



**Meeting minutes
For the School Conference Meeting on
22 May 2024, at 15:30 in the Quiet Study Room**

In attendance:

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

Teacher Representatives: Hr. Witte, Ms. Moser, Ms. Martin, Ms. Callahan

Parent Representatives: Mr. Bespolka, Ms. Vogel, Hr. Erlbaum, Fr. Haselmayer
Alternates: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Ewert

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

Hort Guests: Fr. Heyelmann (after 4:30)

Voting members: 14 voting members present

1. Approval of Agenda

The students asked that the subject of the girls' bathrooms be added to the agenda. This was unanimously approved.

Teachers asked for an update on the hiring process for the elementary school German principal and vice-principal. This was approved: 13 yays, 1 nay

2. Approval of Minutes from 17 April 2024

The minutes were approved. 13 yays, 1 abstention

3. Update on School Administration hiring

German ES principal hiring: Fr. Orgis told the JFKS administration that there are still some technical hurdles being worked out. (Signatures are missing to finalize the decision.) However, she is optimistic that we will



have someone in the position this fall. According to Ms. Martin-O'Connor, the candidate has been updated on the status of the hiring process.

German ES vice-principal hiring: Fr. Orgis told the administration last week that interviews probably won't happen until the fall.

American HS principal hiring: Fr. Orgis is currently focused on the HS American principal position. Seven candidates applied. Two of them did not meet key qualifications. (One does not have U.S. citizenship, and the other has never worked as a teacher.) That leaves five applicants. Two are internal candidates and three are external, all of whom are currently principals at schools in the U.S. The hope is that we will have an interview process in the second or third week of June. Ideally the position will be filled starting this summer.

Teachers reported that there were concerns in the teacher community that the posting of the application was delayed by several months. This meant that there was quite short notice for filling the position by August. Some teachers are worried that the short time line, especially for someone moving overseas, means that we would not have the most competitive pool of applicants. Teachers say the school needs a strong, visionary principal, and they are worried that it's hard to find the best candidates on this time table.

Hr. Bartz said he can understand the concerns. He conveyed them in the discussion with Ms. Winkler and Fr. Orgis. The three decided that since there are five viable candidates, it makes sense to follow the current plan. They do not think it makes sense to wait for an additional year to hire someone.

Ms. Moser emphasized that, speaking as a representative of teachers in general (and not necessarily her personal view), there was a lot of distrust about why the process took so long to get started and now is in such a hurry. The SK teacher representatives held a meeting for teachers to discuss their concerns and questions about the process, and this sentiment was expressed over and over again. The staff does not feel as though there has been sufficient transparency about why the posting was delayed, and there is still the feeling that we have limited our potential applicant pool, since many people who might have considered applying have already committed to a job for the 2024/25 school year.

Students asked whether the school could install an acting principal for next year to allow time for a full recruitment process. They agreed that the school should not rush a decision. They noted that there has been significant turnover in recent years and supported taking our time with this decision so that we can choose more carefully.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor noted that the circumstances for people who are applying for international jobs can vary tremendously, and new changes like this can happen at any time.



She emphasized that the reasons for the delay in posting the job were not transparent to the administration either. The postings for the ES positions were also delayed.

She noted that an acting principal does not receive either increased pay or an official title for the extra work that they do. Relying on an acting principal risks burning out the people who are holding things together.

She noted that if the school is not satisfied with any of the candidates, it can decline to hire anyone and repost the position. But she doesn't recommend shutting down the process before hearing from the people who have applied.

Mr. Bespolka noted that on a practical level, installing an interim principal would still leave the school understaffed, since it would almost certainly be an internal person who would be appointed. He stated that he doesn't see any benefits of not hearing from the candidates we currently have. If one of them is a great candidate, then let's hire them.

Ms. Moser emphasized that it is the duty of school conference representatives to convey the concerns of their constituents, in this case what the staff of the high school feels. It is important to acknowledge these concerns and also to acknowledge that these rumors and questions and mistrust exist.

Hr. Witte noted that they will communicate back to the teachers that the timing of the posting was NOT in the administration's hands.

Hr. Bartz reiterated that the only thing that the JFKS administration could influence was the wording of the job posting. The timing of the posting, including when it could be posted on the school website and how long it can remain, were set by the Senate authorities. He said he would encourage more transparency from the Senate on such matters.

4. MSA

Background: Parents have raised the question whether the Mittlere Schulabschluss (MSA) exams could be eliminated at JFKS. In Berlin, and in many other German federal states (Bundesländer), students who successfully complete the 10th grade at a gymnasium are automatically granted the MSA without taking separate exams. Since JFKS teaches its 9th and 10th grade classes at the gymnasium level (because of our 12-year Abi), some parents and teachers would like JFKS to be able to eliminate the MSA exams. The English exam is generally too easy for JFKS students. The German exam is far too difficult for students in German level D3 or D4. And teachers report that reviewing for the math exam takes up valuable instruction time that could be used to prepare students for topics covered in 11th grade. There are mixed views on the presentation exam. Many students, parents and teachers see it as valuable preparation for the 5. Prufungskomponent (5.PK) that



is part of the Abitur. Others see it as taking too much time away from other learning experiences. These issues have all been discussed at many previous SK meetings.

Hr. Bartz noted that at many Gymnasiums students are still required to complete the presentation exam as part of their 10th grade requirements.

He reported that official JFKS rules and regulations (Rahmenvogaben) state that students must pass the MSA to enter 11th grade. There is a working group from the ED that is discussing this and other potential changes to the JFKS law. Fr. Faust from the Senate's legal department, Hr. Grohé, Dr. Jürgens, and members of administration from the ES und HS will be participating.

Fr. Hasselmeyer asked whether the school knows how many JFKS students leave school after 10th grade. For them having the official MSA is quite important.

Answer from Hr. Bartz: It's just a handful. They generally don't leave the school without an Abschluss, however. After completion of 9th grade, most can receive the Erweiterte Berufsbildungsreife.

Hr. Erlbaum noted that students who attend a gymnasium in 10th grade and successfully complete their classes are automatically awarded the MSA, without taking separate tests. It isn't clear why JFKS can't do this as well, since 10th grade instruction is supposed to be at the same level as a gymnasium.

Answer from Hr. Bartz: There are multiple layers of regulations, so it's a very complex situation. But just abolishing the MSA exams doesn't work. (Dr. Juergens might be the only one who knows all the regulations of the school. Many of the most recent updates are from the 1980s.)

Ms. Moser noted that rules regarding the MSA have been changing in recent years as well, especially post-Covid. One year it counted toward students' grades, but in recent years it has not. She asked whether someone from the SK could join the ED working group.

Hr. Bartz said he would support that, but it isn't up to him to decide.

Mr. Bespolka proposed that the SK ask to add a member to the ED working group.

Motion: SK respectfully requests that a member or members be allowed to join the ED's working group on the JFKS school law and regulations (Rahmenvogaben). The motion passed: 11 yays, one abstention (Two voting members were not present for the vote.)

5. 4th grade student email accounts

The 4th grade team has asked for permission to give their students a school (jfks.me) email account for purposes of instruction. In the computer lab, they would like to use the website Newsela.com. They would like



to then allow students to respond to the articles they read via something like Padlet, but to do that they need an email address for each student. The teachers hope this might also help students learn how to respond to each other online in a controlled environment and in an academic way. It would give the teachers the opportunity to teach proper online manners as well as using typing skills in a controlled way.

Parents and students asked a number of questions about how use of the addresses would be controlled.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor said students would only be allowed to post in class, with teacher approval. Padlet is completely contained and regulated by the teacher. If there are problems, teachers can shut an address down.

Ms. Pantelidou noted that it can be useful for 5th and 6th graders to be able to contact 4th graders via email about student activities as well.

Students wondered whether 4th graders are really responsible enough to have the power to contact everyone in the school via mass email. They wondered if it would work to provide just a class email address or a class code, or only allow students to access their email from computers at the school.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor said she would explore those alternatives. She emphasized, however, that she believes the school needs to teach students how to handle online interactions. In 4th grade, students are still fairly focused on what the teacher is saying. She would rather get these kinds of lessons in early and give students the opportunity to practice. She said the school will put every possible supervision tool around 4th graders use of email while also teaching them how to use it appropriately and providing them with consequences if something goes wrong.

Ms. Pantelidou noted that 4th graders are still a bit more innocent, so that it's good to catch them at that age and teach them internet etiquette.

Ms. Moser said she has heard wonderful things about the News ELA website and thinks use of it warrants the SK's support. She cautioned against thinking that 4th graders aren't exposed to online content. Even 6-year-olds come home asking about fake news.

Mr. Sullivan noted that current 5th graders, who were given jfks.me accounts at the beginning of the school year, actively use google classroom and google drive (for instance for collaborating on presentations), but don't seem to be using the associated email account to contact one another.

Motion: The SK approves allowing 4th grade students to have JFKS email addresses, under appropriate supervision from teachers and parents. The motion was unanimously approved. (12 yays)



6. Hitzefrei

The administration would like to revise the rules for early dismissal due to heat. The current policy is to measure the temperature on the 3rd floor in the red building. If it's higher than 25 degrees C at 10 am, then there's early release. However, that causes problems when there are increasing numbers of warm days, especially at the high school because the same subjects are repeatedly missed when the day ends early.

The new proposal is as follows: When the forecast suggests that it will be too warm in the buildings for several days, the entire day's schedule will be compressed, with shorter class periods. Instead of 45 minutes, classes will be 35 minutes long. The school day will end earlier, but students will attend all subjects. This involves some logistical juggling, since the ES and HS schedules need to stay parallel because some teachers teach at both levels and everyone shares the aula for lunch. The exact schedule is still undergoing some fine-tuning to make sure the logistics can work.

The administration would like to try the plan if hot days occur between now and summer vacation. At the same time, they will also do everything they can to avoid missing class time, for example opening windows overnight and keeping shades drawn.

Exact policies for what triggers a shorter schedule are also still being finalized, but if the forecast suggests a stretch of several hot days, then the administration will come together and decide whether to implement it, ideally with 24 hours warning for teachers and families.

Ms. Moser asked if this will entirely replace the old procedure.

Answer from Hr. Bartz: We can still, when necessary, decide at 11 to have early dismissal. But if it is foreseeable that there will be a longer period of heat, then we would switch to this plan.

Questions from teachers:

Can conditions in the buildings be checked over the weekend, to avoid surprises on a Monday?
(Answer: Possibly)

Could the bells be reprogrammed? (It's being explored, but isn't straightforward.)

How will supervision during the 15-minute pauses in the high school (to stay aligned with the elementary schedule) work? (This is still being discussed.)

Fr. Heylmann raised concerns about the lunch schedule and whether it could work for Hort.

Ms. Martin-O'Connor answered that the exact schedule is still a work in progress, but will take Hort's needs into account.



The administration acknowledged that the first few days of the compressed schedule will likely have some things go wrong, but they feel it is worth trying. Other members of the SK applauded the efforts to find creative solutions to overheated buildings.

7. Attendance rules

The Senate has issued new attendance rules that will take effect in the fall for the 2024/25 school year. Hr. Bartz informed the SK of the main changes and said he will send a summary of the new regulations to students, parents and teachers before summer break.

Two examples: After five unexcused absences, the school is required to report a student to the authorities. Six unexcused single periods equals a full day unexcused absence.

8. Parent evening on hate speech/discriminatory language

The administration informed the SK about plans for the parent evening on hate speech and discriminatory language. They have invited police officers to discuss the legal consequences of certain speech and symbols. Counselors will speak about their ways of dealing with these issues and the administration will go over all the steps that are being taken to try to reduce hateful and discriminatory speech inside and outside of school.

Mr. Simanowitz asked if students could be part of the group working to draft anti-discrimination policies.
Answer: Yes

Hr. Erlbaum asked that the invitation to such events be worded more clearly next time. He said that many parents didn't realize that "discriminatory speech" or "hate speech" would include anti-Semitism or racist remarks.

9. Action items

Bus lane: Hr. Erlbaum will send another letter.

Boy's bathroom: It has been resolved.

Understaffing in Entrance Class: Ms. Martin-O'Connor reported that the administration has come up with a plan to redistribute some of the staffing to provide more support at the EC level and provide continuity over several days.

Trip policy: Hr. Bartz reported that he will take another Meinungsbild/straw poll at the upcoming faculty meeting and will use this to refine his decision making regarding which trips are approved.



Hr. Bartz explained that since he has to give final approval to all trips, he has been following the concept developed by the faculty committee and narrowly approved at the faculty meeting last fall to guide his decision-making. Although the school conference did not approve the policy, there is not an alternative set of guidelines that he could follow instead.

He said that exceptions are possible to the rule that students should not take more than two trips per year. Some students have taken three trips this year. His goal was to let all students, parents, and teachers think about the consequences of participating in trips and make those consequences transparent.

Hr. Bartz emphasized that in his view, the faculty conference should be the deciding body for trip policies. Teachers are the ones who organize and accompany the trips and who have to fill in as substitutes. He will discuss the plan at the start of the next school year with teachers to see what adjustments need to be made. He would like to have the SK approve a policy eventually, but he does not see a strong need for input from parents and students.

Students noted that according to Berlin school law (§ 76 Abs. 2 Nr. 7) the SK sets trip policies, and parents and students decide whether a student takes part (<https://www.berlin.de/sen/bildung/schule/gute-schule/schuelerfahrten/>)*.

Mr. Bespolka emphasized that trips have a huge educational value. He noted that the policy as proposed was unclear about who actually decides about possible exceptions to the number of trips allowed. Parents and students should have a voice on making those kinds of decisions. If a parent takes responsibility and in consultation with their child feels that a trip is worthwhile, then they should not be prevented by a school rule from going.

Hr. Bartz acknowledged that, but he said that he has to also think about all the additional consequences for various trips on the teaching and substitution plans, for example, and on the impact on classes when students are missing.

Hr. Bartz said that when he arrived there was no obvious policy governing trips. The school traditionally sponsors a lot of trips, and he needed support for his decision-making about which ones to approve. He is not interested in reducing the experiences of trips and agrees that they are important, but he also thinks instruction time is important. He agrees that the trip concept should ideally be approved by the SK, but de facto every individual trip has to be approved by the principal.

Teachers asked how Hr. Bartz was keeping track of the number of trips students have taken. He said he has a spreadsheet of all students participating in all trips. Hr. Witte noted that this was a concern for some students, who had stopped some extracurricular programs and said the reason was so that they could go on other trips.



Hr. Bartz said the policy was not intended to discourage students from participating in trips but is supposed to remind people that there are consequences for missing class. The idea was that, after two trips, students, teachers and administration take a close look at where there might be potential problems—where might students fail classes or have to do makeup tests.

Parents and students will propose some revisions to the policy voted down earlier.

10. Miscellaneous

Climate committee: Students still want to get this formed. Potential teachers have been contacted. Parent involvement is still welcome.

Girls' bathroom: Bathrooms have flooded, which has led to closure of the large bathrooms. The small bathrooms are crowded, and teachers complain that it takes too long when students ask for a bathroom break.

Hr. Bartz said that the housemeister reported that there are a lot of clogged pipes because of paper towels in the pipes. A plumber has to come with a device to clear the pipes when this happens, and this can take time.

Students reported that there is frequently no toilet paper available, which is why students resort to using paper towels. Hr. Bartz noted that there is a new cleaning company, and the hausmeister says it is an improvement. However, there are also recurring acts of vandalism where all the toilet paper in a bathroom is strewn on the floor. The cleaning company isn't responsible for this.

The gym is a special problem. The cleaning company is also unhappy with the gym and say they are unable to clean effectively there. The administration is looking for solutions.

Dates for SK meetings next school year: Hr. Bartz will send suggestions via email. There was consensus that Wednesday afternoons are the best meeting period.

The meeting adjourned at 18:33.

Minutes submitted by Gretchen Vogel.

* Gemäß § 76 Abs. 2 Nr. 7 des Schulgesetzes für Berlin entscheidet die Schulkonferenz über die Grundsätze betreffend die Durchführung von Schülerfahrten. Sie beschließt in ihren Grundsätzen über die pädagogische Zielsetzung und daraus resultierender Vorgaben wie beispielsweise: Mindestteilnehmerzahl, Reiseziele (Inland, europäisches Ausland, außereuropäisches Ausland), Reise (mindest)dauer, Beförderungsart und Unterbringung; (Höchst-)Kosten sowie über die Anzahl der Fahrten.

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