



**FRENCH-AMERICAN SCHOOL
OF RHODE ISLAND**
learning through languages

School Forum

Tuesday, September 24, 2013

3:30 PM

MINUTES

Present: Dominique Velociter (Head of School), Betty Cares (Board Chair), Celine Wesson (Board Member), Louise Jakobson (Director of Advancement), Tom Hiller (Business Manager), Jeremy Freitas (Education Director), Audrey Talarico (Education Director), Isabelle Michaels (Maternelle teacher), Susan Gaudemard (Elementary teacher), Celine Cyr (Elementary teacher), Jason Patch (Forum Rep), Mariani Lefas-Tetenes (PA Chair). Parents: Carolina Donnantuoni, Shonna Dowers, Cynthia Kiang, Valerie McCain, George Papandonatos, Delphine Rouleau, Julia Savoretti.

Meeting called to order at 3:30 PM

Introductions

- Jason Patch (JP), Forum representative, introduced the forum and its change in format over the past several years from a closed meeting with elected members to an open forum for all parents.
- Faculty, staff, board, and parent attendees introduced themselves before the group.

Topics for discussion

- Education
 - Jeremy Freitas (JF), Middle School & English Program Director, talked about the English program.
 - This year's focus is a holistic and interdisciplinary approach at all levels, and Common Core standards are integrated into the curriculum and set the basic skill set each student should attain by the end of the year; getting the children to that point is left to the teacher's discretion and expertise. Because of the immersion/dual-language setting, English can lag when compared to monolingual peers in early elementary, but by the time students enter middle school they are at the same level, and by high school they surpass their monolingual peers in English.
 - Harmonization in Middle School: in Middle School, English Language Arts is working with Social Studies (taught in French) for a contest through University of Rhode Island, and other plans are in the works.
 - At this time, the Math and Science curriculum in the Middle School align with American curriculum standards, and there is thought toward alignment with the French national curriculum in these subjects, which may help FASRI's middle school receive accreditation, once the numbers in each grade are large enough to apply.
 - Each teacher had to isolate two goals for the year that they would like to accomplish and share them with their Education Director to ensure they receive the guidance and support needed.



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- Audrey Talarico (AT), Lower School & French Program Director, spoke about the role of the Education Directors and the French program.
 - Education Directors' role: Ensure that the established curriculum is implemented in each class. Observe and evaluate teachers (first/second-year teachers are observed twice; others are observed once). Support the faculty.
 - Dominique Velociter (DV) also visits the teachers and follows up with meetings where necessary.
 - Each class's curriculum is well explained on the website. The French program follows the French national curriculum from the Ministry of Education. Similar to the Common Core, French teachers know the information they need to cover and organize the year as they see fit.
 - Harmonization in Lower School: Several different dual-language projects in the works at the moment. For the most part, students learn a concept in French and then they transfer these skills to their English work, which reinforces it. This is true for reading; students first read in French, and their decoding skills are then transferred when they start reading in English. American and French systems for math differ, and children are taught both ways later in elementary school with different content to avoid repetition. In general, there is more explanation in French and application in English.
- Differentiation (adjusting lessons for the varying needs and strengths in a classroom)
 - Middle School (JF): Group assignments and opportunities for collaboration give students room to challenge themselves or get help from one another. The goal is to craft assignments at the highest level possible and adjust it as necessary.
 - Lower School (AT): Every class has many levels of comprehension and skills. Each teacher adjusts assignments and assessments according to individual needs. This is especially seen in Kindergarten, when new English-speakers arrive without any French; adjustments are made to accommodate but teachers still work to ensure they have the expected level of French as soon as possible. Teachers also provide extra language support/tutoring in both French and English.
 - DV added that most assignments should have at least two different kinds of assessments, if not more, to ensure comprehension of all learning types. She and the E.D.s are helping the teachers develop these assessments for their classes.
- JP asked about standardized evaluations, and the E.D.s and DV responded.
 - French: French evaluations just happened last two weeks in Grades 3, 6, and 8.
 - Middle School English: Eighth graders will take the College Board's ReadyStep assessment in Math and English this year.
 - These tests are standardized but will mostly be used as in-house, diagnostic assessments of student benchmarks. The school favors in-class, personalized assessments to these evaluations, because they are not always holistic or reflect the students' knowledge accurately.



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- Curriculum (DV)
 - Three levels of curriculum at FASRI
 - The standard curricula from France and the Common Core
 - The synthesis and harmonization of these two programs by the school
 - The individualized implementation of this synthesis by each teacher
 - The FASRI curriculum prepares students for successful high school careers in the French and American school systems.
 - Split of English and French: Most of the curriculum is in French in lower elementary and Maternelle, and moves to 50/50 in upper elementary. The choice to have Math and Science in English for the Middle School was made when the Middle School was created; it is not something that changes depending on the teacher who is hired. It is standard at FASRI to have these subjects in English and Social Studies in French, and teachers are hired accordingly to ensure consistency of this arrangement so parents know how their child will learn in Middle School.
 - FASRI administrators agreed to put a link to the curriculum in the Weekly News each week and to look into creating a glossary of important terms for parents, including harmonization, curriculum, syllabus, and differentiation.
- A parent asked about the difference in recess time between Maternelle and Grade 1.
 - AT: elementary students have five more minutes of recess in the mornings this year (20 instead of 15).
 - Isabelle Michaels, Maternelle teacher (IM): Students may miss play more than recess in the transition between Kindergarten and Grade 1. There is more structure in the class time and less play time.
- Arts & Technology
 - Lower School: both subjects are taught in class by the classroom teacher and linked to the curriculum.
 - Middle School: For now, students get two periods per week of art and music, with a dedicated artist in residency for each. In the future, there may be a rotating schedule that allows for longer periods and more elective choices, and more time to get into projects.
 - FASRI tries to hire creative people in general. Teachers from France are trained in all subjects, including art. Teachers are encouraged to attend professional development in any area they would like to develop and also to use community resources & artistic parents to supplement their own skills. The CP/CE1 class is partnering with the RISD Museum.
- How parents can support teachers: teachers and E.D. responded
 - Reinforce what is done at school; it is essential to show kids that all adults are on the same page.
 - Read to your child and have them read to you, asking questions as you go.
 - Carefully read any assignments that are sent home.
 - Read emails and respond when a response is requested.



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- Be prompt for morning drop-off: lateness is an issue and sets a negative example. Students miss instruction time and feel rushed/uneasy when they come in late. It's not a good way to start the day.
- Read the curriculum on the website and ask your classroom teacher any questions you have.
- Head of School Transition – Betty Cares, FASRI Board of Trustees Chair (BC)
 - BC on the board for five years and chair for three.
 - Trustee/Parent Jennifer Tomasik, head of the Search Committee, recently sent email detailing the current state of the search. Lots to consider with any transition, especially with a long-term founding head.
 - BC spoke about the consulting firm Educational Directions (EDI): well-traveled firm with connections all over the world and roots in RI. Two consultants recently visited the school and spoke with teachers, administrators, and parents and were impressed at all levels. EDI is now working on a survey for the community that should be completed thoughtfully. From there, a profile of a candidate will be developed. Finalists will be presented to the community by February and a decision by the end of that month if all goes well.
 - This is a daunting task that is being taken seriously. The goal is not to change the school radically.
 - The ideal candidate will have French fluency if not French/francophone country citizenship and time in the States to observe and understand the American education system.
 - Community will be kept abreast of all updates via the website and email.
 - Overlap in heads
 - The amount of time the outgoing and incoming head spend together will be ironed out closer to June, when the new head should start.
 - Contact
 - Speak with Jennifer Tomasik with any questions. This goes for parents and faculty/staff members.
- Housekeeping
 - The next Forum
 - Probably in the spring
 - Send ideas to either DV or via the P.A. to help create the next agenda.
 - Changing representatives
 - Forum is now part of the P.A.
 - JP will not be at FASRI in the spring. Andrew Ellison will take his place as Forum Rep.
 - The P.A. also needs a new chair for the spring, as Mariani Lefas-Tetenes will not be here. New people are encouraged to get involved.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15 PM.