential. Children need contact from their teacher. Leaving a voice message is not contact. Some children have not had a single live contact with a teacher since lockdown.

--Ms. Geary-Mueller, Hr. Schroeder, and Ms. Rolle said they will reach out to colleagues to encourage more direct contact.

4. Return to in-school learning (Präsenzunterricht)

The Senat will meet on Tuesday, 19 January to discuss next steps. Hr. Schulz expects new guidelines late Wednesday or Thursday. The expectation is that after winter break schools will return to some sort of in-school classes, at least for 11th and 12th grades.

Fr. Althoff notes that in a hybrid model, distance learning is much more challenging because teachers can't easily contact students at home when they are at school. Teachers can't stream lessons because of the technical limitations. When teachers are required to be at school it will be much harder to reach students at home.

Hr. von Kleist asked if the new internet cable would be connected this month as planned.

--Mr. Schulz said that is the plan, but that will not solve the problems. The school's electric system is old and can't handle so many devices at once. That problem won't be fixed before summer.

Ms. Winkler asked if JFKS might stay out longer because students travel from across the city.

--Ms. Rolle and Hr. Schulz said the superintendent knows JFKS's unique situation as a school and is willing to support the school if special exceptions are needed.

Ms. Winger noted that students are hesitant to return with high infection levels and the threat of new virus variants. She suggested that any return to school be optional for students.

Hr. van Kleist suggested returning only for Leistungskurse. Those have been especially challenging to keep up with during remote learning.

5. High School Counselor and Principals update

Fr. Kub will begin on Monday, 18 January, pending last paperwork being processed.

Interviews for a new American assistant principal at the ES are on 14 January. This position will replace Ms. Bell who is leaving at the end of the school year.

Two new counselors have been hired to start in the fall. One will replace Ms. Gebhardt, one will replace Ms. Krull. Mr. Krupski is still looking for someone to fill in for the next 6 months.

Parents and students emphasized the urgent need for an academic advisor for the upper grades. For example, 10th graders in the diploma program need guidance on how to pick classes so they will qualify for European universities.

6. Water fountain

Hr. Schulz requests that a building committee be formed to deal with this and other questions. The current water fountain had to be removed because it was causing damage to the floor. The Berlin Water Works will install water fountains, but the school has to organize the plumbing connections.

7. Food committee

The catering contract expires at the end of this school year. A letter has been prepared to ask for a bidding process, but Fr. Orgis has not been able to give the school a contact person to officially launch that process.

The following members of the food committee were approved unanimously:

Administration: Ms. Rolle and Fr. Kub

ES Teachers: Mr. Gonzales and Hr. Kubala

HS Teachers: Hr. Kuballa

ES Student: Mr. Pantelidis

HS Students: Hr. Beere and Hr. Delfs

Parents: Ms. Spencer, Ms. Pohland, Ms. Schreiter, Ms. Güneser, Ms. Gothe and Ms. Kammere

8. Miscellaneous

Security update: Hr. Schulz reports that blackout curtains will be installed over winter break in all first-floor classrooms in ES, HS, and hort.

Construction is expected to start this spring on the building for the security guards. It may be finished by the end of summer break.

More cameras have been installed; plans are to install a few more in the gym area.

Budget: The budget process for the next year has begun with a request to departments for their proposals.

Survey on digital learning: The administration plans to survey students and parents on digital learning and hybrid instruction.

Meeting adjourned at 17:39.

Minutes submitted by Gretchen Vogel