Parent Community Link
March 11, 2015
8-9:30am

Attendees: Mo Copeland, Chris Schuck, Jordan Elliott, Scott Hardister, David Lowell, Suzie Gundle, Liz MacDonell; Phillip Craig; Alicia Morissette, Kristin Bradley, Clare Rathbone, Ruchi Prakash, Soolyn Chang, Lisa Kellogg, Michelle Fitzhenry, Jana Reddoch; Michelle Ackerman; Courtney Fitzloff, Jodi Wilkins, Mari Schwalbach, Ann Perry, Amy Lindholm; Brandi Ettinger, Kristina Davis, Kristin Barnett, Sandy Patrick, Margueritte Kim, Stephanie Knight, Dennis Sullivan, Kay Pinkava, Julie Kuni, Elaine Elliott, Mike Gwaltney, Libby Berridge.

Opening Blessing -- Phillip Craig
The 7th/8th grade recently went to see the movie “Selma” which features the song “Glory”. Phillip read various definitions of the word “glory” and reflected that the purpose of inquiry-based learning is to help children find beauty in world.

Government, Politics and Citizenship
Mike Gwaltney, Upper School History teacher, and Upper School students Elizabeth Keeney, Maddie Mosscrop, Rowan Berridge, Ted Morissette, Zach Solomon, Peter Graham, Meredith Loy and Chelsea Choi presented on the “Government, Politics and Citizenship” class. This was the first time that this class has been offered at OES. The course was backward-designed – the curriculum developed around meaningful questions.

The class was entirely project-based, there were no tests or quizzes. All skills were learned and developed within the scope of projects.

Rowan Berridge explained that the class began by asking the question “How do we come up with the best form of government?” The class researched governments around the world. The class was then presented with a community, “Xlandia” that had just come out of a dictatorship and asked to devise the best form of government for that community. This exercise enabled the class to begin learning vocabulary around government.

Elizabeth Keeney explained that the class then presented their ideas on the form of government to the “citizens” of Xlandia (eg. Various adults in the community).

Maddie Mosscrop was dreading the “budget” project, because she did not understand economics. The class learned the relevant terms and then engaged in a breakdown of the US budget. The class was asked to cut $50 million from budget. This was really hard because everything seemed necessary and important. The exercise was very interesting because it was so different from other classes. The class considered party differences and had to tailor cuts to a particular district so they worked within the constraints of a specific
fact scenario. There were personal differences and the class had to take into account the needs of the demographics.

Zach Solomon described how the class then formed a lobbying group called the Organized Students of America. The group had to research and advocate for 3 issues: selective service; juvenile death penalty; and gun control. This was challenging because there were real facts surrounding these issues from past campaigns, research, etc.. The class looked at how the law actually changed; in groups, the class came up with positions on issues and presented the issues to a panel. These presentations morphed into the citizenship project when the class presented to the City Council on gun control.

Rowan Berridge commented that one of tools that was available to the class to use was the “Executive Order” and Obama has just issued such an order so it was interesting to see the real life relevance of an issue that the class was considering.

Peter Graham described how every Friday the class focused on politics. A news story was posted and the class discussed 2 or 3 of the issues arising from that topic. The class talked about: ballot measures, GMOs, legalization of marijuana; ISIS; Russia and the Crimea. The class was able to talk and discuss some controversial issues without getting too heated. In fact, one of the most fun and informative parts of class was talking about tough topics.

Mike Gwaltney commented that the class participated in discussions both in class and on-line, reflecting the “I Connect” strand of the Essential Competencies. This blended learning style allowed students to talk and participate at their own time and pace (online space allows a student to learn at his or own pace).

Meredith Loy and Chelsea Choi described how every couple of weeks the class would write a blog that was posted on the class blogsite. The blogs covered topics such as racism, feminism, etc. This was a great opportunity because the blog allowed the students to think and express what they were learning in class and reflect on how their opinions were changing. For Chelsea, this was particularly meaningful because she was from South Korea and was able to blog thoughts and comments about her own country.

Mike Gwaltney commented that the blog began in 2008 when he taught at another school. The blog received a lot of visitors because it was so long-running. The idea behind participating in the blog was to expand the forum of discussion and allow the students to have conversations with people from around world. A reflective cycle was established – the student would reflect on what they had learned, post a blog, people from around the world would comment, the student would then reflect on that comment, etc.

Ted Morissette described how the last month of the class was devoted to citizenship, particularly asking “What is a citizen?” The class was asked to present to the Lower School and Middle School on the topic and so decided to make a video. The class came up with its own answer and then interviewed faculty and students to ask their answer to that question. For Lower School, the class created skits; for Middle School, the class put
together a series of photographs; and for the Upper School, the class put together polls and statistics. The class asked the same core questions to each grade and age. They saw an interesting transformation and progression of ideas through the stages of the OES community.

The class allowed students to incorporate and use their passions (for example, Ted Morissette and film-making.)

Students learn more by teaching others than by being taught. The course ended 2 months ago but the class has spent a lot of time teaching others since then.

Elizabeth Keeney described how Mike Gwaltney approached the class about presenting a proposal to the Portland City Council. The idea that was the most appropriate was gun control, which is a big issue in Portland and to the City Council (one of the high school students shot at Rosemary Anderson High School in December was an intern at the City Council.) The class put together the presentation using statistics and personal opinions.

Zach Solomon described how the class went in to the presentation very prepared. It was both terrifying and interesting.

Peter Graham commented that the experience provided an introduction to what real life politics might look like. The blog post had been a safe place to express opinion, but this presentation was more exposed. Some of the comments on the presentation in the Portland Tribune were not positive and so the class learned a little about the real world and that it is important to give opinion even though there might be opposition to those opinions. The presentation was received very well by Mayor Hale and the City Council—he broke the rules and applauded!

Mike Gwaltney explained that the Essential Competencies provided the focus of the class. This is a new course and was adopted in the faculty curriculum design review.

Phillip Craig asked the students how the class has influenced their views on, or insights into, student government. Rowan Berridge is on Student Council and said he learned the frustrations of how government can work slowly; but also to look for an end goal.

Kristin Barnett asked how the class learned to work together when discussing heated topics? Peter Graham explained that the class set ground rules with the understanding that they all want to be respectful to one another and to be informed. Each student was to speak from his or her own perspective and not overrule others. The class raised hands and took turns. This helped to ensure that all had a chance to speak and that many differing opinions were heard. Zach Solomon added that the goal of discussions was not
to convince others as to what point of view was right but rather to explore the issue at hand.

Alicia Morissette thanked the students for their presentation.

**PCL Chair Announcement – Alicia Morissette**
Alicia Morissette announced that Courtney Fitzloff will be the next PCL chair. She will be fabulous to work with. She has risen as a leader in the PAL community, has two children and has been here for 3 years.

**Head of School Report – Mo Copeland**
The Administration is in the middle of the Strategic Plan process. The Administration is continuing to work with Pat Bassett, the former chair of the National Association of Independent Schools (“NAIS”). He was at OES for two days and presented to the faculty about what is happening in schools around the world. However, the presentation was a little anti-climactic because OES is already doing most of what he talked about. The day after the presentation the news story was presented about Christopher Reekie and his work designing the “magnaglasses” for his grandmother to be able to see.

The Administration has received good feedback about the State of the School presentations. So far, 9 presentations have been given, one to go! The Administration has given a different focus to each presentation depending on the audience and that has worked well. The presentation has been given to 100 parents and 150 employees so well worth the work!

Mo informed the meeting about a calendar issue. A number of years ago, OES made a 5-year calendar. Portland Public Schools puts together a calendar annually and has just made a decision to move the start of school to before Labor Day. OES will retain the pre-arranged dates and start the Wednesday after Labor Day, as usual. This means we will be out of sync with the Portland Public Schools and will graduate later in June.

**Administrative Team Report**

**Assistant Head -- Chris Schuck**
Chris Schuck informed PCL that the previous information presented from the Parent Survey on the library/technical resources was incorrect. Satisfaction with the library is high.

OES is in the middle of faculty hiring season. OES hires faculty well and they don’t leave. In the Faculty Survey, however, we learned that a third of faculty expect to retire in the next 10 year which is about 40 people, approximately 4 per year. Each year there are some professional moves within the Faculty, for example, Dennis Sullivan to Athletic Director and Ann Sulzer to MS Head. These moves create openings. OES tries to accommodate faculty if they want to retire in stages. All faculty searches are led by the respective Division Head and, in the Upper grades, the department chair also plays an important role. By the time OES make the hire, the candidate is well known.
**Upper School -- Jordan Elliott.** The Upper School is about to commence Winterim which is where students experience education outside of the classroom. Examples of this experiential education range from building a house for Habitat for Humanity to a trip to Thailand. But the presentation from the “Government, Politics and Citizenship” class is a reminder that experiential education in the Upper School happens year round.

**Middle School -- Scott Hardister –**
Experiential education plays a big role in Middle School. The 6th grade humanities class visits 5 sacred spaces during the year and has recently visited a synagogue. Similarly, through Service Learning, each grade level has a project that is run through the advisory system. There are also 2 “all-Middle School” service days in which the children choose a service project to engage in for a day.

The Middle School takes advantage of teachable moments. Recently all the 7th/8th graders went to see the film “Selma”. The film fit well with the curriculum -- 7th graders are reading “To Kill a Mocking Bird” and the 8th graders are starting to study the Holocaust. The goal was to make the experience age-appropriate, in light of the wide range of development in the Middle School. The faculty talked about the issue for a long time. The issues raised in the film were very well-framed and tied to intercultural competency. The goal is to get outside of the classroom to learn as often as possible.

**Lower School -- David Lowell –**
There is a recurring theme in Lower School – “I used to think; now I think.” This reflects the evolution of inquiry-based learning. What questions are the children asking? Children connect in new way when they are asked to work as a team. There are times when commitment is the final project, when students own their learning.

**Jordan Elliot** – This week in Student Council there is an election to alter the voting system. This has developed from the question whether the structure of the voting system is impacting who is getting elected.

**Scott Hardister** – As part of a project, 8th graders have to sit with an adult and ask questions, take notes and write the story. In Student-led conferences, the students have to engage in conversation with the most important adults in their lives. These little experiences add up as well as the big trips.

**Admissions Update – Suzie Gundle**
Families were offered enrollment by e-mail last Sunday and some were offered a place on the wait-list. There is always sad news because OES is not able to accept everyone. Families have until March 19th to accept the offer. If a family turns down the offer, then Admissions goes to the wait-list. The wait-list can be in flux until the first day of school.

The structure of the Beginning School is being altered a little due to the building project. There will be 2 pre-k classes next year with a target enrollment of 12 in each class (so the total class will be a little larger). The kindergarten classes will be a little smaller (14 per
class) which means we will bring in more children in 1st Grade to hit the target of 54 in each grade.

Kristin Bradley commented that she has received great compliments on the Admissions Office from many sources.

**Allergy Policy -- Elaine Elliott**

Phillip Craig introduced Elaine Elliott, the School Nurse. Elaine works with the dorms, Lower School, Middle School and Upper School. She works with allergies and concussions; she works with Kelly Cowing; she has an office in the residential dorms; and connects with physicians; she is the point person in community; she may need to drive students to a doctor’s appointment; get prescriptions, etc. Elaine has been the nurse at OES for 15 years.

Elaine explained that OES is rewriting the nut policy. The policy is not changing but we are just clarifying the language. About 12 to 13 years ago there were many students with food issues, especially peanuts, so OES took peanuts out of all menus. The campus then went from peanut-free to nut-free. However, there has been a lot of discussion since then. The campus can never truly be nut-free because it is an open campus. We now describe ourselves as “allergy aware.” This is a more accurate description of what we are doing. The dining hall is still nut-free and all potential allergens are labelled.

There is also a change in how faculty and staff are trained. They used to be trained in a large meeting. Now, faculty and staff are asked to participate in a “safe school” online module and take a CPR class. Faculty going on trips are given special training.

A cumin recall was announced today because of cross contamination. By lunch, OES had confirmation that it does not use the affected vendor. Elaine was grateful to parents for the active response.

Mari Schwalbach asked whether we are still articulating that all food brought to school is nut-free? Elaine responded that the Food Policy states that parents may not bring to school food that has nuts in the ingredients. This will be posted on a link and she will ensure that it goes out in the weekly newsletter.

Lisa Kellogg informed the meeting that Sesame Donuts is nut-free. The meeting agreed that a list of “safe snacks” would be a great resource for parents.

**The OES Auction -- Lisa Kellogg and Michelle Fitzhenry.**

The auction is only a few days away. Everyone should have received a catalog. 382 people are attending and there are only a couple of seats left. If parents need a “ghost bid” they should contact Lisa Kellogg. Anyone can sign up for an easel party through the auction office. Thanks to John Holloran for the “Raise a Paddle” video.

Alicia Morissette closed the meeting at 9:30am.