

School Governance Council  
Meeting Minutes  
December 7, 2015

**In attendance:**

- Faculty Members: Camille Figluizzi, Richard Ceroni, Maria DeAngelis, Mark Magisani
- Parents Members: Sue Boria; Jenny Fuchs, David Greenberg, Richard Nohe, Rick Smeriglio, Patty Denham Travaglino, Alyssa Wallen
- New members / Community representatives: Jennifer DiGiacomo, Sandy Menendez-Aponte
- Guest attendees: Freshman administrator and LandCrew advisor Chase Dunlap; LandCrew members Sam Greenberg, Nicole Somerstein, Samantha Weinrib and Samuel Joseph

The Westhill School Governance Council meeting began with the group reviewing minutes from the prior session.

**Prior business: Attracting more parents to PowerSchool**

- A parent or teacher from Cloonan contacted Alyssa Wallen: the school sent out a flyer with the first quarter report card promoting PowerSchool. The message was along the lines of “Surprised by your student’s performance? If you were on PowerSchool you wouldn’t be!” Alyssa will forward to us.
- Westhill could do something similar, adding a mock-up of what parents would see if they were to log in.
- Guidance counselors can facilitate signing up in the absence of the PowerSchool system admin over the next few weeks.

**New business: LandCrew**

LandCrew (Leading and Developing Crew) attended at the invitation of the SGC, following the discussion at the last meeting.

- As the faculty advisor, Chase Dunlap indicated he was thrilled to be here.
- LandCrew offers a two pronged approach, benefitting freshmen through student mentorship while also developing leadership skills in the juniors and seniors participating as mentors.
- Established when freshmen went to teaming, pairing 2 guidance counselors with the teams, providing teachers with opportunity to meet.
- Came out of the high school action committee
- With great gains, still not hitting all students – use shining stars who are juniors and seniors to carry the messages that may not be as well received coming from an adult
- The student mentors are taking an active role in suggesting passion projects for LandCrew to work on, helping with social media, etc
- To attract student participation in LandCrew: there was recruitment, and an application process, looking to pull from the diverse student body: athletes, AP students, actors, etc.

Student Nicole Somerstein presented to the group on Leading and Developing Crew

- Peer mentoring organization
- Meet with freshmen every G+ or C+ day depending on availability
- 100 student mentors
- Students with academic or personal issue will seek advice from a peer mentor before going to school administration
- Mentoring benefits the academic and social performance of both students and mentors – proven
- Students volunteered, identified what they thought they could offer as a mentor
- LanD Crew mentors were required to participate in 18 hours of training (3 days) prior to school: ropes class at Scalzi (trust and relationship building), classroom instruction – identifying how to help freshmen both in and out of school
- LandCrew mentors were assigned to specific homerooms on freshman orientation day to answer questions, debunk rumors, provide a tour of the school
- Prior to meeting with freshmen on G+ day, mentors pick up written activities from the office including study habits and goals for the year, and games to get them to open up
- On specific days, LandCrew mentors meet privately with administrators and peers during lunch to discuss options and bring in ideas for working with freshmen (best time because they are all so busy with studies and activities)
- Example: Cram and Coco (peer tutoring and study sessions before and during midterm week), movie night prior to winter break
- Feedback: parents and students share feedback, freshmen are more comfortable in Westhill

Discussion following Nicole's presentation:

- Chase: we are building the plane as we fly it. Some things will work while others won't; encouraging the students to make suggestions
- @landcrewwhs on twitter, facebook and instagram presence are both new
- Resources – can the SGC help? Provide us with a wish list; consider SCG gateway to the parents of the student body.
- Chase: what the LandCrew needs from SGC.
  - The adults on the Council represent leaders in the community the LandCrew hopes to become. Who are the leaders in the community we can bring in to speak to the LandCrew as a development opportunity for these leaders? Examples: People like UConn basketball coaches. Dudley Williams at GE, for example. "This was my path and here's a path that could be yours." Would be interested in Anyone who has worked overseas, who is in a profession that's interesting... etc.
  - Suggestion to assess LandCrew members' interests and grab speakers who match up to those interests (
  - Grant writing – expertise (Patty and Sandy to take action)
  - Volunteer, provide opportunity for community service

- Promote LandCrew through word of mouth so it's a familiar concept to the parents and community
- Suggestion to identify leadership themes for LandCrew – 2 or 3 per year
- Participation: 15 students executive board, 80 participants. 3:15 ratio in mentors to students.
- Question for the LandCrew attendees: would you like to have someone talk about leadership?
  - Sam Joseph: yes. Someone inspirational, importance of school
  - Samantha Weinrib: Yes, preparing for college, emphasizing “you’re not alone” in the process (half the group are juniors)
  - Nicole: would be great to have a college admissions pro talk to the freshman
- David: If a child approaches LandCrew member, how does that come to the attention of the guidance counselors? Brought in Judy Klym during training to give them help with mentorship. No formal process in place.
- Questions posted to LandCrew by freshmen seems to be mostly about academics.
- Chase is combing through freshmen with multiple fails in first marking period – pairing them directly with a LandCrew member for 1:1 mentorship. Will not formalize how they meet; let the pair work it out organically.
- May see more questions in the spring after more interactions have taken place.
- Movie night: the film will be Big Hero Six because it's about mentorship and emotional support
- Seeing improvements in year over year freshman failure rates – in core subjects in first marking period. May change as students relax into quarter 2.
- Added a literacy lab in addition to math lab this year.
- Second year of teaming: the model has become stronger. Meetings are more productive, more intervention focused. Scheduling meetings with parents and guidance as necessary.
- Any thoughts on having the LandCrew help mentees past freshman year? The focus has been on the specific two groups (developing mentors as leaders; leading the freshmen by example) to date – not a lot of opportunities to think beyond that yet.
- Freshmen in honors classes: even our most academically capable students admit to struggling and having a lot of stress as freshmen. Doing a better job with the freshmen; there is a gap with sophomores and they are struggling.
- Nicole: the transition from eighth to ninth grade is far more dramatic than from ninth to tenth grade.
- Will the mentor-mentee relationship continue informally past freshman year? Hard to say. It would be an organic process not a formal one.
- Assigning mentors was based more on personality (assigning the mentors into triads) rather than junior vs. senior.

Further discussion by the group:

- How to tie LandCrew in with the concept of parent mentoring? It will take time to see the benefits of LandCrew based on seeds sowing now. How can we tie in with parent mentoring?
- Would the call to the parents of incoming freshmen be better coming from a parent rather than a student?
- Start smaller: new parents to Westhill rather than the entire student body
- Freshman parent orientation is typically in February – perhaps we can ask then if anyone wants a call from an experienced Westhill parent.
- Even open it up to parents who are struggling – just to contact another parent who can say “You’re doing a good job”
- Casual night a week or two before school opens – stop by if you’d like to talk to an experienced parent
- Parent university – attracted parents who were already in the know; had hoped to attract more parents who needed help (Sandy thought the program was very successful as an attendee)
- Could do a Westhill YouTube channel directed at parents

#### Action items

- Patty and Sandy will contact Karen Cammorata re: grant writing
- Brainstorming about people to bring in to talk to LandCrew
- Group to compile list of parents for the incoming freshman parents to call if they would like access to “voice of experience” (Alyssa will also bring that forward to the PTO tomorrow)
- Alyssa will forward the flyer from Cloonan to Camille
- Group: consider connections to speakers who may be interesting and inspiring to the LandCrew
- Chase: poll the LandCrew students to find out what topics and speakers would be interesting and useful

#### Next meeting

Monday, January 25 at 6:15 pm in the Westhill media center

All welcome to attend