

Meeting minutes for the School Conference Meeting

29 January 2025, at 15:30 in the Quiet Study Room

In attendance:

Administration:	Herr Bartz, Ms. Martin-O'Connor
Teacher Representatives:	Herr Witte, Frau Diemer, Ms. Martin, Frau Rigney Alternates: Mr. Kelly, Mr. Filipp
Parent Representatives:	Ms. Vogel, Herr Kölling-Orb, Mr. Bespolka Alternates: Mr. Sullivan
Student Representatives:	Ms. Zoll, Frau von zur Gathen, Mr. Striegel
Hort Guest:	Ms. Heyelmann
Guest:	Frau Mattig-Krone

Voting members: 12 voting members present

1. Election of Ms. Mattig-Krone as an external member of the School Conference

Berlin school law recommends that the school conference elect an external member to serve in a non-voting advisory role. Frau Mattig-Krone has been an adviser for Berlin schools for many years, including 13 years as the Berlin Senate's quality assurance official (Qualitätsbeauftragte) for schools. She has served as an external member of the JFKS School Conference since 2021. The school conference members thanked Frau Mattig-Krone for her helpful insights and her many years of service and dedication to improving Berlin schools.

Her election was unanimously approved.

2. Approval of Agenda

The agenda was unanimously approved.

3. Approval of minutes from 11 December 2024

The minutes were unanimously approved.

4. Class Trip Policy (proposed revised draft)

The German version was not ready in time for the Jan. 14 faculty meeting. It will be presented at the next meeting in March. There was one mistake in the English version: It should read that teachers of AP classes "should be encouraged" to organize trips for their AP classes. (Some AP teachers are new to the school and are not familiar enough with the trips to comfortably organize one on their own.)

5. WebUntis usage

Parents have been concerned about the fact that grades are frequently not being posted in WebUntis. This can make it difficult for parents to follow how a student is doing and can lead to unpleasant surprises such as

learning about problems too late to schedule a parent-teacher conference or to try to improve things before a semester grade is final.

Herr Bartz noted that the administration's goal is to use as few platforms as possible at the school. WebUntis is used for several things: timetable organization, attendance/class register and at the high school also for communication between parents and teachers, homework and updating grades.

Herr Bartz will encourage teachers to enter more test and quiz grades into WebUntis.

Parents also requested a way to check homework assignments. Many teachers use Google classroom for this, but some use other platforms or systems. Only a few use WebUntis. Herr Bartz emphasized that the most important consideration for homework is that students clearly know how to find and keep track of their assignments. Part of the learning process is taking responsibility for one's own work. Whether parents can easily follow along with every assignment is of secondary importance. ES teachers agreed that too much parent involvement overseeing homework can be counterproductive.

Students spoke out in favor of continuing to use Google classroom for homework assignments, especially for larger projects.

Mr. Kelly and Frau Diemer agreed that it is very helpful for students and parents to have more information in one place, including grades, communication from teachers, key homework assignments and even language level testing results. Ideally this would all be on WebUntis. (Frau Diemer noted that she was also speaking as a parent of a high school student.) They acknowledged that would currently require more work from teachers, but said it should be encouraged.

6. Update on principal hiring processes

Herr Bartz reported from the ED meeting that dates have been set for the hiring process for an American elementary school principal. The two most suitable candidates will be interviewed by the SK and ED members in a joint meeting on February 27 (Thursday) from 14:00 - 18:00. This conflicts with elementary school parent-teacher conferences, but the Senate chose the date and it is not negotiable.

The candidates will arrive from the US on February 22 or 23. On Monday (24.2.) they will meet with Senate representatives and representatives from the ED and US Embassy. On Tuesday and Wednesday the candidates will visit the school, observing some classes and meeting teachers and students.

At the joint SK/ED meeting, the two most suitable candidates will introduce themselves and then be interviewed. The SK and ED will then discuss the candidates together. Finally, the SK will vote on its proposal and forward it to the ED for confirmation.

ES German assistant principal: Frau Senkel is currently acting assistant principal. Herr Bartz says Frau Orgis hopes that the final choice can be made before the summer vacation.

HS American principal: The Senate has not yet sent its official notice to Ms. Hale. (A parliamentary committee has to give formal approval, and it only meets four times a year.)

HS American assistant principal: The assistant principal duties are being shared by three teachers for the remainder of this year: Mr. Lazar, Ms. Coronado and Mr. Getschow. It's still not clear how the duties will be covered next year.

7. Bericht ED-Sitzung (Eltern)

Mr. Bespolka gave a summary from the ED meeting on 28 January.

--The Trust Fund money is currently focused on supporting special needs and social/emotional learning.

--Ms. Winkler was reelected as chair.

--The ED approved the calendar for the 2026/27 school year.

-- They passed a code of ethics.

--The ED has developed a way to evaluate American principal performance during the first two years. This will be beneficial for the new hires. It will provide clearer expectations and will enable the school to give constructive feedback during the probation period.

-- The ED approved the proposed changes to the hiring process for principals and assistant principals. (See also minutes of the SK meeting on December 11, 2024.)

-- The Verein has put out an appeal for funding requests—there's plenty of money.

8. Action items

Delegates to special needs: The students still need to pass along the full names so that they can be confirmed at the next meeting.

Grades in 9/10th grades: This topic was discussed at the past faculty meeting. Herr Bartz and Herr Henning both said it was very eye-opening for many German teachers. (The difference between a 3 and 3+ was not clear to many.)

9. Miscellaneous

Expanding electives:

Herr Bartz reported that the school would like to offer two new electives in the next school year: journalism in 10th grade (was introduced in 8th last year, successfully) and computer science (Informatik) in 9th. Journalism was introduced in 8th grade last year and has been successful. Computer science is currently offered in 10th grade, and the teacher, Frau Sass would like to offer in 9th as well. Students welcomed the additions. The SK will take a formal vote at the next meeting.

Herr Bartz and Herr Henning noted that it is important to consider that, because students can choose only one elective, it is important to see how new offerings affect enrollment in long-established electives.

Flu/other sickness:

There are currently more than 250 students out sick in the ES, and this evening's choral concert has been cancelled. At least 17 teachers are sick in the ES, 10 in HS. At least some of the cases are influenza. Flu shots were offered to teachers in the fall, and more than 20 took advantage of the offer.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gretchen Vogel, German translation by Holger Kölling-Orb