

Morningside Community Council  
Minutes  
April 3, 2009

Attending: Christine Milbank, Dannon Philbrook, Amy Oliver, Stephanie Buehner, Kalyani Samudra, Chelle Brain, Emeliee Dirks, Shawna Godfrey, Micheal Porter, Michele Jones, Karianne Prince, Joan Bramble, Cindy McCandless, Karen Duzy, Emily Allison.

The recorder was turned on, and Mrs. Prince greeted everyone. Introductions were made.

Minutes from the last meeting on March 26, were amended and approved.

The discussion turned to the Dual Language Immersion proposition. The teachers were resurveyed with 18 surveys going out and 13 being returned. 4 (31%) were in favor of the program and 9 (69%) were against. The resurvey was so the teachers could also express their opinions.

There had been an error in the initial information packet that went home to the parents, therefore, the parents have received the correct information and resurveyed. 131 surveys were returned with 89 for the program (68%) and 36 (27%) opposed. 6 surveys were uncommitted. This number included the preschool. Parents were generally in favor, but concerns are still apparent.

Mrs. Bramble: The faculty is not in favor and the parents are. The community council needs to be responsive to the community. The faculty, even when not in favor, will often take programs and make them work.

Mrs. Duzy: I talked with the lower grade teachers. Their biggest concern is that one traditional class, where they are not involved in some program, the teachers don't want them to be left out or forgotten. Kindergarteners, not here currently, may not realize that they aren't automatically in the French program. The teachers want what is best for the children and are concerned about the difficulties of this new program. Mrs. Bryner is concerned about space issues in the multi-purpose room, storage, etc. as the program grows.

Mrs. Bramble: The space issue has come up a lot, but the extra rooms are really a luxury that most schools don't have. It also leaves you open to the district just placing programs in your building, because there is room.

Mrs. Godfrey: Is the expectation that the number of children when this is fully operational be the same as when the Canyon Rim community was here?

Mrs. Bramble: There were approximately 360 more children when the Canyon Rim community attended. This program will bring around 180-200 children. We can do split assemblies K-3 and 4-6, which is sometimes more acceptable for information presented in an age appropriate way.

Mrs. Duzy: The extra classroom space makes us vulnerable. There was a budget presentation this morning where the legislature has made cuts. The words school closures, while not on the list of preferred options, were on the list.

Mrs. Oliver: My concern is not about space or the merits of the program, but it limits us to one traditional classroom. This creates a broader spectrum, which is harder to group,

and limits the abilities of the teacher/school to deal with problems. “The other programs have champions at the district to fight for those programs and the children involved, while the traditional program does not.

Mrs. Bramble: There is no extra funding for the Magnet classes.

Mr. Porter: If the Magnet class loses 5 students, the district funnels 5 more children into that classroom, while if the traditional classroom loses 5, they are just gone, and their funding with them.

Mrs. Sumudra: Why at this school?

Mrs. Prince: They want a school on the East side and with the space.

Mrs. Sumudra: Will the Magnet program be bumped somewhere else if this French program grows?

Mrs. Bramble: We don't really know at this time. It wouldn't even be possible to know in three or four years how things will look when this goes all the way to sixth grade.

Mrs. Godfrey: Isn't that the goal, to get the school increased to the size where the traditional program is thriving and there is no need for the Magnet to maintain our numbers?

Mrs. Duzy: William Penn had increased their size, but there is no way for us to know.

Mrs. Prince: Let's hear from the teachers where the main concern is the one traditional classroom. Is this something we can deal with and make happen?

Mrs. McCandless: The same students do carry through in the Magnet. In some places this is chosen as a positive model for the children, as they know each other, their background knowledge is known, parent relationships are better. Where there are negative relationships among the children, they are paired together and learn to get along. There is help to aid the students/parents deal with issues.

Mrs. Oliver: I think with just one traditional class, there would be a broader range of ability.

Mrs. McCandless: Actually, I have a broader range in abilities with the Magnet children, than I ever had with a traditional classroom. The Magnet children come in with reading abilities ranging from a second grade level to a sixth grade level. My traditional classes were usually preschool to third grade in their reading abilities. Keeping perspective helps.

Mrs. Bramble: There can also be some grouping done with the English part of the immersion program.

Mr. Porter: I see the goal of elementary school to prepare the children for junior high and high school and life. With 25 to 30 children, there is a comfort zone, then they get to junior high and they have to deal with 120-130 other children per day. I think that makes it more challenging. It is also harder when a new child comes into that class to find a niche. Last year I had just the one sixth grade, and ended the year with 36 children, who were all struggling to get along in 12 year old bodies. It was tough.

Mrs. Brain: So this would potentially be there every year?

Mrs. Bramble: October first enrollment determines the staffing for the year, funding for aides, etc.

Mrs. Milbank: At what point do you get a half class?

Mrs. Bramble: We submit a staffing plan now. October first is the official enrollment count. That determines the staffing for the year.

Mrs. Duzy: With the French program, we could set the traditional class number a little lower to buffer an increase in enrollment, so the class size don't balloon.

Mrs. Oliver: If you set the traditional class at 21, what happens if 35 want to do the traditional program?

Mrs. Bramble: Well if that happened, we would have to decide.

Mrs. Oliver: What would you do?

Mrs. Bramble: That is why we surveyed to make sure we had community support.

Mrs. Milbank: Do they have to commit to the French program?

Mrs. Bramble: Yes, they have to make a commitment.

Mrs. Duzy: We are looking for starting this for six year olds; a big question has been how will this help the seven-twelve year olds?

Mrs. Allison: They brought up that in the presentation, one or two Fridays per month could be sharing days, where activities could be done to facilitate language throughout the school.

Mrs. Jones: The PTA could be helpful in a proactive way for the sharing part of this.

Mrs. Duzy: So do the fifth and sixth graders now have difficulties?

Mr. Porter: There are 1 ½ classes of each of the sixth and fifth grades. Dynamics in the classroom switch with new personalities, and you can do that with two classes.

Mrs. Dirks: Do teachers as a whole, the general consensus, feel that the traditional class would be a dumping ground and they don't want that class?

Mrs. Jones: Actually, the teachers don't seem to want to share the French class, and would rather have the traditional class.

Mrs. Duzy: Are the teachers willing to switch off from year to year?

Mrs. Bramble: We haven't really gone that far in the discussion.

Mrs. Prince: Could we deal with the problems exacerbated by having one traditional classroom?

Mrs. Jones: To quote Mrs. McCandless, I think it is perspective, but I haven't seen it.

Mr. Porter: With the upper grades, it is there every year, and I haven't seen it better with one year over another. There is name calling and the kids hide it, but it is there.

Mrs. Prince: My sixth grader has an issue with the Magnet kids, my fourth grader plays with everyone, my first grader is in the Magnet, and has school friends, her Kindergarten friends, her soccer friends, etc.

Mrs. Godfrey: We entered the school the same time as the Magnet program. The families here weren't really receptive to the Magnet, and they'd send home information saying this is being done the same as last year, or always but nothing else. With the younger kids coming in, it has helped, and the PTA now is inclusive of everyone.

Mrs. Allison: My fifth grader doesn't have a problem with the Magnet children. It helps that they've coordinated some of their fieldtrips and learning with the fifth and sixth grade Magnet classes. There's less antagonism when they're kids you know.

Mrs. Bramble: It does seem to show up more in the fifth/sixth graders, as they show more of a preference to their groups. The three groups might help to diffuse some of the antagonism.

Mrs. Duzy: Also, the French Immersion Program is open to everyone, so there should be less of a them/us attitude.

Mrs. Philbrook: With issues like name calling, more in the fifth/sixth grades, is that accelerated by the Magnet?

Mrs. McCandless: Some of these kids have a close bond, which insulates them from some of the negativity.

Mrs. Bramble: With the addition of children, we increase the diversity. Children moving in now, have trouble finding a niche.

Mr. Porter: Magnet is not the problem, it is harder to mix with them and there's not a lot of interaction. 11-12 year olds just like to make themselves feel better by knocking someone else.

Mrs. Duzy: We are looking at behavior and a school wide standard that is uniform for all parents, children and teachers.

Mrs. Samudra: Like a Code of Conduct?

Mrs. Bramble: Yes, a set standard for behavior. There is a team working on this.

Mrs. Prince: I'm interested in Mr. Porter's view. Is there any problem that you haven't seen?

Mr. Porter: I had 33 students the first year I taught here, and that was when the Canyon Rim community was here. Last year, I had the only sixth grade with 36 students. This year, there is a split, and I have the full sixth grade. There were certain children that we separated due to behavior issues to help.

Mrs. Godfrey: My sixth grade daughter has had a split every year except the year Canyon Rim was here.

Mrs. McCandless: The teacher set the tone of the year. She can help by just calling the all first graders, rather than immersion, Magnet, traditional, etc.

Mrs. Brain: The parents and PTA can utilize helpful terms also.

Mrs. Bramble: My favorite expression was a Community of Learners, not differentiating anyone.

Mrs. Prince: I'd like final comments from the council members.

Mrs. Jones: It feels like we are between a rock and a hard place. After hearing the budget cuts and looking at programs, it feels like we need to take on the district's new pet project.

Mrs. Allison: I feel like we've done a lot to increase our boundary and it is big right now, but it hasn't brought in the hoped for number of students. I know that change is hard, but I don't think we can face closure again. That was really hard on the community as well, so I think we might need to try this.

Mrs. Duzy: I want it on record that it makes me ill that the majority of our teachers are against it.

Mr. Porter: It feels like the teacher that are against it, are passionately against it, and they are the ones that will be affected by it right away. They are amazing teachers and they'll be helpful to make it work. The teachers for it are less affected and seem passively for it.

Mrs. Duzy: The teachers are afraid that the traditional program will get lost.

Mrs. Dirks: Yet they want to teach the traditional program?

Mr. Porter: They like the diversity and to teach all the classes.

Mrs. Jones: Plus with the French program, you'd have to share your class and collaborate more.

Mrs. Bramble: At Upland Terrace, the teachers started out against it, and went to see a functioning program, it changed their view. They saw what it was doing for the children, and liked it.

Mrs. Godfrey: Are our chances, being in boundary, less to get into the French program?

Mrs. Prince: They are better; there will be a higher percentage of Morningside patrons in the program.

Mrs. Bramble: But with the lottery, they are not guaranteed.

Mrs. McCandless: We have an opportunity to make this fly high and go well. The council can help address the problems that crop up.

Mrs. Prince: I'd like to echo Cindy. If we choose to welcome this program, our PTA can help to offer programs to all of our community of learning. We can make the positives outweigh the negatives.

Mrs. Duzy: I don't like feeling rushed, I don't like that the teachers are not on board but this is an amazing program that we can give our children and community.

Mrs. Prince: I'd like to call for a vote on recommending that the district looks to place the French Immersion program here at Morningside.

Aye – 5

Opposed – 2

The recommendation from the community council is to send a letter to the Superintendent to place the French Immersion program here. We recognize the faculty concerns and pledge as a council to assist them in every way possible.

Mrs. Jones: As PTA co-president next year, I want the teachers to know that there is support.

Mr. Porter: Does this mean the Superintendent will place it here?

Mrs. Bramble: No just that we will send a letter that we are open to the program. I will get together with Karianne, on Monday to draft the letter.

Next meeting May 8<sup>th</sup> at 1:45 here in the library.

Mrs. Bramble: The safe walking route needs to be in before May 8, we'll need to form a subcommittee to do the walking route.