

Fireweed Academy
'Where students learn to view themselves as readers, writers, and problem solvers'
Academic Policy Committee Meeting
APPROVED Minutes
February 11, 2015

APC Members Present: Matt Strobel, Jon Kulhanek, Hannah Gustafson, Stephanie Zuniga, Amber Niebuhr (came in a bit late), Brandy McGee, Garry Betley

Members absent: Kate Henry, Kary Brinson

Committee Members Present: Hannah G-Budget

Staff Present: Kiki Abrahamson- FWA Principal, FWA Secretary Janet Bowen

Public Comments: None

Meeting called to order at 4:35 pm

Motion: Hannah moved to approve the agenda, Jon seconded and motion passed with unanimous consent.

Motion: Stephanie moved to approve the Jan 2015 minutes, seconded by Jon and motion passed with unanimous consent.

Administrators Report: Kiki reported that the LINK UP performance was terrific, thanks to Stephanie for helping out. Ann Margret Wimmerstedt is our current AIS artist, teaching the big FWA kids encaustic painting. The kids are loving it. Eddie wood will be at LFW the last week of Feb. LFW also has a swim week coming up, there is lots of fundraising going on through Paula Kulhanek and Sharlene Cline. The spring fieldtrips will be camping in McCarthy/Kennecott (with NPS guides participating) for the 6th graders and AGEYA for the 3-5th graders.

We are cruising with our transition to the new standards, testing and teacher evaluations.

Kiki, Jon and Amber will be attending the State-wide Charter School conference in Juneau Feb 22-23, 2015. Kiki might lobby against the daylight savings-not good for kids.

Kiki, Matt and Budget Committee member Erik Niebuhr will meet on the 24th with Dave Jones and Laurie Olsen from the district to discuss our budget, rollover money and facility issues.

March 4th is our Invention Convention, trying to bring over the K-2 kids to view. Jon Kulhanek's class is visiting the local aquaponics business here in Homer, they have an aquaponic project going on in Jon's room.

APC Program Evaluation: Jon Spoke about a program evaluation that he needs to complete for his principal coursework he is pursuing. He would like to use the APC for this project...exploring what the APC needs to be more efficient for our school, a broad view, the bigger stakeholder position. This information will be helpful at a strategic planning session. The project needs to be done by the end of March. The APC members asked him to submit his questions in writing.

The APC decided to change the March meeting to the 18th to accommodate for spring break.

Exit letters: Janet Bowen reported that she was up-to-date with exit surveys being sent to families that have left FWA. She will bring responses to the APC meetings as they come in.

Enrollment: 85 at this point for FY16

Some of the issues brought to light included...

- *create waitlist by grade...very heavy on 1st graders right now
- *Policy on midyear admissions, late 6th graders does not usually work.
- *We have never had grade/gender balance- can't use that. Kiki and Janet will discuss options.

Budget Committee Report: Hannah reported that they will be every month, the Monday before an APC meeting, at little Fireweed. Kiki passed out a budget pack to the APC. We have not heard how projected state budget cuts will affect our charter school. Kiki will talk to state reps while in Juneau and will ask Lauri and Dave at the Feb 24th meeting.

Fireweed Campus Brainstorming: Garry send in the following questions to ask in regard to having one campus:

- Is there a student population number of Fireweed students that would substantiate Fireweed occupying an existing Borough School in Homer, one campus K-12?
- Can any funds in our budget be used to buy land or building materials? Or build a shed to store future furniture, and other future building needs?
- It seems that the Foundation or some entity be responsible for the funding and basically charge the school rent. Can it be some other way? Can we lease it to ownership by Borough?
- Is the District willing and able work alongside us to search for an answer or help convince a developer that it is good investment by providing support in the process of figuring it out with facts and figures?
- Can any funds be used to form a foundation or operate one for construction of a private building on private land or some borough land?
- We have many and know many more questions will develop and time is a factor, do we use the borough lawyer or would be better to be given access to rules, laws and regulations and hire our own lawyer to determine what and how to get One Campus, K-12.

Another question brought up at the meeting was 'can we extend our charter contract to 10 years?

Amber spoke at length with several Charter school principals regarding facilities and below are her notes:

Barbara at Academy Charter:

Barbara told me that when they went through their building process, both they and Fronteras went through a process with the borough there where they were given or paid for (I wasn't clear on this) some of the land that the borough had set aside for schools. Academy then received capital funding through three separate legislative grants. The land they received had a "bunch of junk" on it when they started, and the first grant helped pay for the land (so school must have purchased it? Again, I wasn't fully clear on this). They worked out of some of the existing old structures on the land and portables. With the second grant, they built a gym and an administrative area, and then finally with the third grant they built the remainder of the school. She said the project took 8 years and cost about \$2 million per wing, and their building is now 42,000 square feet. Academy Charter serves K-8.

Barbara also gave me some information about Fronteras, which is the Spanish immersion school. They received their funding through some sort of program where they were given federal USDA loans. It seems they borrowed \$7 million at 3.5%. They also initially bought or were given borough land that was set aside for schools, and built on it, and then they are/will lease the building from the borough.

One suggestion, as to inability to simply go out and purchase land, and to stay within the process, was to put out an RFP for a lot purchase, but do so within a very narrowly defined are. Her suggestion was to say, if we had our eye on a specific lot or area of town, to say we wanted it “within a mile of XYZ intersection,” for example. She also suggested talking to the borough manager about what land might be available.

She had a key quote that really resonated with me, which was, “Parents are customers.” We can/should use them to help lobby the district as necessary. If we get out families on board, they’ll help us fight for this and achieve the dream.

Jason Storter, APC Treasurer from Rilke Schule

Jason had a lot of information to share. Rilke Schule is about to break ground on their new building. He said that he has to be careful to be clear that **they** are not building a new building, a new building is being built for them by someone else. Kiska and Cisna (I think?), two Native corps are partnering on construction of the building as an investment. They are also working with Criterion (was involved with Winterberry, and 3 other schools in the Anchorage area), and with Mark Pfeffer, a major developer in the Anchorage area who does major building projects, such as the new legislative building in town. The end result then is that Rilke Schule will be a long term lessee of the building. They work with ASD to extend their charter from 5 years to 10, and were then able to enter in to a 20 year lease agreement for the building. However, they also have an option to purchase the building in 10 years at \$10 million – a fixed rate. This agreement is between their nonprofit (see below) and Kiska Corp. They will now begin a massive capital campaign to raise the money necessary to purchase their building. Rilke Schule was given a \$2 million loan from ASD at 1.5% over 10 years as part of their down payment for the construction costs of the building. According to Jason, after all the hard/long work with the district to get this project on its feet, ASD at this point has basically said that this is how the process is going to work within their district from now on. He also pointed out that they did face a lot of political resistance with this project, due to the current financial crisis and within the state and within ASD.

He had some other helpful info. One way that Rilke Schule has managed to squirrel away some money, is by forming their own 501c3 nonprofit corp. Essentially, the nonprofit acts as the school’s landlord, paying direct lease costs to the current landlord, and the school pays rent to the nonprofit at a rate higher than the actual cost of the building. In this way, the nonprofit is able to basically act as a savings account for the school, and Rilke currently has about \$800,000 saved up in equity and cash. This is done openly, with the knowledge of the district, and other schools have done or are doing the same thing currently, including Winterberry. Jason also pointed out that Winterberry has their own business manager, said he is working on trying to get one in place at Rilke, and suggested that we might want to do the same, especially as we embark on the massive undertaking like building a new building. He couldn’t say enough positive things about Criterion, this is the 5th school project they’ve worked on, and he pointed out that by now they are really well versed in the ins and outs of working within the complexities of ASD and the Municipality of Anchorage. He is happy to share both their lease an option to purchase agreement with us if we would like, and would like to network more at the conference next week.

Hannah spoke to the Ted Turner foundation and they currently do not fund in the state of Alaska

Question: Do you have a strategic plan? Change of Principal? Consolidation of campus. Janet was asked to find old strategic plan...7+years ago.

There was a general discussion that the APC will not organize a strategic plan right now.

D&O Insurance: Janet reported that Amy Garza got back to her regarding our coverage under the school district. Amy said “The D&O coverage in force is called “school leaders errors and omissions” for KPSD and “public officials liability” for KPB. As long as Fireweed Academy is an official part of KPSD they have School Leaders. The bigger question is what exposure are they concerned about? I always ask that question to find out what they are doing so we can then confirm that the coverage applies.”

The APC asked if there is a document that says the APC is part of the School district. And one of their concerns is if we purchase land...large capital expenditure, do we need liability insurance?

Administrative Evaluation: Due Feb 15th.

Janet is to make this a March agenda item and find the principal evaluation that was used during the last few years-email that to the APC. Amber will send out one page evaluation for teachers to use. And we will use the districts evaluation form and send this out to all staff. They will be due to Janet by the 6th and given to Matt Strobel. Janet will put it on the agenda and note in newsletters that parents are welcome to submit comments at the meeting.

Motion: Amber moved to adjourn, seconded by Jon and the motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 6:11pm

Submitted by Janet Bowen