

## Interview with Martha Guise

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is Martha Guise. The interviewer is Daniel Warren. The interview took place at 3:15 on May 22<sup>nd</sup>.

What is Site Council? And what are some of your responsibilities as being part of Site Council?

Site Council was mandated by State Law as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools act in 1990 when they passed CIM, CAM and PAS so it was the original school reform act and it was later later refined a little in regards to CIM and CAM but the Site Council law has stayed the same and the idea was to great local representation in school decision making particularly in the area of staff development so you have a say, it governs how teachers are trained, what sort of school improvements are happening in the school and so that they can oversee and currently they still have power to oversee grant approval and they also get to look at new curriculum that's being added to the school, so they do have some broad discretionary powers.

Where and when do you meet? And how often?

I'm no longer the chair anymore I was for the first three years We used to meet, well it depended on what we where doing, we met as frequently as once a week during the first and second year. First year primarily we met once a week because of the nature of what we where doing, but we, we have met as infrequently as every third week. Ok, or the third week of every month. Depending on what the Site Council's doing there's a necessity of meeting less frequently or less frequently in the nature of whatever tasks they've undertaken.

What are some of the other administrators involved in Site Council?

Lets see, A Site Council is supposed to have at least one administrative representative, it can be no more than half teachers and no more than half parents or non-teachers, so there are certain restrictions governing it. So that it doesn't have one group representing too many people. Ideally it should have an administrator sitting in it, several teachers, several people who are working in the school but who are not teachers, like secretaries or custodians or the registrar or a councilor or something like that, a couple of parents and a community member. And in the best of situations, in a high school particularly, students. Our High School, our Council had two students on it for the last two years in the which I served, and I think its had two students on it every year except the first year. So that's been pretty nice, and the input has been very valuable.

Could you go over some of the things that Site Council's done in particular?

The block schedule at Century High School was Site Council's baby, ahh, technically a schedule is the authority of the principle to decide, ok, the principal has that discretionary power in the building, and the district can determine the schedule in which people teach which is one of the trimester issues this year, but ummm at Century, a lot of people new they where coming to this building with the goal of school improvement, and one of the ways improvement was looked at, was potentially changing the way people spend their day. Rather than being structured in 8 periods a day with a study hall in things like that in a very traditional school setting. We wanted to experiment with some other things, and we where asked by the staff with a vote of confidence, to start investigating what a block schedule would look like, and so we did alot of research, we did a lot of informing and teaching the staff what we've been discovered, and so once we had started investigating what a block schedule would mean and there where a lot of different kinds to look at, we also got some money from the Scholl District because they where real excited that we where looking at it, to go look at some other schools to, so they paid to release 6 or 7 teachers to go look at schools, we even got an overnight to look at schools at Hood River and Bend, yeah, to see their block schedules which was nice, it was a crazy trip, but it was nice. By the time we got to Bend we where a little zooley, but we uh, we saw a lot, and we knew when we came back a lot of more information, because what

you see on paper is very different than what is actually sometimes happening in a building, so it was kinda cool, and we knew when we came back what we wanted to recommend to people, uhhh, then of course because of the nature of the schedule we were gonna recommend for Century we balanced a lot of needs we were concerned about, we were very concerned if one block, if one form of block schedule is recommended it would hurt one type of curricular area, core curriculum is very concerned, like English social studies, science and ya know...math, are very concerned about making sure that those subjects have enough time to be taught, but if you focus, and they were really interested in perhaps having 4x4 blocks, all 4x4, but elective teachers were very concerned that that might damage elective programs and they were very interested in the AB, the every other day, but core teachers were very concerned about having kids all together, all the time everyday, so there was a real type of tension created by what departments felt was this was more advantageous for us, and so we asked departments to choose, so there was a lot of going back to the staff and getting information about what they wanted and then tallying that and figuring it into our decision making process, once we figured out that what we were gonna recommend was kinda a combination of a AB 4x4 which is what you're used to, that necessitated a real look at collective bargain agreements, because teachers contract currently mandates that teachers will only teach 5 classes a term, or 10 classes in the school year if they're elective teachers, that's not what happens at Century, so we had to go through a whole process of getting a waiver from the union, which is a whole nother set of negotiations, not just with the staff to change the schedule. Then it's with when the staff is interested in doing that then you have to look at what going to protect the rights of all the people in the district, and when you wave contract language like that you're waving the protections of that language, you have to persuade people pretty mightily that the advantages outweigh the drawbacks, and so we did a lot of work at Century and what would happen, what were the trade offs we were gonna make with the district for what that was gonna be, what were the carrots we were gonna get, for taking on another class in the year what was gonna be the benefit for us, for teachers here a 90 minute prep is a pretty big benefit, no other teacher in the district gets 90 minutes everyday to prepare your lessons, grade your papers do the necessary paperwork that goes along with teaching, that's a huge carrot for us, so it had a very beneficial carrot going with it, and the idea that there would still be some protections in place, so we then had to prepare a waiver have the staff vote on the waiver, present to the union, so there were people who were teachers, certified people on staff had to go present to the union about what that would be and there has to be a yearly presentation to the union about this waiver because it's a waiver of contract language and its only good for one year because the staff was very worried about how this, this was experimental, this hadn't been done before, so the staff wanted one year term on the waiver so they could go back if they didn't like it, and so it's a yearly waiver and it has to be renewed every year, that's a very touchy thing you have to be careful about those things, its legal, so you have to be very cautious, so that was another thing we have to do, then in the second year, well there was also staff development that was done around this because once the staff decided and the waiver was passed, then you have to re-align all your lessons because you're ready for an 8 period day of 55minute classes you gotta figure out how your gonna teach the same stuff differently on a 90 minute class, and that changes the way you teach, hopefully. You have to learn how to handle 90 minutes and you have fewer days longer time on the day, its not a matter of folding the same stuff into a different, you have to reconfigure the ways you do things, so teachers did a lot of staff development about teaching and brain research and techniques that work on teaching on longer periods of time and project based learning, so it was a busy, busy 18 months at Century, and then the next year we had to implement it well we did a lot of surveying for staff and students and parents, we survey 2000 students at the end of the year because we wanted to know what everybody thought about how the schedule was going, but those things kept us quite busy. In the third year I was chair it was kinda like well we did all that so fast, what do we do know, and we were sorta trying to figure out Century had opened and there was a lot of rush to get it open and there was a lot of things that were happening and suddenly we were settling in and we had established a culture and kids knew who they were and where they belonged and this was turning into Century High School instead of just oh the building and everybody identified themselves as Century Students, and I think it was sorta a figuring out what the next step should be for the school that the Site Council was really struggling with and trying to figure out, we always have to deal with renewing the waiver, we did another survey of staff students and parents, mostly staff and students, parents aren't really good at returning surveys, god bless em its really hard to remember to do that, its not high on their priority list, but its just really hard to get feedback like that, uhh, we started begging to discuss what our block schedule might mean to credit requirements in the district, and we actually sent a letter to the school district years ago, talking about the possibilities of raising credit requirements because we knew a lot of people would be

taking early release, and we thought that might not be so good for seniors and people who could use a little more vigor in their lives and a little more education rather than just going to work and paying for car insurance, which is what most teachers think you're doing, whether you are or not. So it was sorta finding out what would be next for Century, we got a little money and we wrote a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Grant, so we got a reading grant at the end of that year that paid for a team of staff members to go and take a look at one of the new American High Schools that was implementing some cool stuff with small teams, small schools within schools, and really focused programs for freshman and sophomores and then juniors and seniors, so they really aligned their whole school. We went and looked at Clackamas, was it North Clackamas, school district. We went and did a site visit and I participated in a two day workshop sort of planning about where Century was going and what the next step Century needed to take, and so when I left the Site Council we sorta left them with hope fully, a direction of where they were going next, but it was finding that direction was really hard that third year, and I think its got it but its been kinda a bumpy road getting there, last year was a little hard too. This years been interesting with the trimester whether or not we where gonna go to that, but I think were starting to get that direction down now, that's sorta what we've done, the big tasks. It seems sort of out there and hard to prove but it takes of meeting it takes a lot of negotiating it takes a lot of staff meetings and educating people on what these things mean and the ramifications of them, kind of encouraging people to talk about the pros and cons, then you have to write up what an agreement is and get everybody to say yes and then submit it to everybody for signatures. Now we've got it what do we do with it. It takes the collective efforts of many people and some of the people who made it possible aren't even on Site Council and never where?

What are some of your concerns regarding the trimester?

I'm really spoiled here at Century and I'm also partisan, I'll say that. We worked very hard in this building and on my Site Council, the one I worked with, and I think that if you talk to Miss Young you'll get the same answer from her. We spent a year researching developing and creating a schedule that worked for teachers students other staff members parents administrators, and its worked, People have sweated blood to make this work at Century High School, I'm not sure there is a perfect schedule, but we like what we've got and it's good, and by all the standards the district set forth and rationales for the trimester Century beats every single one of them, we offer more credit opportunities than trimester does, we allow for more teaming, kids already can leave early or get here late in order to go and do internships or practicum's or things like that, or travel to another school, I think those are really important reasons for schools to look at different schedules. I think that asking Century to switch to Trimesters is a little bit like asking us to scrap what already works in order to be like everybody else, and I'm not sure that every School should have to be like the same ones, I think you can offer the same opportunities to kids in very different ways at different schools, as long as a 70 minute kid at Hill High can get here to take a 90 minute class there's no way there not gonna miss two classes traveling between the schools anyway if where all on 70 minute schedule, we can make this work. That's not gonna be a hardship, what gonna be a hardship is asking a staff that's poured heart and soul into making this work to change again, that's a real teacher burnout issue in a year where there's a lot of stuff going on that's gonna burn out teachers, who are really committed to making kids their first priority. That's part of my bias. We've done this and we've done it well and it sorta negates everything that's been done and was praised and encouraged. Another thing is I'm not sure Trimester is better for kids. You guys have 4 classes a day at Century and can take them on two different formats and on a trimester you might have 5 classes a day. Well, that's more work, that's more teachers you have to contact that's a little bit of a more frenetic schedule for you guys. We went to this schedule to slow down, calm down a kids day. There's a body of research that shows that kids with ADHD and attention problems and behavior maybe don't do as well on 90-minute periods. I'd like to see what happens at the other two schools to see if that's true. I'd like to see if the grades change or the dropout rate changes at the other two schools, but in that case I don't think we should have to go to it until they prove that that's the case. Lets let a year go by, or two, because the first year is really rough, its change. Nothing is really a good baseline in the first year. We want that original year where there was a regular schedule, then the first year, then the second year is when you get a real good measurement of what you've got started. To look at grades and state testing scores and attendance rates and dropout rates at all those schools. So lets look at real data and compare and contrast and then make some decisions, but that's gonna be two years from now not next year. That's part of my problem, I don't think that there's any data to say that one is better than the other and we should allow some differences until we know. Another thing is Century has a real nice schedule for a

teacher. You teach 3 classes a day you have a 90-minute prep. That's pretty good, that's 3 changes a day instead of 4 and on a trimester a teacher would lose 20 minutes a day from Century's schedule in terms of time to prepare, time to work on student issues time to take care of all the things that a teacher takes care of during that prep and that involves grading papers, creating lessons, working with teammates for freshman teams or sophomore teams. You're gonna cut 20 minutes outta that every day. So it's a loss from us, and I think it's a loss for Century kids, but that's a personal opinion based on a real love and a lot of effort that went into this, and I know that, part of me is biased. The other part of me says let's be rational, let's see what happens at the other schools, but I'd like us to be able to wait a couple years to do that, and I hope that the school board would see that as something that's a reasonable request, and far more rational than just going there because that's what everybody else is doing. I think that if we could look at scores and data that would be really effective school change. I keep my fingers crossed and hope, I don't know if it's gonna happen, but that's what I'd like to see happen. I'd like to see us do it in a way that allows us to bargain contracts that aren't contentious because I think it's become a big issue with the teacher's union this year cause the other two schools are not real happy about just going to trimester. We have a waver at Century because we really work with the teachers on that, and people are really willing to do that because there's trust. And I'm not sure where that is now. Once trust is questioned it's real hard to get back, so and in a bad economy which is where we are now that adds a whole nother layer onto it. When you change people's workload and you have a bad economy and you have issues of mistrust, that becomes a tough issue. All of that gets lumped up with trimesters. I like what we have here and I'd like to watch what the schools do, and hope for the best for them because I don't think an 8 period day is the best thing at all. After every school we went to of all the six originally they didn't like their block schedules and they had very different combinations at all of them, but every single one of them said they would never go back to an 8 period day, even the people who hated the schedules they were on, teachers and administrators who didn't like it said they would never go back to an 8 period day, ever. I thought that was interesting, and know having done that for four years I say exactly the same thing. I would never go back to an 8 period day, never ever ever ever. It's not good for kids, it's not good for teachers and the bigger the school gets and the more crowded the harder it is on the kids I think, and the harder it is on the whole school climate. It's just more pressure, it's chopped up, it's very fast, pressure pressure pressure pressure. You know that's just not good. I like the flexibility of kids in this, it may not seem flexible to you guys but it's a whole lot more flexible than it could be. There ya go.

What kind of things do you get out of doing your job personally?

Well, it's never about financial gain, like financial coordinators are, there's a statement for that and I think they do it because they really believe that what they do has a positive effect on the school and they're making changes that can be good for kids. Site Councils are really easy to get people to come join up for when it looks like they're doing good things, they have real purposes, they have real effective tasks to complete. Site Councils which aren't given authority, which does happen in some buildings are really hard to get people to go out for because they see themselves as just a rubber stamp group, you know where just meeting to meet because we have to meet because this has to exist by law and all we do is say oh yeah and somebody presents to us and they expect us to say yes and if we say no we get in trouble so all were supposed to do is rubber stamp it and that's it. People don't want to be a part of that, and then they feel like they're not making change, they're not doing something good, nobody does anything for free unless it feeds them unless it feeds them and makes them feel good about what they do and what they are. The best Site Councils do that, they make ya feel like your brain and your effort and your energy is going for something good, and it's not always fun. Sometime you stand in front of 50 people and they hate you, but you think you're doing it for the greater good. You think you're doing it to make the system work better. That's pretty heady stuff when you can make a change and see it happen and see people benefit from it. You never go back after that, you never go back and the chair's job is so big, that to do it for free is an exercise in insanity, really. It's a hard job to do for free, actually I should kick myself a few times for giving up that many hours of my life, but it was cool stuff, and I learned a lot. You really do learn a lot about yourself, and about yourself and about people and about helping change happen as a process and about how people respond to change, which is interesting, and just about how the system works, which I didn't know before. It really did change me.