

# Moving From Good to Great

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*This newsletter is published by the MHS School Site Council —to engage the community in our process of continual school improvement.*

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The School Site Council meets the third Tuesday of every month from 3:30 to 5:00pm in the Library. Everyone is welcome to attend.



## Re-storing Balance Re-igniting Passion Re-engaging Students

As the season of state and AP testing comes to a close, a group of teachers, counselors, and parents are meeting to rekindle a reform-minded effort that began two years ago with the reading of a book: *The Power of Their Ideas*, by Deborah Meier. In this inspiring account of an innovative New York City public school, Meier talks about how to return passion to learning by listening to and respecting students' ideas—by building on the power of *their* ideas.

We all know that Malibu High School is renowned—among the top 100 schools in the nation—for student achievement as measured by tests and college admissions. Yet, how many of us are confident that our school is doing its best to ignite the same passion for learning that most of our adolescents felt as young children? Although most are dutifully completing assignments and getting good grades, how many are stressed out and counting the days until summer?

In the first issue of this newsletter last June, the School Site Council reported survey data from students about their engagement in school. While many students shared positive news about their learning, many also reported feeling disengaged and overwhelmed. Students asked for assignments and projects that were more meaningful and relevant to their lives. They also asked for more opportunities to connect with teachers and students on campus.

In this issue, these survey data are revisited and the Council announces its response: three related efforts that aim to re-store balance, re-ignite passion, and re-engage students in meaningful learning.

## A New Approach to Community Service

*"I suggest additional outreach programs in which students of all backgrounds will be able to connect with each other on a deeper level."*

*"I would like my teachers to talk more about how what I am learning is meaningful and relates to life."*

*"The only significance high school seems to have is in relation to where we go to college and that's why there's so much apathy and cheating and lack of interest."*

The community service requirement at MHS was originally intended to promote learning connected to the world, in service of others. Although some students do engage in very meaningful community service projects, many end up logging their hours in ways that are less than inspiring. To restore the original intention and integrity of the program, a committee is currently meeting to develop new ways to engage students in learning through service. This group will be meeting over the summer to craft a new program for the fall. If you are interested in participating, please email committee chair, JuliaCheri Hoos at [hoos@smmusd.org](mailto:hoos@smmusd.org).

Malibu High School

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Moving From  
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### 2008 MHS School Site Council

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Jonathan Nadel  
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Bill Robinson  
Roya Sabafi  
Bob Snider  
Rachel Stowell  
Bonnie Thoreson



## Expanding Opportunities for Dialogue through Council

*"Treat students with more respect and maturity. Just because we are going through puberty does not mean that we should be treated like a child."*

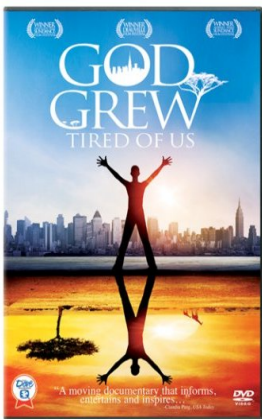
*"The most productive, meaningful classes I have taken at MHS have been taught by teachers who were willing to listen to their students."*

Council is the practice of speaking and listening from the heart. Through compassionate, non-judgmental listening, Council inspires a non-hierarchical form of deep communication that respects the power of students' ideas. Led by skilled facilitators from the Ojai Foundation, current 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade students meet weekly in Council to develop effective means of resolving conflicts and to discover their deeper, often unexpressed needs and stories. Building on the strengths of similar programs at Crossroads, New Roads, and other independent schools, the School Site Council is exploring opportunities to expand this experience in other grades, including rites of passage retreats for 9<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, Council lunches, and support for the Freshman Seminar. For more information, visit: [www.ojaifoundation.org](http://www.ojaifoundation.org).

## Foregrounding Projects, Exhibitions, and Student Work

*"Mr. Bream's art project in 7th grade was very fun, it gave us all a chance to learn and discover our creative sides that we didn't know we have. Now we have a painting to have all our lives to show we accomplished something."*

*"We need more freedom to design our own projects so we can connect to the world and grow up as functional adults instead of robots that follow directions from a piece of paper."*



Project-based learning is the use of classroom projects, intended to bring about deep learning, where students use technology and inquiry to engage with issues and questions that are relevant to their lives. These classroom projects—often exhibited in public settings—are used to assess student's subject matter competence and contrast with traditional testing because they offer a 360 degree view of a student's learning. There are many examples of project-based learning at Malibu High School: the 7<sup>th</sup> grade painting, the Freshman Seminar community service project, the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade Decade Project, the Physics Olympics, the Zuma Project, the whole-school reading of and reflection on *God Grew Tired of Us*, and list goes on. To honor, expand, and keep track of the many projects MHS students engage in, the Council is examining the possibility of having each student create and maintain a digital portfolio that contains at least one exemplary project each year. To be inspired by the potential of project-based learning and digital portfolios, check out what students at other public schools have created; for example: <http://www.hightechhigh.org/>