

Cabot School Sustainability Committee

Approved Minutes of October 9, 2024 Meeting

Cabot School Library

In attendance: Jennifer Blake, Steff Burtt, Theresa Lay-Sleeper, Rebecca Nally, Eric Nelis, Melissa Pratt, Amy Richardson, Joanna Thibault and Chris Tormey

Meeting began at 5:05 PM

1. **Draft minutes** of the committee's August 20th meeting were reviewed and approved.
2. **Tonight's meeting agenda** was reviewed. Ellen suggested that an item about finding new committee members be added to the Discussion section tonight. Agenda with Ellen's suggested addition was unanimously approved.
3. **Discussion:**
 - a. **Review of September 13 "Welcome Back/Open House" event:**
 - Very good turnout (150-200 based on 25 pizzas consumed?)
 - Jennifer: Several home- or other-school families attended
 - Good mix of families catching up and visiting classrooms and talking with teachers
 - Appreciation for staff/community volunteers and for contributions of food (Pizza fixings from the Cabot School kitchen, fresh corn from Steff Burtt) that allowed it all to come together
 - b. **Review of September 17th PBL Forum event:**
 - Appreciation for presentations by Cabot School staff on how PBL works at different grade levels:
 - Grades 3 and 4: Rebecca Nally and Allison Morrow
 - Middle School: Jonny Flood
 - High School: Thomas Dunbar
 - Valuable takeaways: How development of essential literacy skills are built into the projects, strong participation by all students, and regular assessment of skills/progress throughout a given project.

- Discussion of how best to get info on PBL out to a larger audience: holding another forum identical to the first later this year, combining a “PBL 101” presentation with a (student-prepared) meal and PBL Exhibition(s) of Learning later in the year?

- Committee settled on these efforts to get info on PBL out:

1. Jennifer will develop and share newsletter in near future devoted to PBL
2. Amy will work with several of her Art students to develop pamphlet
3. Ideally, a video to present Cabot’s approach to PBL should be made:

How? -Ellen and Theresa will investigate asking college students to develop a video on Cabot PBL as part of their required “real-world experience”

- Jennifer will check in with Jonny Flood to see if he has the bandwidth to develop a video on PBL at some point this school year

c. Discuss focus/goals of next community forum:

Chris reviewed conversation at the School Board’s August meeting about holding a community forum this fall about increasing opportunities for students, including the discussion of collaborating and potentially merging with the other high schools in the SU. The article by Ellen in the October Cabot Chronicle about beginning the discussion about merging Cabot with one or both neighboring high schools grew out of that August School Board discussion. Ellen explained that her interest in beginning these conversations grew from her commitment to many community members last winter to “explore all options” that might improve sustainability and reduce cost, as well as from her fear that voters would not support next year’s budget. She wanted to be intentional this year and not reactive, and suggested that forming a 706B study committee with Twinfield to study a potential HS merger would be like a “first date” rather than a marriage.

General discussion followed about the challenges/downsides of holding a community forum this fall about a potential merger with Twinfield. Reservations from committee members included:

-In March the community voted by a wide margin to pass the school budget and to keep the high school as part of our school: Starting discussions about changing that structure just 7 months later seems counterproductive.

- It does not make sense to hold a forum until we have a good deal more information to share with the community (how many schools might be involved, what cost savings/increased opportunities would result?)

- A regional HS may not save money
- More research needed about the impact of merger on communities that have done so: impact on elementary grades?
- The atmosphere at school and among school families is so much improved this year over last- we should give this new school administration at least a year to continue improving things before suggesting a change
- Last year the threat of closing the high school was stressful/demoralizing for both students and staff- let's avoid the same this year if possible
- A merger discussion is a long process (up to 2 years in cases)- we will not have answers to essential questions before this budget season
- A HS merger will not have enough benefit unless all three high schools in the SU are involved

Committee members agreed to be proactive in improving the sustainability of the school in its present form at this point rather than starting merger discussions. Jennifer noted that there are 12 new students at school this year; discussion turned to ways that the committee could help get the word out on Cabot's programs to neighboring schools this fall that could result in students from "choice towns" choosing to come to Cabot for high school. Amy recalled the "High school fair" held at Walden several years ago when Cabot's presentation excited her son to come to Cabot for 9th grade; Jennifer emailed principals of the choice schools in our SU to find out when similar "High School fairs are scheduled for this year.

Committee agreed to the following efforts during the next month:

1. Develop ways to communicate essentials of Cabot PBL to a wider audience (see above: Amy, Jennifer, Ellen and Theresa)
2. Assist school staff with development of school outreach efforts to neighboring schools (continue discussion at November meeting)
3. Begin list of questions for SU office to research to communicate to community (Chris will start this list and circulate for additions).

4. **Committee agreed on Wednesday, November 6 at 4:30 PM for our next meeting**

5. Meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Minutes by Chris Tormey