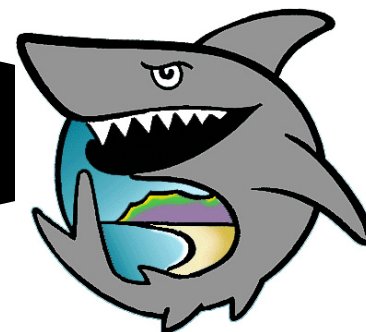


Site Lines

A Newsletter of the MHS School Site Council



Volume 3, Issue 1

February 2009



This newsletter is published by the MHS School Site Council

—to engage the community in our process of continual school improvement.

Inside this issue:

Single Plan Update	1
CSL Program	2
Block Scheduling?	2
Department Spotlight: English	2

The School Site Council meets the third Tuesday of every month from 3:10 to 4:30pm in the Library. Everyone is welcome to attend.

School Improvement Update

Every January, the MHS School Site Council submits its Single Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA) to the SMMUSD School Board for approval. This plan is a state mandated requirement to ensure that all public schools are using data to continually improve their instructional program.

Last year, we developed our SPSA based on the improvement strategies outlined in our WASC school improvement plan. This comprehensive plan was the result of a thoughtful process developed over the course of a year with all stakeholders at the table. The School Site Council participated in this process and during its monthly meetings last year followed up on a three elements of the plan:

Improve math achievement by clarifying math pathways. (*Outcome: SSC worked with the math department to produce an issue of this newsletter that publicized the math pathways in middle and high school*);

Develop new 9th grade earth science course and restore biology as a 10th grade course. (*Outcome: SSC worked with the science department to secure resources needed for planning and development*);

Deepen community service program by focusing on service learning. (*Outcome: SSC formed a subcommittee on this topic, developed a new Community Service Learning program, and hired a coordinator to launch and run the program.*)

These three activities/outcomes were accomplished by work done by the MHS faculty to improve instruction and student achievement school-wide (with an emphasis on math and science) by developing common student assessments of power standards that are aligned across grade levels (vertical) and content areas (horizontal).

This year, the School Site Council submitted the following SPSA to the Board, recommending three main strategies for improvement:

1. Each department will develop its own plan for studying and improving instruction. This plan will have the following built-in supports:

- Sufficient meeting and released time to ensure meaningful goal setting, discussion, analysis of student work and other relevant data, strategic planning, and dissemination among faculty;
- An outside support person chosen by the department to organize meetings, gather resources, and keep the process on track;
- Clear expectations for internally monitoring the department's progress in achieving its goal, learning from the process, and improving teaching practice;
- Professional forums for sharing progress and deepening practice.

2. The Community Service Learning Committee (a sub-committee of the School Site Council) will develop its own plan to evaluate the implementation of the new CSL program that launched in January 2009. Initial evaluation findings will be shared at the October 2009 meeting of the SSC.

3. From January-March 2009, the School Site Council will conduct a school-wide feasibility assessment of implementing an alternative schedule for the Fall of 2009 and present this assessment to the faculty who will vote on whether to adopt an alternative schedule.

4. The School Site Council will continue to publish a newsletter to highlight and inform the larger MHS community about efforts to improve the school's instructional program.

Site Lines



2009 MHS School Site Council

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Jonathan Nadel
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Bob Snider
Rachel Stowell
Bonnie Thoreson
Dana Weinberg

New CSL Program Launches!

Thanks to our new Community Service Learning Coordinator, Bobbi Ross-Neier, MHS students will now be supported to deepen and extend their learning through service. If you missed the overview sent in last month's PTSA mailer, check out the full CSL Handbook on the MHS website. Questions? Contact Bobbi at:

Bobbi.ross-neier@mail.smmusd.org

310-457-6801 Extension 245

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays

& by appointment

Block Scheduling?

Prompted by requests from teachers, parents, and students, the School Site Council is currently studying the feasibility of implementing a Block Schedule. This study involves mapping out all the factors involved in adopting a new schedule, engaging teachers and students in discussing the merits and challenges of such a change, and hearing from educators at other schools who have experience with block scheduling. Changes to the MHS schedule require a 70% vote of the faculty.

Department Spotlight: English

The English department met off campus in mid-December 2008, for a full day follow-up to departmental discussions on what we perceive as the increasing gap between the well developed writing ability of Honors and AP English students versus the less than adequate skills of some college preparatory students. This discrepancy is particularly apparent in formal, academic writing. We started by discussing samples of student writing to analyze problem areas such as difficulty with quote selection, in-depth analysis, full development of a thesis, and learning how to truly revise a paper (versus correcting a few errors and retyping it). In previous years, the department created a writing rubric to help students identify standards for writing and to set uniform guidelines for teachers to evaluate writing. Teachers expressed concerns that the rubric no longer seems to fit our current concerns with stu-

dent writing and began to revise the rubric, and in the process, continued our discussion of what makes for good student writing. In future meetings we plan to finalize our student rubric and use this as a tool to help guide student writing. We also plan to create a notebook of effective writing strategies used by various teachers. Additionally, we hope to set specific goals for improving student writing and form teacher-partners who will observe in each others classrooms and provide feedback for which lessons and classroom activities are most effective in teaching student writing. Using essays written at the end of the first semester as guidelines, we hope to see measurable improvement in student writing by the end of the second semester.

Bonnie Thoreson
English Department Chair