



**Meeting minutes**  
**for the School Conference Meeting on**  
**17 April 2024, at 15:30 in the Quiet Study Room**

In attendance:

Administration: Hr. Bartz, Ms. Hale, Ms. Martin-O'Connor

Teacher Representatives: Hr. Witte, Ms. Moser, Fr. Freytag, Ms. Callahan

Parent Representatives: Mr. Bespolka, Ms. Vogel, Hr. Erlbaum, Fr. Albanese  
Alternates: Fr. Ferarry, Mr. Sullivan, Fr. Hasselmeyer

Student Representatives: Hr. Bordet, Mr. Simanowitz, Ms. Patt, Fr. Zoll  
Alternate: Fr. von zur Gatten

Hort Guests: Ms. Heyelmann

External member: Fr. Mattig-Krone

*Voting members: 14 voting members present*

### **1. Approval of Agenda**

*The agenda was approved by unanimous vote.*

### **2. Approval of Minutes from 28.02.24**

*The minutes were approved with 13 yays and one abstention.*

### **3. HS/ES Electronic Media Device Policy**

Teachers voted unanimously at the recent HS faculty meeting to support a return to a more restrictive cell phone policy. Current problems include overuse of devices by 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders during passing time (between classes in the halls) and behavioral concerns in multiple grades, including taking photos and using WhatsApp groups inappropriately.



Teachers have seen a significant increase of cyberbullying in classes and are constantly working against antisemitic and homophobic comments. They see a clear connection between the new policies implemented last spring and an increase in phone-related behavior incidents.

Ms. Moser noted that many 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders seem not to understand the current policy and apparently think that teachers can't confiscate their phones. The policy allowing older students to use phones has prompted a "classist" attitude that is detrimental to the school community and climate. It remains difficult for teachers to enforce the rules effectively, because it is hard to tell who is in 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

Parents asked what kinds of cyberbullying teachers had observed.

Hr. Witte reported that students have made disgusting antisemitic comments in large WhatsApp groups, and that he was photographed when helping a girl who was crying.

In general teachers feel that a significantly stricter cell phone policy is needed to help get the problematic behaviors under control. Even if some of the issues happen outside of school, having stricter phone rules at school can help reduce the flood of problems.

Hr. Bordet noted that many of the problems aren't related to 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders' behavior, but rather involve younger students. Will restricting phone use by older students really help?

Ms. Moser reiterated that the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders are not demonstrating positive behavior for the younger students (for example, using Facetime in the hallways).

Ms. Hale noted that younger students have less developed impulse control. If the older students are using their phones, it's harder for younger students to resist.

Mr. Simonowitz said that students recognize that there's a problem. The school community does need to change the culture around phones, but he urged the SK to find a policy that takes students' logistical issues into account. Some of the student ideas include allowing 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders to use their phones only during passing times while inside a classroom (not in hallways), banning headphones on campus, and looking at ways to educate the student body to encourage a shift in the digital media culture.

Students noted that teachers need to also be careful to set a good example. Perhaps teacher phone use could be restricted to the teacher lounge?

Teachers agree that teacher behavior also needs to improve. They noted that many teachers also started using their phones more after the overall policy was relaxed last year.



Students said they had not all received a copy of the previous policy before the meeting. They proposed going through the old policy point by point and proposing amendments.

*A vote was taken on the question: Should we go through the policy point by point to discuss possible amendments? 5 yays, 8 nays, 1 abstention (Motion was rejected.)*

Parents noted that in the fall the SK informally agreed to give the new policy a one-year trial period. That year is now up.

*A vote was held on the motion: The John F. Kennedy High School will return to the policy in place before last spring, as outlined in the student handbook from fall 2022, with one change: Grades 7 - 10: No EMDs shall be used by any student on campus ~~during school time~~ \*between 07:30 and 15:30\* except for use in a classroom directed by the teacher. At all other times, the EMD must be turned off and out of sight (no buzz, tones or lights). 9 yays, 5 nays*

The motion passed, and the new policy will go into effect immediately, with some leniency granted until the change has been communicated to the school community.

#### **4. Werkswohnung / Campus apartment**

Hr. Bartz explained that he lives part of the time in an apartment on campus, for which he pays rent. It would be helpful for communications with the Berlin Immobilien Manangement (BIM) if the school conference could state clearly that this is something that is explicitly desired.

In the longer term, the Baupiloten plans potentially include between 4 and 6 apartments for teachers and administrators and their families.

Mr. Bespolka noted that having someone living on campus adds to campus security.

Hr. Bartz noted that the apartment has been used in the past by the Hausmeister, and they would continue to have priority if they desired to live there.

Proposed motion:

Die Schulkonferenz beschließt, dass ab sofort mindestens einer Schulleiterin oder einem Schulleiter das Wohnen auf dem Schulgelände angeboten wird.

The School Conference resolves that, with immediate effect, at least one principal will be offered accommodation on the school campus.

Begründung:



1. Die 06K01 ist Berlins größte allgemeinbildende Schule und befindet sich im Bezirk Zehlendorf und damit in Stadtrandlage. Als deutsch-amerikanische Schule wird sie von amerikanischen und deutschen Staatsbürgern geleitet. Die Möglichkeit, auf dem Gelände zu wohnen, erhöht die Attraktivität des Arbeitsortes.

2. Die Schule hat sehr viele verschiedene Gremien, die auch vielfach abends tagen. Die Wohnmöglichkeit erleichtert die Anwesenheit eines Schulleitungsmitgliedes.

Explanation:

1. 06K01 is Berlin's largest public school and is located in the Zehlendorf district on the Berlin suburbs. As a German-American school, it is managed by American and German citizens. The possibility of living on the campus increases the school's attractiveness as a place to work.

2. The school has many different committees, which often meet in the evenings. The residential option makes it easier for a member of the school administration to be present.

*A vote was taken on the motion: 14 yays. The motion was unanimously approved.*

## **5. Child protection plan**

Mr. Bespolka thanked the child protection team for taking the time to consider the feedback and suggestions from the SK's last meeting. He and other parents have been asking the school to develop a child protection plan for many years. He emphasized that the document should be regularly reviewed and updated. He suggested that the German version be designated as the definitive version. In several places there are slight differences in interpretation, and ambiguity can lead to problems.

Mr. Bespolka also noted that, for example, the flowchart on page 7 seems to deal with a situation where school personnel are worried that a child is in danger at home and is not designed to address a child protection issue that happens at school. If the document has a flowchart, it should be relevant to the situations outlined in the rest of the document.

Ms. Hale agreed that the flowcharts are something that the child protection team is still working on.

Students agreed that some of the translations are very open to interpretation or misunderstanding.

Teachers suggested investing in a professional translation.

Students asked about how teachers and students can be in contact in situations such as an exchange trip, for example in case of problems with host families.



Ms. Hale replied that the team is discussing alternate ways for teachers to communicate with students. According to Berlin-wide policies, teachers are not allowed to communicate with students via WhatsApp. One possible solution is to have school-owned cell phones that teachers can use on trips and excursions, but there is still a need for other messaging options (for example, google hangouts).

*A vote was held on the motion: The school conference approves and adopts the current child protection policy, as distributed with the meeting invitation and agenda. 12 yays, 2 abstentions. The motion passed.*

## **6. Mittlere Schulabschluss (MSA)**

Hr. Bartz reported that he invited Frau Orgis to this meeting, but she couldn't attend.

Hr. Bartz noted that the MSA tests offer the school the chance to compare students within JFKS and with other schools in German, math and English, and that the presentation is a good preparation for the Abitur 5.PK exam. Although JFKS teaches at the level of a Gymnasium, it is technically a Gesamtschule and is officially required to have students take MSA exams. However, the administration is open to finding a procedure that is more focused on the needs of our school, including possibly eliminating the exams.

Ms. Moser noted that the level of the English test is so low that it's useless for our school. (Elementary school students could pass it.) However, the German test is too hard for many D3 and D4 students.

Ms. Hale noted that the MSA is one of the very few ways of collecting standardized data on students after the VERA 8 test in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Such data can be very helpful in evaluating changes the school makes in organization or curriculum. Only a small proportion of 10<sup>th</sup> graders (less than 15%) are in D3 or D4.

Fr. Zoll asked if it would be possible to exempt D3 and D4 students from the MSA German test.

Hr. Erlbaum noted that since JFKS offers the Abitur in 12 years, the level of teaching in 10<sup>th</sup> grade is more equivalent to a Gymnasium than a Gesamtschule. Teachers and students spend a lot of time preparing for the MSA exams instead of learning new material that would prepare them for the Abitur Oberstufe or AP classes in the diploma track.

Ms. Zoll said that many students see the presentation project as very valuable preparation for the 5. PK.

Hr. Bartz said that the school should examine in more detail how it could keep the positive aspects of the exams and while getting rid of the parts that don't fit or have negative impacts.

Each year a few students don't pass the MSA exams and can't progress to 11<sup>th</sup> grade.



*Action item: Hr. Bartz will prepare an overview of the topic for the next meeting. Interested parties can draft a motion to be discussed and potentially voted on at that time.*

## **7. Security protocol/crisis plan**

Ms. Martin-O'Connor reported that the security committee met on 7 March. Fr. Heyelmann, Hr. Bartz, Hr. Erlbaum, Fr. Orgis and Ms. Martin-O'Connor discussed the security of the JFKS campus, what a crisis team does, and definitions of different types of crises.

Key aspects of school security include the permeability of our boundaries, keeping the right people in and the wrong people out, and how to keep students and staff safe.

The JFKS crisis team includes the Hausmeister, counselors, social workers, and members of the administration. It has met several times this year, including with SIBUZ (the district school psychologists) to plan more specific response plans to possible different crises. A meeting with BIM is planned to discuss fire drills, where students and teachers congregate, how to get them there, and signage in the school related to emergencies.

A communication plan is in place among the crisis team.

There is a crisis binder that has different protocols for different kinds of crises that can arise. Administration is familiar with the different plans.

The security committee is looking for gaps that exist in the procedures or in staff's understanding of them. Some of the unique features of our campus also pose additional challenges.

Hr. Bartz noted that a recurring and important question involves storing data from the observation cameras on campus. Another question is if it's possible to add more cameras, since parts of the perimeter aren't under observation. These questions, as well as the quality of images captured, are being discussed.

New electrical gates, which close automatically, are due to be installed at the end of the summer at the entrance to the gym and to the courtyard behind the Aula.

New gates on the ramp are also under discussion.

Ms. Heyelmann notes that the Hort is not yet included in the security concept.

## **8. Committee reports**

**Building committee:** Hr. Bartz reported that the Baupiloten feasibility study should appear soon.



The next planned building projects are to renew sun protection on the white building and repair and renew all roofs over the summer.

The next step in the Baupiloten process is a political discussion about whether the swimming pool will be kept or not. The first building scheduled to be rebuilt is the blue building. That building phase will take 2-3 years, and the school will need an additional building during that time, called the “Drehscheibe” (hub). This will then be used by different groups as different existing buildings are rebuilt. One option would be to build the hub building where the pool is now. Another would be to use a different building, for example Clayallee 138 (near the U.S. Consulate) or to build on the sports field. The hope is that the political decision will be made this summer.

Passive network cables are supposed to be finished in the blue building next week.

**Food committee:** Hr. Bartz spoke with the caterer about portion sizes. They reported that most of the time students are not interested in larger portions. He checked daily for several days and observed that the portions seemed OK. If students were still hungry, they were offered seconds (or thirds).

Students reported that the situation has gotten better and agreed that many kids do ask for small portions. But some students have been told they can't have additional portions.

## 9. Action Items

The construction safety report about asbestos still needs to be communicated to faculty and students. (Officials determined that asbestos was used in only limited and contained areas and does not pose a danger to staff or students.)

## 10. Miscellaneous

**Principal hiring:** Hr. Bartz said the HS American principal position will be posted in the coming week.

**Students using offensive, abusive and illegal language:** Hr. Erlbaum asked about the school's procedure for dealing with offensive, abusive and illegal content in group chats.

Ms. Hale reported that the school is following the law. When forbidden symbols and signs are brought to their attention, they notify the police. Standard practice in the HS is that any time an administrator speaks with a student, they also contact the parents. In general, disciplinary measures are not made public.

Last week the administration had a round table discussion with teachers, student support and community members with experience in this area to brainstorm appropriate responses.



The administration also had a really positive conversation with student council members about some of the correlations with Covid and how that could be affecting the increase in inappropriate behavior.

There will be a 7<sup>th</sup> grade assembly on Monday (22. April) to clearly tell students that abusive, offensive or illegal language is not OK and doesn't align with our expectations nor the JFKS mission statement. They will also discuss the incident reporting form, including where students can find it and how it works. They are hoping to encourage students to speak up and speak out when problematic language is used.

There are also plans underway for a parent evening on the topic.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor reported that issues in the elementary school have mostly involved personal bullying and have not generally involved antisemitism or racism. The elementary school held assemblies in February to address the issue. Parents of the specific children involved were notified.

Parents asked if the situation had improved since then. Answer: No.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor said she thinks the school needs to reach out to parents and partner with them to a greater extent to help control how students use phones and chats at home. School staff continues to think creatively and collect ideas for how to improve things, but until there is a united front with parents, it will be difficult to make progress.

Ms. Zoll noted that students felt that public statements were lacking from the school following the defacing of the Buddy Bear with swastikas and other illegal graffiti.

Ms. Hale said they have listened to that feedback and are working to change how the school responds. Hr. Bartz noted that after the second incident, the school made announcements the next morning. He also noted the solidarity gathering at the bear, organized by Mr. Simanowitz and the student council.

Ms. Moser noted that JFKS is not alone in dealing with these kinds of problems and said from her perspective the school is doing good work to counter the pervasiveness of problematic messages students see on social media.

Ms. Callahan said she would have liked the school to organize a town hall-style event to allow different community members to share how they were affected by the graffiti and other incidents.

Ms. Hale encouraged all community members concerned about these issues to join the work of the J.E.D.I. group.

*The meeting adjourned at 18:05.*

*Minutes submitted by Gretchen Vogel.*