

Garden City Middle School
Curriculum Committee Meeting Notes
April 11, 2022

PTA Representatives: Krista Irwin (not present), Meghan O'Brien, Marissa Padala

SEPTA Representative: Karen Butt

AGENDA

1. SEL Curriculum

- Any updates with regard to adopting a SEL curriculum? Parents are looking for more formal instruction that will be required for all students and that will promote more inclusive behavior.
 - Adopting the use of the DESSA (Devereux Student Strengths Assessment) screener
 - Used to help understand social emotional health of students
 - Teachers answer questions in an online screener about students
 - Look to planning for counselors to push into homebase and address social/emotional topics at assemblies in the future
- How do you identify students who may be struggling when the student and/or parent does not reach out for help? How can the school staff encourage students who are not participating in any school-related activities (sports or clubs) to be more connected to the school community?
 - DESSA should help with “child find” referrals for social-emotional and mental health intervention.
 - Teachers are tuned in to notice a difference in a student and will check in with the student or reach out to the parents to see if anything is seen to be a change from the student’s typical behavior.

2. Updates on English Studio, Math Lab and Organization Station

- What has the turnout been like? How, if at all, do you see these programs evolving?
- Have you received any feedback from parents and/or students?
 - Turnout for both English Studio and Math Lab in grade 6 has been strong.
 - English Studio offerings for grades 6 & 7 have been consolidated into one time, as turnout was low in 7th.
 - 8th grade numbers are low in English Studio.
 - Organization Station has low numbers in 8th grade; We have some dedicated participants in 6th & 7th grade. We are considering other ways to drive interest and participation, including a potential shift in timing.

3. Electives

- Is there a possibility that the current elective choices can be expanded to include a greater range of topics? Some suggestions given are architecture, veterinary medicine, sports medicine, and finance. It’s been observed that, with the pressures of high school

these days, the time for students to explore interests has been pushed down even more to the middle school level.

- Plans to expand elective course options are in the works, however planning starts in September for the following year. The process for developing new electives starts a year in advance. Ideas are in development for the 2023-2024 school year.
- Can elective choices be added that are more appropriate for students with 504s and/or IEPs? Karen is reaching out to SEPTA to get more details on what is being requested
- Can a math elective be geared towards prep for the AMC8 and other similar math competitions? Or would this be better served by an extracurricular club?
 - Since AMC8 is optional, there are no plans to create a related elective. Mr. Samuelson suggested the students interested should join Math Research Club
- Has the Latin elective been removed permanently from the curriculum?
 - Given low interest, Latin is not scheduled for next year.
 - German seems to have strong interest from incoming 6th grade

4. Parent-Teacher Conferences

- A few years ago, the MS made the decision to end mandatory PT conferences. Parents, however (especially post-Covid), are looking to establish a stronger connection with their children's teachers. Has there been any thought to reestablishing these conferences in the future? Can conferences occur in the evening with individual teachers (instead of with a team)? Is there currently uniformity with respect to which parents are offered a conference (e.g., GPA below a certain threshold), or can it be established?
 - There are no plans to return to mandatory PT conferences, as there is not enough time allotted to schedule all students. With that said, teachers are always available at any point of the year should a conference be needed/wanted.
 - The teachers in each cluster screen for the most at risk students. There are no specific grade threshold criteria for this as the teachers are looking for several different red flags (i.e., a grade related change of some kind, social-emotional change)

5. Midterms/Finals/Benchmarks

- Recently, there has been movement away from larger exams to "benchmarks" that are generally given on a quarterly basis and cover smaller amounts of material. What are the arguments for and against larger types of exams? Some parents are concerned that students will not have much experience taking larger tests (relatedly, they may not know why midterms were eliminated or understand the role of quarterly benchmarks).
 - Moving away from midterms, as they take away from learning schedule
 - Ongoing assessments, such as quarterly benchmarks provide critical teacher feedback
 - Final exams will be given, as administration is aware of the importance of building academic stamina