

Town Meeting

Allocation Committee meeting 4-30-15

Casey put up a chart showing current and projected allocations, figuring in the 2.4 increase for next year. Included in the chart were optional/tentative plans to use 1.5 of that increase to decrease the teaching load of 6th and 7th grade TAs in order to allow them to give the necessary time and attention to the needs of our youngest students. Frank spoke about his feelings that TAs need support: the culture of HB has changed since the first AP class was given in 1986, and the students' opportunities to engage in alternative educational experiences has diminished. Increasing the TA system might be one way to address this issue.

Casey indicated some changes to the allocations chart: we've stopped separate Middle School allocations, so for instance, all PE is now under PE, and Core Plus now is its own line item (with a proposal to decrease it from .4 to .2 and only offer it to 8th graders), as are a few other items not specifically part of any one department. The meeting was then opened for discussion.

Catherine spoke on behalf of the English dept., saying that they backed the addition of an activities coordinator.

Kris spoke on behalf of math and said that they were requesting a .1 increase to offer a lunch-time math lab. They're hoping to see a quantifiable difference made by giving an individual responsibility for this time period and allowing teachers to keep that time for eating and planning.

Mark Dodge spoke for science and said they were requesting .4 for adding AP environmental science every year (now rotates with AP biology), .2 for an additional biology block, and .2 for advanced computer science.

Brian said that social studies was requesting 5.6 positions (6 was listed - going to be checked).

Paul said that world languages needed to increase its Spanish sections from 2.4 to 2.5 to allow for an extra block of Spanish, but the total departmental allocation would stay at 4.5.

Carl said that fine arts anticipated no changes but added that they wanted to support an increase in funding for outside teachers.

Sally, Nekya, and distance learning requested no changes.

Michael C. spoke on behalf of HILT and said they were requesting a .25 increase to hire a half-time assistant who would be able to work for four blocks supporting the students in math and other subjects. His hope was that this position could be shared with a part-time special ed assistant.

Liz then introduced the proposed position of an academic activities coordinator and the request for a .4 allocation. Many people have expressed concern over the dwindling "alternatives" in our alternative program. One of our goals has been to build the concept of self-directed learning, but teachers are overbooked now and often don't have the time to work individually with students. An activities coordinator ideally could work with students on an individual basis, could help them craft senior projects, design independent studies, internships outside of school and in general help build and strengthen the HB community and foster independent learning, particularly assisting at the high school level to build on what we're trying to teach in the 6, 7, and 8 grades because at the moment, "kids often aren't equipped to do something awesome. We want to help them do something awesome."

Carol asked how such that person would actually interact with students, and Liz answered that they're hoping that he or she could work with TAs and pair up with students as needed.

Casey then spoke about the proposal to assist 6th and 7th grade TAs (currently 10). She said that when she speaks with prospective parents and students, she talks about the strong community, and the traditions of self-directed learning and self-governance. In reality though, there's often little time to focus on these concepts, and she thinks that we could do a better job, particularly with our 6th and 7th graders.

Francisca said there was definite need to increase the availability of counselors to students. There is someone available now only three days a week; Greta is here on a 4th day but is here primarily to attend required meetings. Francisca and others felt strongly that there was a need to have someone here every day.

Bill V. asked how classes currently taught by 6th and 7th grade teachers would be covered if their teaching load is reduced. Casey said that a tentative draft of changes left 2 history blocks and one math 8 still open.

Mark Dodge said that the initiative to add advanced computer science came from students - the desire and the need is strong. He added that there is a critical need for an additional biology block; 86 students have signed up for next year, with 30 signed up for AP biology. He added that students have requested AP environmental science, saying that it is difficult to plan their schedules with AP biology and e.s. only offered on alternate years. In response to direct questioning, he said that a half-time teacher (.3) could cover the biology needs.

Diana said she wanted to express her support for the requested HILT increases. She said that they are an important part of our population that needs and deserves our fullest support.

Bennett (12th) added his support for full-time counseling staff. He said that he had not even been aware when younger that there was counseling help available.

Mark Dickson returned to the subject of advanced computer science and said that we have a very talented group of students who want and need advanced instruction, and at present, we have no single teacher devoted to this program.

Eleanor spoke to the issue of TA assistance and said that a few years ago, a program was initiated involving significant planning and development for middle school TA. They saw real results, but in the time since, teachers have been asked to do so much more that that progress had been lost.

Bill P. said that he understood the sentiments that were being expressed but that he was concerned about the equal valuation of everything. He didn't want changes to be made that would fragment our program, our culture, and our sense of fairness. Lengthy discussion then followed about the needs of teachers and students, the pros and cons of changing teaching loads, and the desire to mold students into the kinds of students we want them to be. Bill V. and Eleanor talked a bit about a passport program they had been using to encourage kids to participate more in school wide activities, and Liz spoke of the need to strengthen our core values as our size increases.

Jennifer then spoke candidly about her unease with emphasizing one part of the school's needs over another's and about the varying emphasis on academic vs. philosophical goals. She wondered if it would be possible to separate the two conversations or somehow order their importance. This led to further discussion and the suggestion that perhaps one teacher could be chosen to lead and coordinate grade level TAs.

Dan said that the set-up as it is now for 6th and 7th grade is not working. The demands, in terms of discipline problems and emotional needs, are not being adequately addressed.

Mark Dickson said that if we were to choose to make major changes to accommodate TAs, we really should examine the whole TA framework: re-align the TA times so that Friday afternoon wasn't a throw-away time period and make TA as a whole more purposeful.

Carl offered a well-thought out proposal for exact numbers, trying to reach a compromise among requests. No one paid attention.

Frank said he didn't want the group as a whole to accept something that would ultimately be divisive. Evidence over the years, though, of teachers moving from middle school to high school when there were openings, and not the reverse, showed that middle school stresses were high.

Margaret suggested that maybe a full-time counselor could assist the middle school TAs. She felt that to change the middle school teachers' schedules would indeed create division because many high school teachers also feel that they are being asked to do more than should be reasonably expected.

Rachel asked why one teacher from each grade couldn't act as a coordinator and lessen the burden for the others, but the general consensus was that that kind of set-up usually didn't help much.

Paul said that students cannot succeed academically without their philosophical and emotional needs being attended to. He said that question isn't one of "seat time" - the purpose among teachers is there, but the time isn't. He also argued that depending on a counselor to fill the gap would defeat the purpose of TA, and he reminded everyone that middle school TAs typically have to spend far more time dealing with parents than high school teachers do.

Alison pointed out that just in terms of actual minutes and hours, they are required to have their kids physically with them at TA times and required to attend team meetings twice a week. She said that teaching middle school at HB often feels like being a second class citizen, and that they are being asked to do more than there is time to do it in.

Tom said that there was a strong need to parse our philosophical goals from our other goals. He said he was hearing a need to make middle school students quantifiably better prepared to enter high school, and it sounded to him like a coordinator of some sort was needed along with someone to put out fires when necessary. He also said, however, that investing in our outside teacher funds helps considerably in growing our philosophy and nurturing our students.

After more discussion, Meghan made a motion to make the .4 increase in counseling a priority. Frank clarified that we were assigned counselors by Jeff Carpenter in the Students' Services Office, and that we have little or no say in the matter. If we wanted to choose and hire a full-time counselor, we would have to use a full-time position (1 from our allocations) rather than accept the freely allotted hours we already are given.

Dave then said he was a little concerned about the idea of focussing on a counselor or counselors to solve our problems. He said that students had to feel comfortable with adults in order to confide in them and said that in the past, people like Marianne (our former registrar) and Steven Garmin (a former PE teacher) had filled that need for students, but we couldn't assume that any specific new person would necessarily work out.

Michael Coughlin pointed out, however, that there are real and significant emotional and psychological needs *right now* for which there are not sufficient resources. He asked again if there were not some way of getting one person here, full-time, and Frank answered that it was something they could request, but there was no guarantee.

Paul then said that he was leery of depending entirely on one person. He said that students' personalities varied, and that it would be better to have a variety of counselors available.

The question was called regarding Meghan's motion to make full-time counseling a priority and it passed.

Discussion then returned to the possible TA changes. Casey pointed out that this was not something that had been long sought after, but rather a new idea that had been imagined in response to a growing problem. It was never meant to be divisive. She reminded everyone that the entire allocation process is meant to be one where ideas can be fleshed out and approved or not approved, but that it was a dangerous thing to start talking about equity. Responsibilities and demands ebb and flow over time, and allocation has never equaled work load.

Eliza (11th) said that the class of 2016 was planning on reinstating the hs/ms big brother/big sister program, and she hoped that doing so might help alleviate some of the burden on the middle school TAs.

Bennett (12th) pointed out that a completely structured, planned, middle school TA actually *precluded* young students getting the personal attention they sometimes needed. He said that he had been bullied when he was in 7th grade, but in a large class of coordinated activity it had been impossible to ever talk to anyone about it.

Eleanor said it was better to bring the question of inequity out into the open rather than whisper about it behind closed doors. But Dan said that regardless of perceptions of inequality, some kind of change was necessary. Better to try it out and then abandon it if the changes don't pay off.

Bill said we really have to ask ourselves what kind of experience we want to create for students and how committed are we to making sure they grow up with the necessary social and emotional skills.

Dave made a motion to cease discussion and bring everything as was to Town Meeting. After much further discussion, his motion was defeated.

Mark Dodge made a substitute motion to 1) remove environmental science from the picture, 2) cut the academic coordinator and 3) support the middle school proposal. That, too, was defeated.

Casey made a motion to create a base that included .25 for HILT, .3 for science, and .1 for world languages, and then to leave the rest to Town Meeting. Dave countered that he was sure that at Town Meeting a vote would put academics first and would leave the concept of growing a caring community as expendable.

Diana said that she believed the social and emotional needs of our youngest students have to be our priority and made a substitute motion to put the 1.5 for adjusting teacher loads into the base and to leave the remaining .7 open for debate (.2 had already been voted for counseling increase).

Genevieve (11th) said she thought students had to be more involved in these decisions.

Diana's motion went to vote and passed, saying that the allocation committee supported the idea of an addition 1.5 be included in the base as class relief for 6th and 7th grade TAs, with the remaining .7 open for Town Meeting debate.

Mark Dodge made a motion that we hold an informational Town Meeting first and defer voting until a second meeting could be held. Casey requested that such a meeting be held early in the week so that master scheduling, hiring, etc., not fall behind schedule. Discussion followed as to the pros and cons of precluding voting at the first meeting, but the final consensus was that it would be best to reserve time to present the options along with today's committee's preferences, and then to allow some time for consideration before final decisions would be made.

The motion passed. An emergency Town Meeting would be called on Friday to change next week's schedule in order to accommodate two separate meetings.