

**ISC GENERAL MEETING
ACADEMY BUILDING
January 12, 2010
MINUTES**

Attendees -- List available upon request from Juli Gruber-May, ISC Secretary

Welcome

Beth Johnson welcomed the group and thanked Cynwyd Elementary School for providing refreshments for the meeting.

ISC Mini-Grant Program

The ISC Mini-Grants Program provides funds to LMSD faculty who are piloting innovative techniques to enrich student learning. Rachel Somers, ISC co-president, announced that the ISC webpage now has a tab for the Mini-Grant Program, which leads to an application that can be submitted electronically. ISC reps and HSA presidents should encourage teachers at their schools to apply to the program.

Treasurer's Report

To save paper, ISC treasurer Karen Cosentino no longer will distribute budget information routinely at every ISC meeting, but she's happy to provide the information upon request. Please contact her if you'd like a copy of the budget, or have questions.

Art Show

Barb Clark, ISC art show chair, invited everyone to this year's exhibition of student work at Main Line Art Center from Friday, January 22 through Thursday, January 28th. The opening reception takes place on Saturday, January 23rd at 1 p.m. The art show features wonderful work from the elementary, middle and high schools.

Taste of Lower Merion

A Taste of Lower Merion features food from area restaurants as well as entertainment, and benefits ABC House (for academically gifted minority high school students) and the Lower Merion Scholarship Fund. The event is organized by students and takes place on Sunday, February 21st at Lower Merion High School from 5 to 8 p.m. Please contact tasteofLM.org if you'd like to contribute to the event.

Coalition for Youth of Lower Merion and Narberth

Eileen Riddell announced two upcoming events sponsored by the Coalition for Youth:

Battle of the Bands – Saturday, January 30th at Milk Boy Ardmore. The event brings together students from schools throughout the area and showcases their talent.

Supporting Your Teen's Transition to High School – Sunday, March 14th, 2 to 4 p.m. at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church. This panel presentation will discuss the issues facing families with 8th graders who are about to enter high school. All are invited.

ISC Report on Guidance Services in Secondary Schools

Mary Broach, Beth Burrell, Amy Norr and Abby Spector reported on their study of guidance counseling in the middle and high schools. For six months in 2009, the committee conducted more than 100 interviews, and a survey of 600+ parents, to understand the school district's middle and high school guidance services from the perspective of staff and parents. In November 2009, the committee presented the report to Superintendent Chris McGinley, Asst. Superintendent Mike Kelly, and Supervisor of Guidance Bruce Barner.

To see the full report, go to the LMSD website, click on Community and then choose the ISC tab. The report's key overall recommendations are:

#1 - Improve the quality of counseling

- Increase counselors' visibility and contact with students
- Continue to hire counselors who want to be visible and enjoy being with students
- Require follow through with students, parents and staff
- Connect counselors to the academic mission of the school through programs about course sequences and creative scheduling
- Consider specialization of counseling services, in particular, a college specialist
- Review the concept of Advisory, its effectiveness and potential

#2 – Improve communication

- Establish regular times to present guidance-related material to students
- Develop regular, effective communication with parents
- Develop and enforce standards for returning phone calls and emails in a timely manner
- Share relevant information between schools, but also provide information that is school specific
- Insist on a courteous and upbeat attitude from all staff

#3 – Clarify roles and leverage time

- Create specific evaluation form for counselors and update job descriptions
- Clarify roles
- Find ways to leverage counselors' time (e.g., college or special education specialists, aim to reduce time commitment to IEP meetings)

#4 - Encourage feedback

- Create open lines of communication within buildings, to absorb input from counselors, teachers and students
- Convene an advisory committee for school counseling in each building and include teacher and parent representatives
- Use surveys or other methods to encourage student input
- Be open to talking to professionals outside the district

For central administration specifically, the report recommends:

- Provide clear direction and oversight, while still allowing autonomy to each building
- Create specific tools to evaluate the success of counseling programs and the work of individual counselors
- Develop an action plan to implement changes in the near future.

Following the presentation, Superintendent McGinley commended the committee on its report and noted that it will be a useful resource for the district. In addition, he explained that the school district hired external consultants with expertise in school counseling to conduct interviews with staff and parents over a two-day period in October. Dr. McGinley had just received the consultants' 65-page report and many of its findings align with the ISC Guidance Committee's. The District is currently reviewing the two reports to note similarities and develop a timeline for implementing changes. The external consultants' report will be made available to the public.

During a question and answer period, Dr. McGinley indicated that the school district's short-term plans are to:

- Provide more user-friendly information to parents. The goal is to "front load" information for families – so they can see what decisions are upcoming for them and their children as they progress from kindergarten through 12th grade. The new roadmap is one effort in this direction.

- Develop clearer expectations for how students should be served by school counseling in the district
- Discuss school counselor job evaluations with Lower Merion Education Association
- Encourage creation of parent advisory groups for school counseling to promote dialogue among families, school counselors, teachers and administrators
- With the CARE committee, explore ways to make schools more engaging and culturally appropriate for families of color. The school district is planning training for parents and staff.

The school district also will research and consider longer-term options, such as school counselors who specialize in post-secondary planning.

Bruce Barner reported that the current middle school bullying program will change. The company that developed the program is discontinuing it, but the school district will find an alternate way to present bullying prevention information to students.

Also, Dr. Barner will make sure that all parents receive information about Naviance, a new online program the school district is implementing to help students explore their career interests and plan for college or other post-secondary activities.

Parents who are concerned about their children's emotional health, behavior or the possibility of drug or alcohol use, should contact their school counselor. Every school has a Student Assistance Program, which is designed to help children who are having difficulty.

Upcoming Meetings

- ISC Presidents Meeting, Tuesday, January 19 at 9:30am at Harriton High School
- ISC Art Show, Jan 22 to Jan 28, Main Line Art Center. Reception on Saturday January 23, 1pm.
- School Board Business Meeting, Monday January 25 at 8pm in LMHS Library
- ISC General Meeting, Tuesday, February 9 at 9:30 am in Academy Building. Guest Speaker: Dr. Nancy Acconciamezza, Math Supervisor for the school district