



Certified Staff Handbook Committee

Feb. 9 Meeting Summary

The following is a summary of what was reviewed and discussed and at the Certified Staff Handbook Committee meeting on Tuesday, Feb. 9.

Professional Workday

There were concerns that some teachers were able to leave early, which others said was a fairness issue. Superintendent Don Johnson said the professional workday language wasn't intended to shorten the workday but rather allow teachers to leave for an appointment, run errands, etc., on an occasional basis. He stressed that if a teacher is missing classroom instructional time, a more formal request needs to be submitted.

Section loads for encore subjects at elementary level

Sunset Ridge art teacher Darcy Sage submitted a proposal to change the amount of time art staff work and receive for preparation.

Sage pointed out encore teachers had more than 300 minutes of prep time a week, but noted classroom teachers two additional 15-minute free periods due to recess that encore teachers don't have available.

She noted that the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction recommends 90 minutes a week of art and said the District is far short of that at the elementary level except for fifth-graders, who have it every other day now that they are at the middle school.

She believes teaching art is prep-intensive. She also is concerned that while amount of time students have art is same as before because of the implementation of the six-day rotation students are now only getting art 30 weeks a year and believes that is a detriment.

Art teachers also had more transition time between classes in the past and-or taught the same grades in consecutive classes, which made things easier. She said neither is any longer the case.

She proposed art teachers work 24 sections over six days and if less than 24 they could be assigned additional duties. She currently teaches 21 sections at Sunset Ridge and four at Elm Lawn. She also noted she has no more than two consecutive five-class days.

Deputy Superintendent George Mavroulis said all specials are now 30 minutes except for art, which is 60 minutes. Before the six-day rotational schedule art classes ranged from 40-55 minutes and other

specials had different times, which resulted in no common planning time. He also noted the six-day cycle gets everything aligned in 30- or 60-minute block and said it avoids the issue of some students not getting a special because more off days on Friday if students assigned an encore on that day.

He also said instructional minutes are closer across all levels than they have been in his 14 years at the central office. He noted at elementary level the highest number of sections is 54 for some physical education teachers who don't travel. The average minutes for a teacher who has 24 or 48 sections is 240 per day.

The committee spent quite a bit of time discussing is enough prep time built into the current schedule. Mavroulis thought it might be possible to improve the schedule by giving special teachers a third building. However, Northside principal Roz Craney pointed out no elementary teacher currently works in three buildings, which staff indicated was important.

Don Johnson wondered if the art proposal needs to be implemented for all elementary encore staff. Sage said technology teachers she has spoken with don't have the same prep needs as art staff, but believe like they need more time out of the classroom as well.

Johnson noted that years ago there were big ranges of classroom instruction time from level-to-level and also among curriculum areas.

"The challenge is knowing what is comparable and we do struggle with it but we have wanted some level of balance," he said.

Mavroulis indicated if art teachers had a cap of 24 sections another 0.33 FTE would be needed. He also said if there is a firm number of sections an employee must have to be full time than they run the risk of not being a 1.0 FTE if the numbers go down.

Kellie Collins said she can see where art might need more prep time but there are so many extra issues. Mavroulis said the request by itself seems reasonable until you try to put all of the pieces together. JoEllen Pauls said the key is building a relationship with each teacher and principal to develop a schedule that is best for everyone.

Core-encore supervision equity concerns at middle school level

Kromrey principal Steve Soeteber led a discussion about concerns that what is asked of teachers who lead academic resource time at the middle school level is more challenging than what is asked of others who don't.

He explained that academic resource time is limited to literacy and math. Students also receive time to work on organizational skills but it is done during extended time, he said. George Mavroulis said students aren't pulled out of a class they really love for additional help unless it is really needed.

Soeteber wants math and literacy teachers who already know those students to have them in academic resource time. He believes a possible solution is to increase instructional support for encore teachers involved so they can play role in academic resource.

Don Johnson wondered if there is a way to make teaching schedules comparable, knowing that art isn't English, for example. Jerry Moen shared a number of possible solutions, including a number that

included additional pay for staff. Johnson said he would prefer to adjust the schedule vs. adding stipends, which he believes presents additional challenges.

“It’s not to be unsympathetic to any teacher’s load,” he said. “I don’t know how we compare but as much as possible we want to be fair.”

Teaching hours, online teaching and part-time hours

MHS principal Steve Plank addressed the committee about concerns related to all three areas.

He said the crux of the issue is building the MHS master schedule. He said 2,100 students pick up to seven classes every year, which results in about 900 sections. MHS receives about 15,000 course requests and is able to meet 87 percent of those. An example of when a request can’t be met is when a student wants Class A and Class B but both only meet once and are at the same time.

He suggested a change to the language on page 19 4.05-d of the handbook. It currently doesn’t require part-time staff to attend meetings, which he believes should be required. He also suggested changing the language related to voluntarily teaching online. He is worried if a teacher is struggling in the classroom, maybe they shouldn’t be adding online teaching. He also has concerns about Nos. 8 and 10 on page 25. He said having only offering online courses at only beginning or end of day poses real challenges and he doesn’t think that is sustainable. The language says it isn’t guaranteed, but online teachers believe it is.

Plank said there are seven part-time teachers at MHS and another dozen who teach online and that the perception is they are part-time because they aren’t in the building as much as full-time teachers. He also has another 10 teachers who travel between middle schools and high school. He noted almost all world language teachers travel, which makes it nearly impossible for them to get together.

“They do meet but only because they find a way to make it work,” he said.

A full-time teacher at MHS teaches five classes, while someone teaching online would have four brick-and-mortar classes and one online class.

George Mavroulis pointed out the idea of letting online courses be at the beginning or end of the school day was an enticement early on because there was 30 hours of training to get ready.

Plank doesn’t believe changing the online section will have a huge impact, although he did acknowledge someone teaching online may feel like this was a nice perk that has been removed.

An additional hour was spent after lunch discussing the challenges with changing the language. It was agreed that Director of Employee Services Tabatha Gundrum will put together some broad language, especially regarding changes to part-time teachers and their duties in the handbook and the committee will consider it at the next meeting.

Revisiting additional pay for Student Services staff

Director of Student Services Jerry Nicholson reviewed changes that were made a year ago to student services pay and covered possible changes going forward.

He said stipends were given to all student services staff starting this year. It resulted in a reduction in pay for some staff but said that was because previously some staff were documenting everything while some weren't documenting anything. He also is reluctant to give different levels of stipends to different people because it might create hard feelings.

"They are all difficult jobs," Nicholson said. "They are all hard-to-fill positions."

He believes the current process is fair. He said there may also be years where some positions have more meetings than others but believes it should balance out over time. He also said this is more professional than making staff track everything. He noted he has had multiple conversations with JoEllen Pauls on this topic and she said she agreed with Nicholson.

Don Johnson said he knows of only one school that is requiring student services staff to attend additional meetings so rather than making a big change he wants to have a discussion with that principal about no longer doing that.

Professional Development points for out-of-district events

The committee had a lengthy discussion about whether to provide points for out-of-district professional development, which wasn't included in the handbook.

George Mavroulis offered a number of options. He suggested a full point if a teacher pays, no point if the District pays or give people choices, such as a half point or a choice of a stipend.

Don Johnson is worried there isn't as much relevant internal professional development for some staff, such as student services, physical education and art, etc. He suggested staff who develop in-district course proposals and professional development, which could help them get their points, and the costs could be paid for by the District.

JoEllen Pauls said the original goal was to provide as many options as possible for teachers to get their points and move up the new salary schedule. She believes staff have choices and suggested not making it any more complicated than necessary. She also thought adding more options makes it seem like we don't value internal professional development as much.

Tabatha Gundrum thinks staff is still nervous about how many points they will accumulate and believes once they see how many points they have lots of the anxiety will disappear.

The committee supported one hour equals one point whether it is paid by the District or not.

Personal leave limits at the end of the school year

Tabatha Gundrum led a discussion about concerns related to how many staff are out of the buildings on Fridays and some Mondays late in the school year, along with adjacent to holidays.

She went through a comparison of 2014-15 and 2015-16 from September to end of January for reimbursable time, unpaid absences and total absences and how many slots weren't filled. She also went through how many personal days were used at each building.

The current language allows up to 10 percent of teachers to use reimbursable leave before a request could be denied. She believes if there was ever had a day where each building had 10 percent out the District would not be able to fill all of them.

She noted the District has 350 substitute teachers on its list, but on a recent Friday still have 17 unfilled slots, including 11 in special education. She believes demand has increased among all the area districts using Teachers on Call. She said some ways the District is helping substitutes is providing training so they are more comfortable with special education students and with technology.

As unemployment goes down, the ability to find qualified substitutes has become tougher, she said.

Don Johnson noted there have been 74 more sub requests on Fridays than Thursdays for reimbursable leave and said “there clearly is a tendency for people to take Friday off.” He said if other districts are facing similar increases on Fridays that explains why subs aren't available on that day.

The District hired three permanent substitute teachers last year and one has been used to fill roles in the classroom all but two days this school year and both of those were in the first week. George Mavroulis suggested if we pay subs extra on Friday why couldn't the District pay staff members extra if they take on additional coverage. Gundrum said the \$33 an hour the District pays for additional coverage to staff is significantly higher than any other district in the area. Brenda Weiss suggested for most staff it isn't how much money they get but rather not having enough time to help out a colleague.

Other items

Due to time constraints, the following items were only briefly touched upon at the end of the 7-hour meeting. They will be part of the agenda for the next meeting on Feb. 25.

- Building advisory teams aren't elected by MEA members. The MEA asked if their members could be a part of those teams.
- Glacier Creek and Kromrey were used to just one meeting a month. The teachers are proposing one monthly meeting for 60 minutes rather than two for up to 45 minutes each. It was noted elementary schools are meeting twice a month for 45 minutes apiece.
- The teachers asked if there was a way to adjust parent-teacher conferences so a full conference doesn't have to follow a full day of teaching.
- Tabatha Gundrum covered the implications of unpaid leave for Affordable Care Act and benefits deductions. She noted part-time staff who take unpaid leave could fall below the 30-hour average, which has ACA implications. She also noted some staff members have to pay pro-rated insurance costs while others who go on five-day anniversary vacation, for example, don't. That doesn't apply to personal leave but it does to unpaid leave.
- Gundrum said mileage language is in support staff handbook but not in teacher handbook so she wants to add it. The District will pay at the IRS rate.
- The make-up of the handbook committee will be reviewed to make sure all levels and curriculum areas, along with different levels of years of service, are represented.