ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF DAC MEETING
September 23, 201

Attending: Margaret Bierman, Chair
Mitzi Leaver, Secretary and HS parent representative
Steve Steadman, LS parent representative
Keri Melmed, MS parent representative
Natalie Walker, LS staff representative
John Stene, MS staff representative
Marci Elder, RMSEL Director of Curriculum and Instruction
Julie Stelzer, RMSEL Finance Director
Kelsey Haddock, RMSEL Dean of Students
Susan Peters, alumni parent

Absent: Chad Burns, RMSEL Executive Director
Wendy Chadwick, HS staff representative

1. Margaret Bierman called the meeting to order at 7:04 a.m. There were no community members in attendance, and no open forum items for discussion.

2. Marci Elder provided the executive director’s report in Chad’s absence. Topics included:
   a. Steps taken by staff to prepare for the new school year, with a special thank you to the office and administrative staff.
   b. An overview of the HS, MS, and LS crew trips taken to date, noting that K/1 and 4/5 trips are scheduled. Adventure staff was highlighted and thanked.
   c. Review of the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) conference attended by Chad. As a result of this conference, Chad is working on separating RMSEL policies into two categories (adventure and student) to help minimize risks to participants and to bring RMSEL policies more in line with NOLS and High Mountain Institute (HMI) policies.
   d. Review of the calendar shift for professional development on Wednesday mornings and the positive feedback from staff.
   e. A quick overview of the staff’s ground school, held at Staunton State Park near Conifer, as well as a workshop study conducted on the 16th Street Mall in central Denver. The Mall will be a part of this year’s 4/5 expedition.
   f. Explanation that the goal of professional development is to ensure all students reach stated targets as a result of highly and clearly defined goals.
   g. Mention of Jen Wood as the person overseeing PD and her helpfulness to the team.
   h. Reminder that the BOCES meeting is at 7AM on 27 September, 2016.

3. Marci updated DAC on curriculum and instruction.
   a. PARCC data for SY2015-2016 was released and summary data is available online. In summary, RMSEL’s EAL results were as expected. Math results were lower than expected. Growth data needs to be analyzed to determine why RMSEL’s math scores declined.
b. Passage panel reading days for SY2016-2017 are May 12th (seniors) and May 20th (3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades). Passage presentation days are May 19th (seniors), May 30th (3rd and 5th grades), and May 31st (8th and 10th grades).

4. Finance Director’s report: Julie is preparing for the September BOCES meeting and the annual audit, which will start on 10 October, 2016.

5. Teacher updates:
   a. Lower school: Natalie reported that we have three new crew leaders in LS: David (2/3), Lisa (2/3), and Leah (4/5). The kindergarten crew will travel to Camp Shady Brook in Colorado Springs for their crew trip. This is a new location that she is eager to try. Kindergarten is starting a new expedition focused on the people and places of RMSEL, and expanding the idea of community from RMSEL to the greater world. First grade crews are learning about water and the states of matter. The 2/3 expeditions this year are geology, maps, and Native Americans. The 4/5 expeditions are ecosystems of the plains and the American Revolution.

   b. Middle school: John reported that all MS crews went to Sanborn Western Camps and did backpacking trips, emphasizing the adventure and Outward Bound basics of the school. He noted the return to combined 7/8 crews, and that has been a good change.

   Academic notes:
   i. 7th graders are buddied with 8th graders, allowing them to see the 8th grade portfolio process. John feels this will help the 7th graders next year with their portfolios. The 8th graders are taking their portfolios very seriously and are already working hard on them.
   ii. The humanities expeditions for this year are ancient civilizations and mythology (7th grade) and history from the American Revolution through the Reconstruction of the South, then leading into the Civil Rights movement, culminating in a trip to Birmingham for the capstone trip (8th grade).
   iii. In science, 7th and 8th grade students are studying the Colorado River.
   iv. Middle school athletics is doing well; 42 percent of MS students (63 students out of 150) are participating in athletics.

   c. High school: In Wendy’s absence, Kelsey reported some of her observations about high school. RMSEL hired two new crew leaders in HS: Maggie (science) and Ian (9th and 11th grade humanities). Based on the times that Kelsey stopped by, classes are going well. She visited 10th grade humanities, 9th grade science, and 12th grade math. Chad is the staff member in charge of the senior-level passage and SLE, and the seniors have a healthy respect for his leadership. All other grade-level passages seem to be going well.

   HS crew trips included two backpacking trips, one rock climbing trip, and one canoeing trip. The backpacking and rock climbing trips were to Sanborn Western Camps, while the canoeing trip was on the North Platte River in Wyoming. In addition, seniors are leading the fitness pods and are holding their peers accountable for participation and attendance.
d. Specialists:

i. Natalie reported that Dana, the K-3 literacy interventionist, works Mondays and Tuesdays and is in the classrooms during literacy a lot more, which is helpful and having a positive effect. Mary, the math interventionist, works four days per week, allowing her to be in the classrooms a lot more during math.

ii. Kelsey reported that Lyndsey is doing a Movement class with the LS crews and is teaching them the rules of playground games and how to do conflict resolution. This is having a very positive effect on playground time for the lower school.

iii. Margaret indicated that parents are asking about the difference between the new movement class and the existing fitness class. Kelsey noted that the distinction is still being defined, but Colin focuses on the five principles of fitness and the body’s reactions to stress and exercise, while Lindsey is more focused on conflict resolution. However, most kids think they have two fitness classes and isn’t that awesome? Movement class will also move to doing yoga, learning to center oneself while in conflict, and communication with peers.

iv. Kelsey explained the new AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) class. This preparation class is designed to help students learn teamwork, organization skills, and critical thinking, and to expand their writing and reading skills. Kelsey noted that AVID is a MS requirement and is an elective in HS.

v. As a wrap-up, Kelsey touched on other specialist areas. Michelle (art) is working on 2D columns with MS students, using shading and perspective. HS is exploring fiber arts. Kelsey (music) is working on the blues café for MS and 2/3 is learning recorders. Erin (Spanish) is working with kindergarten, 1st, and 6th graders this trimester, and Eli is working with 4/5 on technology integration. Of note: 4/5 crews are learning how to interview people using technology.

6. Margaret opened discussion about DAC beginning its work to become part of the long-range planning committee for RMSEL. She noted that agenda items 7, 8, and 9 (vision and plan, grant research, and community surveys) are intertwined and that all facets need to be considered.

a. Questions to open the discussion:

i. What should RMSEL look like in five years?

ii. How do we deal with decreased funding?

iii. Should we add more students at the LS and HS levels to match the size of MS? This would provide more funding without significant increases to overhead.

iv. Should RMSEL remain at this location, and if so, should RMSEL attempt to purchase the property? It was noted that the school’s lease runs through 2022, and that improvements to the existing property become de-facto property of DPS and should be undertaken when necessary and with caution.

v. What steps are needed to identify the vision and create a plan to reach it?

b. Experts:

i. Steve knows a woman in Boston that works for EL corporate and is a Denver native. He is willing to cultivate that relationship and look for guidance from her on how we can achieve our goals.

ii. Steve suggested hiring a facilitator to help guide DAC through this process. A facilitator has skills that can help keep a group on task and focused. Facilitators
can also help structure surveys so that questions are pertinent and not leading to preconceived outcomes.

iii. Susan suggested a half-day or full-day retreat with a facilitator to fully explore areas for discussion.

c. Process:

i. After much discussion, the group determined the first step is to identify what makes RMSEL unique and which characteristics need to be preserved, such as EL, adventure, community, and approach to academics. These grounding principles should be used to form the foundation for the long-range vision.

ii. The next step is to develop a plan to execute the vision.

iii. The last step is to engage experts (finance, real estate, etc.) who can help us execute the plan.

d. Education: Discussion raised concerns about parents needing additional information so that high-quality survey input can be received. A suggestion was made for DAC to author several whitepapers to help answer questions our community has about various practices at RMSEL. These white papers would be informational (fact-based) and cover a wider range of topics and present more in-depth information than existing FAQs.

Suggested topics include:

i. Where do your fieldwork fees go? This whitepaper would explain what is and is not covered by fieldwork fees.

ii. How does RMSEL pay for transportation? This whitepaper would explain what IGA monies fund, how much money from fieldwork fees is set aside for bus maintenance and insurance, and expose the gap related to bus acquisition.

iii. What’s the difference between expeditionary learning and adventure? This whitepaper would explain that crew trips are not necessarily about expeditions, but they are always about stretching students and crew building.

iv. What is service-led leadership? This whitepaper would explain the concept and identify ways that parents can volunteer to support students and the school.

e. Alumni and parent database: It was suggested that RMSEL create a database of where alumni and parents attended college. This information could help HS students connect with experts in their chosen fields and connect them with people who can write letters of recommendation, etc. Parents could also be tapped to mentor students.

f. Susan made a motion that DAC meet monthly due to the large tasks it faces this year. Mitzi seconded the motion and a voice vote was unanimous.

7. Surveys: DAC will create a survey each trimester, each focused on different topics. The first-trimester survey will likely focus on experiences with Google Classroom, Wednesday late start impressions, and (potentially) fieldwork fees. Additional survey topics for the school year include long-range vision and plan related questions, math, and fundraising and fieldwork fees.

8. Grants: Grant writing needs to become a focus at RMSEL. RMSEL is a unique school with an innovative approach that should appeal to many foundations.
9. Next steps: Margaret will meet with administration to determine the feasibility of a facilitator and additional scheduling of DAC meetings. The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, 31 October 2016 at 7:00 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:35 a.m.