

Citizens Advisory Committee Meeting – Sept. 27, 2022

CAC Members: Nancy Boyle, Benaifer Dastoor, Sundeep Jain, Wes Morse, Yanping Zhao, Ganesh Balgi, David Heinke, Daniel McCune, Cathy Gomez, Melinda Hamilton, Shirely Frantz, Carol Gao, Lori Cunningham, Andrew LaManque, Zongbo Chen, Kevin Du, Mori Mandis, C.S. Prakash, David Fung, Gouquing Li, Sam Vicchrilli, Jingna Zhang, Seema Sharma

FEA Representatives: Jason Heskett, Bonnie Belshe

Students: Kumar Chandra, Henry Widjaja, Saisuijan Kotakonda, Vikram Thirumaran

FUHSD Administrators: Superintendent Graham Clark, Assistant Superintendent Trudy Gross, Assistant Superintendent Tom Avvakumovits, Coordinator of Data and Assessment Denae Nurnberg, Lynbrook High School Principal Maria Jackson, Monta Vista High School Principal Ben Clausnitzer, Homestead High School Principal Greg Giglio, Cupertino High School Kami Tomberlain, Fremont High School Principal Bryan Emmert, Director of Administrator Services Jason Crutchfield, Coordinator of Communications Rachel Zlotziver, Lynbrook Assistant Principal David Erwin

Facilitator: Minh Le

Facilitator Minh Le opened the meeting at 6:01 p.m. and welcomed new member Sundeep Jain from Cupertino High School, who is taking the place of a Cupertino High School representative who could no longer continue on the committee.

Welcome and Review of CAC Purpose

Minh clarified that two different, but parallel conversations are currently taking place within the district – the conversation with the CAC around balancing enrollment and a separate and significant conversation that many CAC members have questions about. Minh stated that the questions of the committee members on other related topics are good and legitimate, but many of them are touching on issues that are contractual and thus are part of a conversation that is taking place between the various bargaining units and the district administration. Both conversations are taking place, but they are on different timetables and involve different groups. The conversation that is occurring between unions and administration is more nuanced and complicated and involves issues that will take longer than a few months to resolve. Part of this very careful balancing work is making sure that the district is taking care of the adults who are taking care of our students. In terms of setting expectations, it is important to recognize that this is a separate conversation on a different timetable than that of the CAC.

Superintendent Clark thanked the committee for their participation and their engagement in the last meeting. He reiterated that the district's short-term goal is to

do something for next year, meaning that a recommendation would need to go to the Board of Trustees by early December at the latest. The role of the group is also to make some longer-term recommendations. Superintendent Clark echoed Minh's comments about the broader questions the CAC may have. One example is a question that we have heard often from the community about whether the district could open a school in North Sunnyvale or reopen Sunnyvale High School. He shared that that is not something that could happen in the course of just a few months, but rather something that would be a long-term discussion. The district has also had questions about whether we could have a fleet of buses. These are all long-term discussions. Staff can be prepared to talk about these issues, but these are not things that could be done in the span of a few months. The specific role of this committee is to look at reallocating students between schools. Superintendent Clark shared that the focus of the evening's meeting would be on what makes a good comprehensive high school. Next week we will be sharing information on district finances.

- *Student CAC member: I have been talking to some staff and wondering why we can't just lower the student-teacher ratio, to avoid the stress of laying off teachers.*

Course Scheduling Process and Complexities with Declining Enrollment

Denae Nurnberg, Coordinator of Data and Assessment, introduced herself and her background and experience in the district. She shared that a list was created from the questions and comments that committee members shared at the end of the last CAC meeting. Some of the items included are large and complex issues that we may not be able to delve into this semester, as Superintendent Clark mentioned in his opening comments. The highlighted topics on *Slide 5* will be covered this evening.

Dr. Nurnberg covered the course scheduling process, including information on the course scheduling annual timeline, how the district builds the student schedule, the basic section allocation formula, a six-year historical view of the district's section allocation, and enrollment and section data (*Slides 7 through 14*).

- *CAC member: Why don't you publish the schedule in the Spring if the Course Schedule has been finalized in May?*
 - *Staff: all kinds of things change between May and August, including an increase or decrease in student enrollment*
- *CAC member: Do we have any open enrollment between schools?*
 - *Staff: No, we do not.*
- *A CAC member and student CAC member shared their own course selection experiences.*
- *CAC member: What is the optimal range for the number of students you would want to be in to have classes that are the right size (not too big or too small)?*
 - *Staff: Section allocation is based on total student enrollment, so there isn't an optimal number, it adjusts based on the growth or decline in enrollment.*

- *CAC student member: Why are some of the class size ratios smaller than the standard ratio?*
 - *Staff: We lower our ratios for certain classes where more foundational work is occurring, particularly in some of our ninth-grade courses and some intervention courses.*
- *CAC member: What was section allocation like 15 to 20 years ago when enrollment numbers were similarly low?*
 - *Staff: Section allocation originally grew out of a financially challenging time, which forced us to be responsible financially, i.e. to not spend what we did not have. The vast majority of the section allocation process has remained the same over the last decade or more.*
- *CAC member: I don't understand the section allocation formula.*
 - *Staff: The formula includes a variety of variables in the formula, shown several slides prior (Slide 10). We will provide additional background on this a bit later.*
- *CAC member: Homestead seems to be consistently 25% higher than Lynbrook in terms of sections. Are the same number of course offerings available?*
 - *Staff: There are some differences in what is offered, not based on student enrollment, but rather based on a number of different factors not driven by student enrollment. We can get more into that on a later date.*
 - *Staff: It is safe to say though that we have very similar course offerings at each of our school sites.*
- *CAC member: Do you have a slide on the other things that make up a comprehensive high school (i.e. number of guidance counselors, etc.)?*
 - *Staff: We aren't covering that tonight, but we have between 4 and 5 counselors at each site, and fairly consistent office and support staff.*
- *CAC student member: Do we have any safety net for world language classes?*
 - *Staff: We buffer against this by thinking deeply about our course offerings. We have 20 offerings in our World Language department, and when you pull from the same group of students it makes it more challenging. We will be discussing this in our longer-term conversation. Tough decisions will have to be made in the next several years. We may have to think about collapsing two course levels together or what sites we offer certain languages at. We are going to be taking a deep dive with our teachers and administration to navigate these complex decisions.*
- *CAC member: How much flexibility do you have in student-teacher ratio. If the ratio is 20-1, what do you do if you have 19 students?*
 - *Staff: We work alongside our teachers' union to think about what is best for students to make each scenario work. We have specific language in our bargaining agreements to deal with these various situations. It is not a strict ratio for every single class section, there is some buffer on each side.*
- *CAC member: If the numbers now are similar to what they were in the early 2000s, would the number of sections be about the same?*

- o *Staff: The section allocation formula hasn't changed in 20 years. So yes, it would.*
- *CAC member: How is the student-teacher ratio decided? Can that be changed?*
 - o *Staff: It is part of our collective bargaining agreement with our teachers' union. It is an ongoing conversation with our teacher's union and in constant thought process. There have been slight changes over the years. We continue to have that conversation and engage in dialogue with our teachers.*
- *CAC member: This year there are 96 fewer sections across the district. How did you deal with it?*
 - o *Staff: The vast majority of the loss was absorbed by attrition – meaning teacher retirements, resignations or moves. Some temporary roles for teachers and release periods also factor into this.*
 - o *CAC member: But does that mean that our students are not getting classes? Not meeting their graduation requirements?*
 - *Staff: No, our students are getting the classes they need. Meeting graduation requirements is not a problem.*
- *CAC student member: Are there some courses where there is a level one and a level two that could combine?*
 - o *Staff: Yes, that does happen across some of our elective courses.*
- *CAC member: You mentioned that there could be 19 students instead of 20 for an algebra class. How low can it go?*
 - o *Staff: Our ratios are by department, and it is an average of the sections, so that the average comes out to the ratio for the whole department.*
 - o *Staff: This is a conversation with the teachers' union, not one we will have here in the CAC.*
- *CAC member: Did we see a difference between the projected and actual enrollment over the last five years?*
 - o *Staff: We were pretty accurate, but there were slight differences. We do a new projection every year.*
- *CAC member: How is it decided what courses are offered?*
 - o *Staff: Courses are based on graduation requirements, A-G requirements, AP course offerings and interest from our student community. We also make sure there is a three-year pathway for those students that are not interested in the AP/Honors track. And some is of course tied to what the standard curriculum is by discipline. We want our students to experience a broad range of courses in different areas. CTE pathways are another factor. We try to prioritize student choice, as we really value that in our district.*
- *CAC student member: Is there a plan to stay with this bell schedule for the next 10 years or a longer period of time?*
 - o *Staff: The changes that took place over the last few years had to do with COVID-19 and remote learning and a state law that required high schools to begin school no earlier than 8:30 a.m., so we did have to adjust the bell schedule again to meet those criteria.*

- *CAC member: Could you compare the mechanism we are using to what the other districts are doing in the area? Is there an opportunity to find things that other smaller districts are doing well?*
 - *Staff: The way our district is run both financially and operationally and the practices that we put in place 20 years ago have stood the test of time for a reason. We do have a couple of unique practices that are different from other school districts, and we will go over them with you. There is always opportunity to learn from our neighbors, but our practices really do buffer against declines and growth in enrollment.*
- *CAC member: It's a very natural impulse to look at the student-teacher ratio and ask if we can change that, and as nothing we do is free, that will have a financial impact on the resources we have available to spend on attracting and retaining good teachers. Getting great teachers for this district is tough even though they want to work here. We have worked really hard on getting people to stay in this area with the high costs of living, which are going even higher. I worry that this could have the consequence of causing more quality teachers to leave.*
- *CAC member: Is there any case where a student isn't getting a core course that they selected?*
 - *Staff: It can happen because of scheduling complexities. A student will not miss out on getting one of their core academic courses, but it just might not be the one that they listed as their first priority. But even that is rare.*

Dr. Nurnberg shared information regarding whether we can continue to run comprehensive high schools in the face of declining enrollment (*Slide 15*). She shared that while we will need creative solutions as we get smaller, we have still been able to add a few new course offerings during the decline.

- *CAC member: When you have an ebb and flow of enrollment from situations like the pandemic, will the district be able to ride it out?*
 - *Staff: Certain courses might just not be offered one year, but they wouldn't necessarily be removed from the catalog. Offerings can ebb and flow over the course of the years.*

Assistant Principal Dave Erwin, who builds the master schedule for Lynbrook High School, shared information about student scheduling conflicts and considerations for course placement during course scheduling (*Slides 16 through 20*). He shared that declining enrollment would result in more singletons and doubletons in the schedules. Staff do their best to reduce the number of conflicts in order to maximize student choice, but there are times when unavoidable conflicts occur.

- *Student CAC member comment: Many of my friends are choosing not to take a 7th period because of how late school starts and ends now, and the conflicts it has with athletics.*
- *Staff: Room usage can also limit the scheduling options you have.*

Dr. Nurnberg covered the effects of declining enrollment on scheduling, sharing an example of its effects on one of our World Language departments (*Slide 21*).

Jason Heskett, teacher, FEA president and CAC member, shared one of the negative effects of declining enrollment on teachers as they may have three to five different preps (*Slide 22*). Each additional prep that a teacher has is more work on top of everything else a teacher does. We are also a district built on collaboration, but if a teacher has five different preps, they have to choose which two classes they collaborate on across the district and they lose out on that collaboration with colleagues, which includes a focus on cycles of inquiry, interventions, checking for understanding and more. Students also lose out on some of the access they have to their teachers when they have more preps, or split assignments, and also have less focused tutorial time. It is typically ideal for teachers to have two preps.

Dr. Nurnberg covered some of the projected decline in sections over the next three years at Monta Vista High School (*Slides 23 through 26*). She shared that larger departments could buffer more against the decline, while there would be more effects on smaller departments (typically electives).

Dr. Nurnberg shared the timeline and next steps for the short-term proposal (*Slide 27*).

Additional Questions and Comments from the Committee

- CAC student member: If the ratio for Algebra is different from other math courses, how is that average calculated?
 - Staff: Algebra 1 is reviewed separately from the rest of the math department courses since it has a different ratio.
- CAC member: You have done a good job with managing the decline, but you are not sharing the pain points.
 - Staff: At Lynbrook, we've been living this experiment the last few years. We are thankful for the LSSAP, but to your point, there are courses we don't offer compared to other schools. We don't offer both AP Physics courses, we don't offer AP Environmental Science. We have only so many teachers and we can't have them all teaching four and five different preps. If we add classes, it can take a toll on our teachers, and it then lowers the enrollment in some of the classes we already have. This is a decision we have to make as a school community. Our students are getting a great education, they aren't hurting, they are getting into great colleges, but they do have less choice in some areas.
- CAC member: If we keep the number of teachers the same for the 2025-2026 school year, looking at the drama department example, would that cause problems?

- o Staff: Yes, that would be a problem. We cannot run a theater program with so few students.
 - o Student CAC member: Moving class size ratios down one or two kids is not going to significantly improve the student experience.
- CAC member: Is there a point where you decide that you can't sacrifice a program?
- Student CAC member: Is this where we start to see split assignments for teachers (drama department example)?
 - o Staff: It depends. Some teachers can pick up other classes (i.e. drama teachers that also teach English)
- CAC member: I can't fully understand the problem from the formulas. What program would be hit the hardest?
 - o Staff: We don't have a projection in that way, as you said it is complex and the mitigating solutions are equally complex.
- CAC member: What exactly are the problems? Are we going to lose classes? Are we going to lose teachers? Will the number of sections of each class be reduced?
 - o Staff: Yes to all three.
 - o CAC member: And this is all because of the teacher contract?
 - Staff: No. We don't have unlimited funding. Our expenses go up about 4% a year, so we need revenue to go up just to keep pace with our expenses. We need to stay competitive with other districts and pay our teachers and staff a living wage. We can't give raises to stay competitive and keep our staffing level the same as enrollment goes down.
 - Staff: We are trying to share a lot of complex information and teach you a lot of different things about our district in a short amount of time. Please do know we are going to circle back to what you are talking about in our next meeting. We will have our Business Department colleagues here in our next meeting. This needs a deeper dive, and we will marry these issues together in our next session.
 - CAC member: But then we only have one more session to come up with recommendations.
 - o Staff: Yes, but remember we are looking at both short term and long-term timelines.
- Student CAC member: At what point do we reevaluate what we offer as a school? When do we reevaluate what languages we offer? We have a large Indian population but don't offer Hindi or another dialect.
 - o Staff: Right now, the College Board doesn't offer an AP test for Hindi unfortunately as it does for our other language pathways. However, we are always evaluating our course offerings.
- Student CAC member: I do understand that the counselors and scheduling staff make a valiant effort, but I want to share my own experience. I want to make sure we factor in the effort students put into choosing their courses. I

- wasn't able to get one of the electives I wanted and was at risk of only having five courses
- o Staff: Like you said, we try to do our best, but it is not a perfect science.
 - CAC member: I think finance is a huge topic. There are different levels of knowledge in the room. Is there some sort of parking lot or process for submitting questions ahead of time to help build the content for the next meeting?
 - o Minh: I'll set up a Google Document for that purpose, and invite CAC members to submit questions and ideas in advance of our next meeting
 - CAC member: I listened really carefully, but I still have the same question about what the problems are. I probably don't have to understand all the details, and I still try to understand the big picture.
 - Facilitator: We will bring the entire picture together at our next meeting. Thanks for being engaged with that question.

Closing

The meeting was extended by popular consent at 8:00 pm to allow more discussion. Minh closed the meeting at 8:20 p.m.