

Nome PTSA Meeting Minutes
November 17, 2004

PRESENT: Diane Adams, Elizabeth Coler, Sandra Harvey, Betty Johnson, Warren Johnson, Julie Kelso, Louise Kuntz-Tadda, Mikey Lean, Urtha Lenharr, Sylvia Matson, Karen Mehl, Jessie Morris, Barb Nickels, Sharon Penttila, Carl White, Helen Wooten

CALL TO ORDER President, Barb Nickels, convened the meeting at 6:32 PM.

CAMP PRESENTATION Rahniah Parker, representative from Norton Sound Health Corporation's CAMP program, presented healthy initiatives for the Nome Public schools. Those present were asked to complete a survey indicating their support or non-support of those initiatives. In addition, Rahniah explained the screening criteria for CAMP's Step-by Step program.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES Minutes from the PTSA meeting of September 20, 2004 were approved by a vote of those present.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT PTSA president, Barb Nickels, distributed and discussed her written report, which is hereby made a part of these minutes.

PTSA COMMUNITY CALENDAR Julie Kelso stated that the PTSA's expected profit from this year's community calendar is approximately \$4,800. This year's calendar will feature a photo of Nome Elementary schoolchildren.

ROOM PARENT PROGRAM Julie also updated the group on the room parent program. Nine elementary classes have a designated "room parent" whose duty it is to coordinate parent volunteer efforts for the class and assist the teacher in other areas as needed. Some room parents have put together a contact list for their class, which helps parents to familiarize themselves with their child's classmates and their parents. The email addresses that are a part of the list have proved to be a particularly useful communication tool for both parents and teachers. Julie hoped that all teachers, regardless of whether they have a room parent, would consider obtaining email addresses and providing their students' parents with a contact list.

Julie went on to say that she is the room parent for Mrs. Lean's first grade class and is hosting a website for the class, a link to which can be found on the Nome Elementary website. She stated that reaction to the website has been very positive. Nome Public Schools' technology coordinator, Robin Johnson, is looking into the possibility of providing teachers with templates that would make it easier for teachers or parents to put together class websites. In the meantime, Julie offered to provide assistance to other parents or teachers interested in doing simple websites for their classes using Netscape Composer.

REPORT CARDS Urtha Lenharr explained the features of the report card with the aid of overhead transparencies. Particular attention was paid to the leveled subjects (math, reading, writing, personal social service and cultural awareness) that appear on the left hand side of the

report card. The grade shown for these subjects is a combination of Level and Rating. Urtha explained that, because the grades are based on well-defined standards, this system provides grading consistency among teachers, and lets parents know exactly what skills their children have learned. He also highlighted the fact that an average score of at least 80% on target assessments for a level is required for students to move on to the next level.

Following Urtha's presentation, Barb opened the floor for questions and comments regarding the report card format. The following were the major areas of concern covered:

Assessments

The discussion began with a parent asking if there was some kind of schedule or deadline for teachers to complete assessments, which are the basis for leveled coursework grades. Elementary principal, Carl White, indicated that there is not. This parent stated that her child had only been assessed on one target this semester.

Another parent wondered how teachers know where the students are at academically, and whether students are working at their full potential, if the assessments have not been done. She stressed how important she thinks it is, especially in the early grades, that students be assessed correctly. She, as well as others at the meeting, questioned whether it was even possible for teachers to keep up with the assessments, given the class sizes, and the fact that assessments have to be done one-on-one with students.

A teacher shared an idea that a parent had proposed to her, which was that several days be set-aside for nothing but assessments. Parent volunteers would teach classes, or if funding permits, substitute teachers would be utilized while teachers performed the assessments.

One very upset parent gave an account of how frustrated she was last year during her parent teacher conference when, after asking the teacher why her child had received a "V-Developing" on his report card, the teacher responded that, although she knew the child had mastered several of the targets, she had not had the time to assess him on them, and thus was only able to give him a "V" grade. This was obviously an unacceptable answer for this parent. Julie stated that several parents had informed her that their child's report card this quarter indicated no changes since the previous year for at least some of the leveled coursework.

One teacher stated that, even though the formal assessments may not have been done, that did not necessarily mean that students had not been tested and evaluated. In fact, she stated, students are being constantly tested in a variety of ways, and she gave some examples. A parent inquired as to whether those interim tests could somehow be reflected on the report card so that parents could at least get a feel for what their child had accomplished during the semester. The teacher answered that this is not possible, as the tests are informal, and would result in a very subjective grade. She then went on to stress the importance of parent/teacher communication as the best means for parents to gain an understanding of their child's academic standing.

Confusing nature of report card

One parent related that both she and her husband had attended the parent/teacher conference at which the teacher explained their first-grader's report card. They thought they had a clear understanding of their child's standing, but it was not until the end of the conference, when they asked the teacher what grades their child would have been assigned in reading, writing and math under a *traditional* grading system, that they got a true picture of their child's performance. They thought their child was doing "A" level work, when the teacher actually assessed them as "B, or even C".

Timing of assessments

One parent felt that teacher discretion as to the timing of assessments is leading to meaningless grades. She gave the following example to illustrate the point:

Assume two students are in the same class. They both receive the same instruction in the first ten targets of Level 1 Math. One student easily grasps the subject and the teacher assesses him on all ten targets that were taught. His average score on those ten targets is 95% and his report card therefore shows: Math – A (advanced) – Level One. The second student is struggling. He is only able to fully understand one of the targets taught to him. The teacher, in accordance with policy, only tests him on the one target she feels he can pass. His score is 92% on that one target. His report card therefore shows: Math – A (advanced) – Level One. The end result is that, although one child is excelling and the other failing, *both receive the same grade on their report card.*

This discussion led one parent to question how students could ever get a "V" on their report card if teachers have been instructed not to test them until they are reasonably sure they can pass the assessment with a grade of at least 80%. How are parents to know that their child is having a problem?

"V" Grade

A parent pointed out that a student could get a "V" on their report card if they have not yet been assessed in any of the targets in a level. This parent felt that a grade of "N/A (not applicable)" would be more appropriate in this situation.

Saxon Phonics

A parent suggested that, since Saxon phonics is such a large part of the curriculum, at least in the lower grades, a separate line for a Saxon phonics grade be added to the report card. This grade would be based on the average score of the Saxon assessments, which are given after every five lessons.

Lack of meaningful benchmarks

One parent expressed frustration that the “levels” do not correspond to grades (first grade, second grade, etc.). This lack of correlation between levels and grades leaves parents wondering if their children are progressing at a pace appropriate for their ages. This particular parent had asked her child’s teacher, the school principal and a school board member for guidance in determining the appropriate reading, writing and math levels for her child. In every instance, she was referred to the “Roadmap to Prepare Our Students for Testing Success” (see copy attached to these minutes.) She said she did not understand until much later that this document is in no way meant to provide benchmarks for academic excellence. Rather, it shows the very minimum levels that students should be reaching at particular points in time in order to eventually pass the high school equivalency exam.

The current report card only attempts to tell parents where their child is *at*, not where they *should be*. This parent felt that with a traditional report card, her child’s grade would reflect how they had performed based on a standard curriculum appropriate for their age. With the current report card, she is expected to have the expertise to define her child’s academic success. What does a grade in reading of “Level 3 – V” mean, especially when the V is given because the student has not been assessed on any targets in level 3? Is what our school district calls “Level 3” equivalent to first, second, or third grade standards in other districts? If the child moves to a different school district, where will they be placed? Have they kept up or fallen behind in their age group?

Valedictorian

One parent asked how the high school valedictorian is determined with our current system, and wondered why we have multiple valedictorians. The question remained unanswered.

Quality Schools Model

A question arose as to why “Personal Social Service” and “Cultural Awareness” are listed along with reading, writing and math under the leveled coursework section of the report card. Julie responded that she thought this was a result of our school district adopting the “Quality Schools Model” and quoted from information she had obtained from the Re-Inventing Schools Coalition website, a copy of which is attached to these minutes.

Other comments

Several parents expressed gratitude to the teachers for their dedication. It was noted that some of the teachers at the meeting had not yet been home that day, and their attendance at the meeting was greatly appreciated.

MEETING ADJOURNED