

## DECEMBER 2022 MWS SCHOOL FAMILY & COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Dec. 6, 2022 6:30 PM

Virtual meeting (Zoom)

### Participants

Principal Sara Long; Assistant Principal Bethany Jacobs; Assistant Principal Michael Johnson; Principal in Residence Tanisha Sheppard; Katy Chib; Amanda Moran; Lourdes Montes-Greenan; Geneva Lane; Carrie DeLeon; Mike Addabbo; Chantial Featherstone; Danielle Shapiro; Keyonna Saunders; Jane Richardson; Tavian Cardwell; Kerry Graves; Jenna Lingsch; Molly Allen; Toja Okoh; Zafar Shah

### 1. Communication and engagement

Toja: A climate of mistrust has developed between the parent/caregiver community and the MWS administration from years of disruption and instability. For example, turnover in the administrative roles over recent years, disruption caused by the pandemic, and now, the staff/teacher shortage in our school system in the aftermath of the pandemic. We want to "reset" our relationship with the school administration and improve the SFCC's functionality to achieve a common goal.

Goal: SFCC will be a functioning, supportive, and collaborative space to enable the school administration and faculty to work with the parent/caregiver community to ensure a vibrant and dynamic educational environment for our children/students.

Ms. Long's view: There seems to be a lack of trust in the principal. That feeling trickles down to the assistant principals as well. Example: extensive questioning of a policy that is commonplace in City schools, which requires students to have a pass to move through the building. The volume of questions about this seemed excessive. The admin team re-aligned daily policies and procedures to enable better functioning and safer school days, and there was a middle school parent meeting to share these changes. These policy and procedure changes are not particularly noteworthy or even innovative.

- *It seems that the expectation among parents is that I give an explanation for every change, however minor or mundane. It's just not feasible, for things like the use of hall passes to manage movement and ensure that students are accounted for and are learning.*
- *If I can't be trusted to ask students to use a pass, then I don't feel parents trust me to run the building.*
- *There are big issues to tackle, but we can't get to those things when such basic things are scrutinized. I feel like I am being micromanaged.*

Q: For parents, where is the mistrust coming from? Clarifying question from Zafar: Is this mistrust coming from the SFCC or people outside SFCC?

Long: it's a mixture of both. When parents say "there's no communication" or "I'm not being heard," this is partly a result of people communicating their needs and concerns through multiple channels - sometimes going through individual SFCC reps.

Q: What can SFCC grade reps do to head off many of the questions that are pressed on admin?

- Toja's suggestion: put grade reps in that chain of command/communication, wherein the grade-assigned APs will utilize SFCC grade reps as a first point of contact. Each grade rep can partner with the assigned AP to their grade to field questions and concerns. If they are questions/concerns grade reps don't have answers to, they can then be referred to the assigned AP.

Jane: Is there guidance on whom parents can contact and when they can contact?

Katy: Could some of the emails that are sent to Ms. Long be rerouted to other staff members based on urgency/importance? Is there an established chain of command?

- Ms. Long's Suggestion: interest in putting together a parent handbook? We had one in the past, but it needs to be updated. Mike added that a lot of the school website information is basically handbook content that could be pulled together into a handbook. Ms. Long also offered that the school website could specify points of contact based on topics. Zafar queried whether the website could feature an interactive menu of FAQs. *A sub-committee in the Culture & Achievement committee will be set up to work on this, in collaboration with an assigned admin.*

Jane: It seems like our school in particular has parents who feel entitled to speak directly to Ms. Long. Is that unique compared to other schools? Long: I have 10 years experience at an elementary school that had very active parents before coming to The Mount Washington School. It was a good working relationship. (Toja's note: this was before COVID, and Ms. Long began at MWS during the COVID crisis, taking on a split campus and a middle school. This is not a small shift.)

Kerry: As a new parent, I didn't know our class rep until they started posting on Bloomz. I don't know if I should go to a class rep for anything. First time my child was sick, I didn't know who to contact.

Katy: I hear from parents who say, "I've reached out to x person multiple times and have gotten no response." What can we expect when we communicate with staff/admin about a concern/incident, in terms of a turn-around time for response?

Long: Approximately 2 business days is the expectation. If that fails, follow up and copy the next person up the admin hierarchy.

Toja: based on personal experience, I have escalated my communication because I didn't receive a response. But not everyone would feel comfortable doing this, nor know that they have this option.

Long: if you copy all admin on your email, especially at the outset, the message does not appear to have a targeted individual who should respond. Admin then has to figure out who knows what and who should respond. That can cause delay and increase frustration on the part of the parent. (Toja's note: This is another reason to have a clearly defined structure of communication that is visible everywhere.)

Toja: I have also noticed that some parents have only recently joined Bloomz, which means that grade reps ought to re-introduce themselves. *We may want to do an official check-in twice a quarter to introduce themselves, explain their role, and field questions/concerns if parents have them.*

\*\*\*Long: *The primary point of contact for all parents, if they have concerns about their children's experience, especially their academic or day-to-day experience, should be their child's teacher.* If the teacher is unable to address the issue, the parent may then be directed to an appropriate resource (and SFCC rep or their assigned admin).

Amalie: SFCC's purpose was always to streamline communications between admin and the parent/caregiver community. Glad the discussion is focusing on this.

## **2. VOLUNTEERING**

Ms. Long: volunteering requires a uniform process. People may think we're putting them off, but we have to go through a formal process to vet volunteers in order to assure safety. And then it's really teachers who can tell a parent/caregiver if they have a need to fill. A parent may feel that admin, when they are approached directly with interest to volunteer, may not know exactly what volunteer needs there are at any given moment (staffing needs may change drastically from one week to another, or from one day to another, and some needs require more skill than a parent volunteer can provide).

Toja's Suggestion: *SFCC can take on the role of organizing a parent/caregiver/community volunteer force and coordinate with the school monthly (or bi-weekly) to check on volunteer support needs.* In fact, this is already being done by Katy Chib and Carrie Moore. Grade reps could be teacher liaisons to request extra classroom support; and we know that as of now, lunch and recess present the greatest need for an organized volunteer group. SFCC can explain to parents how to get processed through North Avenue, and then direct volunteers to the places where they are needed in the school. This is an excellent place where SFCC can strengthen its partnership with the school.

Jacobs: This is a good idea, if we can get a single person as point of contact. [Katy Chib and Carrie Moore have already begun this work.]

Katy: *Volunteer flier. To increase awareness of the needs and opportunities to volunteer, printed fliers can go out in hard copy with students? Bloomz is not reaching everyone. Grade reps need to distribute.*

Long/Jacobs: school can do it with one weeks' notice. Fliers should be clear in grayscale.

Q: Jane: would it be helpful for other SFCC participants to meet with Ms. Long to clear the air?

Admins: No need was voiced.

### **3. BUDGET PRIORITIZATION**

3 upcoming meetings

1st: what do we want in our school? Ex. A math teacher

- Needs to happen w/in next few weeks, before February.

- Propose Tues., Jan 10th

2nd: draft budget: Budget forum

3rd: Budget review, ahead of 20-part approval.

### **4. PLAYGROUND**

Toja: Could Ms. Long help the Facilities Committee make in-roads with district contacts re: playground planning?

Long: Yes, but she first needs to get clarity on who our main contact will be going forward (Cyndi Smith, Maurice Gaskins, or Amnestee Graves?). There may be a change in our point of contact, so she needs to check. *Toja and Molly will follow up on this.*

Kerry: A parent from a different school advised that *we should not fundraise until there is something in writing from the district about the playground and specifically demolition of old grounds and upkeep of the new grounds. We need to know what they are committed to before we raise money.* That information is more likely to be shared with Ms. Long, than with parents.

Long: Agrees, and is happy to do this.

Toja: Is there Kirwan money in the MWS budget that can be reallocated to the playground?

Long: There is money that remains after the elimination of a position - e.g. math support position. It is a relatively decent pot of money to use (approx. \$75,000), but it must be used THIS year. *Once we receive a clear understand of what we can and can't do in writing, we can begin to move on using this money to clear and re-design the space in the back of the upper building for outdoor eating, an outdoor classroom and the meditation garden.*

Zafar: can that available money be used for after-school math tutoring for 7th grade?

Shepherd: a plan for math tutoring is nearly complete.

**Miscellanea:**

- We have a lot of students with needs this year.
- Long gets about 150 emails a day and works to clear those out daily. This may explain the brevity of her daily written communication to parents, which parents/caregivers should be aware of.
- Admin team is very tight. They communicate regularly and they are on the same page.

**Action Items:**

- A communication tree or flow chart will be worked out, and it will be posted on all our communication channels (website, Bloomz, SFCC and PTO Facebook pages, and included in the parent handbook). In addition, a Parent Handbook sub-committee in the Culture & Achievement space will work on this, in collaboration with an assigned admin.
  - [Admin (constructs this tree/flow chart); 2 SFCC communication reps will post this tree/flow chart, including Mike Adobbo (current webmaster)]
- All SFCC grade reps should re-introduce themselves formally to their grade parent/caregiver community through Bloomz. Explain their roles and invite them to reach out with questions and feedback (what's going well and what's not going so well). Repeat this again early in the next term.
- Katy Chib and Carrie Moore will continue to organize interested volunteers and will follow up with teachers, grade reps and a designated admin to determine areas of greatest need.
  - Coordinate with school office staff to print out fliers (grey-scale) to send home with all students. Office staff need a week's notice to do this.
- Toja and Molly will follow up with Ms. Long to initiate official communication to get clarity on what the district will contribute, and if they commit to maintaining the new playground once it's built. Once this is established, the Facilities Committee can begin developing a fundraising plan.