

Minutes of the School Conference

11. December 2024, at 15:30 in the Quiet Study Room

Anwesende:

Administration:	Herr Bartz, Ms. Martin-O'Connor
Teachers:	Frau Rigney, Frau Diemer, Ms. Moser, Ms. Martin
	Alternates: Frau Gothe, Mr. Kelly
Parents:	Mr. Bespolka, Ms. Vogel, Frau Albanese, Herr Kölling-Orb
	Alternates: Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Ewert (joined at 16:30)
Students:	Mr. Simanowitz, Herr Bordet, Ms. Zoll, Frau von zur Gathen
	Alternates: Herr Strigel
Guests:	Frau Orgis, Ms. Winkler (ab ca. 16:45)

Voting members: 14 voting members present

1. Approval of the agenda

The agenda was unanimously approved.

2. Approval of the minutes from 22. Mai 2024

The minutes were unanimously approved.

3. Approval of the minutes from 9. Oktober 2024

The minutes were approved with 13 yays and one abstention.

4. Ethical code of conduct for the school conference

Mr. Simanowitz explained that the ED adopted a very similar document.

SK members welcomed the proposal, suggesting only one change to the translation: "I will not put my own interests or the interests of individual groups or individuals above those of the school."

*The "Ethical Standards for the SK" presented are unanimously adopted with the above-mentioned change.
The document should be reviewed at every first meeting of the SK in the school year.*

5a. Trip policy

Mr. Bespolka presented several proposed changes to the draft high school trip policy presented in 2023. These involve the number of trips that students are allowed to participate in and whether 12th graders can participate in trips. The German version of the document still needs to be updated.

In a short discussion, the question is asked whether the Berlin-Brandenburg activities for 11th graders who do not go on a course trip is really necessary. Teachers and administrators say that it definitely is.

The trip concept will be sent to the HS Faculty after the German version has been completed. The aim is to adopt the document at the latest in the March meeting of the SK.

5b. School trip funding

Parents have prepared a proposal that encourages the administration to ask the Verein for funds to cover teacher costs on school trips if funds are otherwise not available.

Herr Bartz explains that the Senate has now promised to change the school budgeting rules, which will allow schools more flexibility in how they use available funds. Schools can now cover the costs for teachers who chaperone school trips from funds that are earmarked for paying substitute teachers or for teaching equipment.

This makes the parent proposal less urgent, however several SK members still support passing the resolution.

Ms. Moser notes that many teachers are reluctant to use funds from the Verein to cover trip expenses. The teaching staff wanted to send a clear signal to the Senate that limiting funds for school trips is unacceptable and insulting to the professional teaching staff who put so much extra time and energy into planning and accompanying trips. It is also seen as unfair that schools with wealthier parents can cover budget shortfalls, while schools in poorer districts, in which trips are arguable even more important, cannot.

Herr Kölling-Orb notes that the resolution could be seen in a different way: Since JFKS can compensate for the loss of public funds with funds from the Verein, that in theory could leave more public money for schools in socially disadvantaged districts.

The school conference approves the submitted motion with one change: In the first sentence after the word "will" is added "in the event of budgetary constraints." Thirteen voted in favor, one abstention (For resolution see annex).

6. Construction projects

Herr Bartz reported on several ongoing building projects:

— The White Building is currently receiving new roller blinds for sun protection. In this context, the entire control and electrical system is also being renewed so that the roller blinds can then be controlled individually from each classroom. Unfortunately, this causes construction noise. However, attempts are being made to schedule the noisy work outside of teaching hours.

— In addition, work is still being carried out in all parts of the building to upgrade the LAN network in order to be able to offer high-performance WiFi throughout the school.

— Roof repairs are also ongoing. After the repair work is finished, planting and solar panels will be added.

Herr Bartz also reported on the plans for a general renovation of the school. A feasibility study by the Anderhalten architecture firm estimates that the planned renovation will cost 110 million euros and the work will take an estimated 10 years. (Building sections will be renovated or replaced one at a time, with the blue building that houses high school classes slated to be first.) The feasibility study has already been presented to the Berlin Secretary of State for Education, but the necessary funds still need to be allocated.

As a first step, a temporary replacement building (so-called "hub") is needed to house students displaced by the renovations. The most convenient place to build the temporary hub is the space currently used by the swimming pool. Tearing these down is not politically popular, but the swimming pool is in urgent need of major renovation, at an estimated cost of 6 million euros.

Herr Bartz concludes by noting that there is currently no need for the school conference to take action.

Frau Orgis noted that Herr Schulz, former JFKS high school principal, is closely involved in process as a consultant and that his help and his knowledge of the building complex have been very valuable in pushing the project forward.

7. Grading in 9th and 10th grade

Mr. Bespolka notes that grades in the 9th and 10th grades count toward a student's Grade Point Average (GPA), which is used for university admissions in the United States, the U.K. and some other countries (including for Abitur students). Some German teachers are not aware of this, and parents ask that the teaching staff be made aware that the grades they give 9th and 10th graders can significantly impact their university admissions. Herr Bartz said he would raise the topic at the next HS faculty meeting.

8. WebUntis Use

Parents noted that there is inconsistent and incomplete use of the school online platforms, including many teachers not posting grades or homework on either WebUntis (which is understood to be the main platform for this) nor Google Classroom. This makes it difficult for the parents to track the progress of their children. This can lead to unpleasant surprises at report card time. There is an ongoing tension between what gets posted on which platforms. WebUntis is being used primarily for attendance. Many homework assignments are still on google classroom. Due to time constraints, the topic will be discussed further at the next SK meeting.

9. Security

Parents noted that a number of parents have approached the SK representatives with respect to security concerns, especially with respect to open gates, the security post being unmanned, no checking of IDs, etc. After the bomb warning a few weeks ago concerns have been further heightened. Herr Bartz responded that in his view security measures are working as planned. Entrances other than the main gate are generally always locked. He will follow up on the concerns raised.

On the day of the alleged bomb threat, there was unfortunately a miscommunication on the part of the police. By 2:30 a.m. it was already clear that there was no danger for the JFKS, so the closed entrances and extra confusion could have been avoided. The head of the police section has apologized to the administration for the miscommunication.

Parents suggested that the school conference receive a regular security report, at least once a year. Herr Bartz said he would add the topic to a future SK meeting agenda.

10. Information on the American high school principal position

Frau Orgis attended the meeting to explain the current status of the hiring process for JFKS administrators and the role of the school conference in the process.

Ms. Hale has been selected as the new American high school principal and will officially start in that position once final paperwork is through. Frau Orgis explained to the school conference why the SenBJF appointed Ms. Erin Hale to the position, which differed from the vote of the SK. For the assistant principal position, an interim appointment will be made as soon as feasible.

11. Proposed changes to the hiring process

According to Frau Orgis' explanations, one of the main reasons why the Senate has often deviated from the school conference's proposal in the hiring process for the JFKS principals is due to §7 (3) of the JFKS. This stipulates that, contrary to the Berlin School Law, all suitable candidates must be presented to the SK. However, the official hiring process mandated by Berlin law involves a ranking of the candidates based on formal qualifications and interviews with Senate officials. These rankings cannot be shared with the SK because of confidentiality rules. This can often lead to discrepancies between the selection decision of the Senate and the SK, especially if there are a large number of candidates. (The SK's recommendation is based on relatively short interviews, which in recent years have mostly been online.) Frau Orgis reported that she will propose changing the JFKS school law to bring it into better harmony with official hiring practices that are used in other Berlin schools. These stipulate that only the top two candidates are presented to the school conference. If the Senate determines that one candidate is outstanding, then only that candidate is presented to the SK. This would make the hiring process significantly more efficient.

In the meantime, Frau Orgis and Ms. Winkler have been working to find ways to make future hiring procedures more efficient and effective for all involved parties. They have developed the following proposals:

- All interviews will be conducted in person, including for applicants from the U.S.
- The representatives of the ED personnel committee will take part in the formal selection process, which usually consists of an interview and a further assessment. This will significantly improve the involvement of the US Embassy.
- The SK and ED will conduct interviews with the two most suitable candidates and will then make their recommendation. The further procedure will then be carried out as before in accordance with the Berlin School law and the JFKS law.

The new procedure will be used in the hiring process for Ms. O'Connor's successor in February or March.

All members of the school conference welcome the ED's suggestions for improving the selection process and hope that they will lead to a more efficient and collaborative process.

12. Miscellaneous

Elementary school German vice principal:

The position has been advertised again (Link: <https://www.karriereportal-stellen.berlin.de/Stellv-Direktorin-Stellv-Direktor-einer-Integrierten-Sekun-de-j53681.html>).

Bus lane:

The school conference will not pursue this topic further. Parents will mention it to the parent council's transportation committee in case someone there wishes to follow up.

Early release due to heat:

Herr Bartz reported that Ms. Kennedy and Frau Gillert have started the process discussed in the last SK meeting to improve the shortened schedule's coordination with lower elementary classes and their particular needs. A revised plan will be presented to the SK meeting in March.

Special needs committee:

The student representatives have not yet finalized the positions and will now name the members in the January SK meeting.

ED committee on revisions to the JFKS school law:

Herr Kölling-Orb was approved as a representative from the SK.

Baupiloten:

Ms. Martin reported that the architecture firm told her that there is no current need for input from the school community, since the project is at such an uncertain stage (as discussed earlier in the meeting).

Honoring the two top Abitur graduates during the graduation ceremony:

Herr Bartz reported that following a suggestion from students, the graduates with the first- and second-best Abiturnote will be recognized. In previous years only the students with the two top diploma grade points have been honored (valedictorian and salutatorian).

Activities during Holocaust Remembrance Day (January 27, 2025)

Frau Diemer noted that various activities are planned in the high school for January 27, 2025 (Holocaust Remembrance Day), including interviews with survivors.

The meeting was adjourned at 17:55.

Minutes (in German): Holger Kölling-Orb

Translation: Gretchen Vogel

Annex to the meeting minutes of the December 11 School Conference

Resolution of the school conference on December 11, 2024

Securing funding for teachers' travel expenses for class trips via „The Verein“

In order to be able to maintain the proven and pedagogically valuable JFKS trip program across all grades in the event of budgetary constraints,

- the school administration should apply to the “Verein” for funding commitments in the event that teacher expenses for class trips can no longer be financed from the Berlin budget when this budget is exceeded – while ensuring that this requires no additional work for the teaching staff when planning and applying for class trips,
- the teaching staff should be encouraged to plan and apply for class trips as usual in accordance with the JFKS trip program and the AV Veranstaltungen,
- the school administration should continue to approve all class trips in accordance with the JFKS trip program and the AV Veranstaltungen.

In order to relieve the Verein's budget, both the school and the Verein should solicit earmarked donations from parents.

As part of the planning of school trips, possible free places should be requested before the final financial planning, assuming these are not cross-financed by extra costs for JFKS students.

All School Conference members are aware that the planning, implementation and accounting of class trips mean a great deal of extra work for the teaching staff. However, the willingness and commitment to school trips means great added value for our school and our students. The students, parents and school administration are extremely grateful for this commitment and greatly appreciate the educational work involved in the class trips. This resolution therefore also appeals to the school administration to expand and maintain forms of thanks and appreciation for the teaching staff.