

**PTO Council Meeting
March 3rd, 2015
100 Walnut Street
MEETING MINUTES**

Attendees:

Dr. David Fleishman, Superintendent

Executive Board

Jennifer Abbott, Co-president

Karen Manning, Co-president

Kim Thurmond Treasurer

Christina Hardway Secretary elect

Andrea Steenstrup, Equity Representative

Theresa Fitzpatrick, Elementary Rep

Caroline Wilson, Website Manager

Jo-Louise Allen, Newton PAC Liason

Frieda Dweck, Ex-Officio

Jess Black, Peirce

Carolyn Judge, Bigelow

Sally Brickell, NNHS

Sarah Housman, Mason-Rice

Meredith Andrews, Underwood

Teri Ginsburg, Countryside

Autumn Sarzana, Underwood

Natalie Atri, Angier

Michelle Wettaofar, Angier

Megan Flynn, Ward

Theresa Fitzpatrick, Brown

Other Attendees

Cove Davis, Memorial Spaulding

Stacey Moriarty

PTO Presidents by School

Betsey Blagdon, NSHS

Emily Prenner, NSHS

Lisa Hansen, Williams

Next Meeting Dates

Tuesday April 7, 2015

Tuesday May 12, 2015

Superintendent's Update

Snow Update: Generally, the snow removal team needs an hour for every inch to prep schools (after it stops).

Q: What about Days of Schools? Have we decided about how to handle that?

A: We've had 6 snow days in the recent past. We are likely to have a lot of close calls in March. We are trying to keep open, and we might have some 2 hour delays in March, though these are not a perfect solution. We are likely to have just an extra day at the end of the school to address the snow days. The state is adamant about the 180 days; they are not flexible. Right now: we are hoping for no more snow days. We will add in more days at the end, and that will probably be a Wednesday. Eighth grade graduation may not even be the last day of school, but decisions will have to be made about 8th grade graduation. High School graduations are very difficult to change. These will be kept the same no matter what the snow days turn out to be.

Standardized Testing Update: The Superintendent has been attending many school meetings and questions about PARCC have arisen. PARCC represents a change from MCAS including a change to the use of

technology of for the purposes of standardized testing. This is a pilot year for this testing, but it is something that is linked to funding. In fact, Congress is reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Act; and the testing is linked to federal funding, so standardized testing is likely here to stay. An advantage to the PARCC is that the results will come in earlier than they did for MCAS.

Q: There is a MCAS and PARCC test for 5th graders. There is an increase in the number of testing days—now it is 10 days for fifth grade.

A: In MCAS, testing days would be very long. Now the TIME is not that different but the NUMBER OF DAYS is longer, and there can still be instruction on testing days with the PARCC. The overall time is about the same.

Q: For children's with anxiety that is really a lost day.

A: Yes, that is a concern and there is anxiety for both the children and the adults. Regardless of what we say, testing does create anxiety.

Q: There is some opting out in New Jersey and has that come up here?

A: There USED to be a lot of opting out, but we haven't seen as much of that now.

Q: There is a concern about using it for teacher evaluation.

A: The amount of testing evaluation that gets linked to overall teacher evaluation is a concern for adults too and creates anxiety

Q: My children took the technology pilot last year, and there were problems. What happens when there are problems with the technology?

A: We had a dry run in Countryside with the entire tech team on hand. There were a few problems, but it went relatively well. In Newton, we have had a big shift in technology and we are ahead of many of our peer districts. The concern may be that they are doing it in 11 schools, and many districts don't have that many schools. We are also ahead of peer districts in class size. They aren't going to do it all the same day, and there will be resources. We are also held harmless this year (because of the way that we have implemented this as a pilot year).

Student assignment group: There will be a public meeting on March 26th about student assignment plan. There is a problem with a space distribution, and the result would be new schools with no kids. We absolutely need a new school assignment plan because there would be some schools with empty classrooms and some schools that will have too many kids for the available space. They have made a commitment to not develop any more modulars.

Q: Carr & Zervas: how will the move happen? Would kids move in the middle of next year? Zervas will be moving in the middle of the year?

A: People might get redistricted to Zervas, and the first year (Kindergarten) at Zervas would actually be at Carr because of the moves for schools.

Comment: The School Committee discussed the criteria for districting at the last meeting. The criteria are being discussed and prioritized. Jen Abbot will try to get the discussion of that criterion to the PTO members.

Superintendent response: The High Schools need to be even, and so that will be a priority.

Comment: March 13th will be when the budget will be presented at the School Committee Meeting.

CASC Fundraiser—April 10, 2015

- Stacey Moriarty has put together a fundraiser to help raise awareness and funding for the Creative Arts and Sciences program. Some schools have more support than others, and by having a citywide event, it might help everyone.

- They had a successful concert series this year. A jazz singer brought “Journey to Jazz” into the schools. She is coming back to finish a tour in April. She is a teacher in Illinois, and she can come back at that time to finish the tour. There is an available Friday night on April 10th, and there will be a cocktail reception before the concert. Tickets are \$35 dollars and that includes the concert with a 6 person musicians back-up band and the cocktail reception. Thanks to Theresa Fitzpatrick for coordinating the details of the event. Vino Divino is helping to support the event, and a portion of the orders parents put in will go to the Creative Arts and Sciences program.
- There is variability in funding and general support across schools and this fundraiser is may help address that. Funds raised from this event will be distributed evenly among middle school and elementary school PTO's to help offset costs of next year's concert series.

Q: [Re: Vino Divino] Do you need to say that you want to have a portion go to the Creative Arts and Sciences program?

A: Yes, there will be a time period and you should tell them that you want to support it through the purchase.

Q: How do you purchase tickets?

A: Go to the Creative Arts and Sciences Newton program on the NPS website when you are publicizing the event. And there is a link on the PTO Council website.

Newton Schools Foundation

Marcia Tabenkan and Andrea Steenstrup

- Marcia a co-president of Newton Schools Foundation, which is a private non-profit organization (like the PTOs). The mission is to create support for public support of schools and also funding for schools. The Newton Schools Foundation provides funds that are less restrictive. These funds can be used to support teachers, professional development, and materials. The NSF gives money to Dr. Fleishman, and this money can be used across schools and grades. Dr. Fleishman has a team of faculty and staff and they have identified programs that support the goals of the school. They are new pilots or they are creative initiatives that faculty have spearheaded and determined to be useful. They have also been “Investing in Innovation,” and are working to fund programs that enhance innovation and keep Newton Public Schools ahead of the curve. Essentially, this program is a celebration of education.
- They are in their 18th years of the Honor Thy Teacher program. The NFS is hoping to raise \$50,000, and this is a good way to help parents who want to recognize the teachers while still complying with the Newton Gift Policy. Last year, they had 30% of teachers recognized. This ranged across the schools from single digits in one school up to 2/3rds of teachers in another school. Marcia is asking the PTO Presidents to help support this initiative.
- They are also always interested in having people volunteer. Maybe if your kids are going from elementary to middle school, it would be a good time to begin volunteering for the Newton Schools Foundation

Q: Does this come back to teacher-related initiatives?

A: They give a chunk of money to Dr. Fleishman and then it gets distributed. It covers a range of funding. It's unrestricted funds so it isn't devoted completely to teacher development.

Comment: Boston Globe is promoting a program that gives all subscribers a silver envelope. Inside there is a voucher for advertising for nonprofit. It's a quick and easy way to get free advertising from the Globe. People could designate the Newton Schools Foundation.

Q: Do you give examples of how the money is used?

A: We don't because we've tried to focus on the teacher more than the funds. BUT—they might change and include more examples of what the money goes to support.

Comment: Many of the ideas come from the teachers and this might be good to highlight. For example, The Green Trail and Newton South and these were faculty-driven initiatives. The Middle School Wind Turbine project is similarly faculty-driven. There are programs at every level and they are programs that benefit people across the district.

Comment: This is also a year-long program but the big push is in May.

Comment: Can we have the old numbers in percentage support to help increase participation?

Comment: There is also a benefit that the Principals gets a note that recognizes the teacher and this is a more identifiable aspect of teacher recognition.

Comment: Individual schools may differ in the way that they help support this process.

Comment: This process can also recognize other staff members in the school

Budget/Financial Update

Kim Thurmond, PTOC Treasurer

- Kim Thurmond discussed the financials as they stand now: Everyone has been really responsive, and they have been able to collect dues from this last year. There have been some stop-checks fees and other related situations, and there are some outstanding bills that are being resolved.
- *Changes in PTO Council processes:*
 - Changes: There are checks and balances added into the system, and there will be a more formalized process of check-writing system. Also, the official address will be the Education Department and this will be a change.
 - This should also be a discussion between PTO Presidents and Treasurers to have discussion about Best Practices. The PTO Treasurers meeting was canceled due to the snow. The meeting will be made up on April 7th, during the second part of an extended PTOC meeting.

PTO Communications

- Recently, one of the co-presidents initiated an e-mail discussion about “MySchoolAnywhere,” and it was difficult to flesh that out over e-mail. This seemed by a good time to discuss MySchoolAnywhere.
- The question is who is using it and with what success? The gist of the question is that this is database, and the question is: does anyone use this capability to use this as a communication tool? Some schools use it in tandem with MailChimp. Basically—what is the most effective way for PTOs to reach their parents? Some of the systems are redundant, and is there a way to streamline it?
- What works? Bigelow used MySchoolAnywhere and it works well as a directory program. They still are collecting e-mails for MailChimp, however. They have not leveraged it, in part, because they don't have the resources to migrate the system over. For the foreseeable future, there will be redundancies across the systems both within the PTO and across the schools. Michelle Wetlaufer discussed the advantages of MailChimp in terms of sending information to parents and tracking parent activity.
- Theresa Fitzpatrick discussed the benefits of the MySchoolAnywhere in terms of the directory.

Q: Can the two systems talk to each other?

A: There is a system whereby you can download pretty easily into excel and then upload into the other program the appropriate system. Michelle Wetfauder (from Angier) said she could be a resource for other people who might be struggling with this process. She can be a resource for import/export issues for the two systems (MailChimp and MySchoolAnywhere). She could also send a list of Fifth Graders to, say, a Middle School and then the system can be streamlined. The parents could then respond to a confirmation e-mail saying they agreed to be in the new directory.

Q: Could anyone be a resource for describing how you could send the information summarized and sent out automatically (RSS Feed).

A: Answer from Newton South: Yes, Then MailChimp can be used to send this out automatically. There also capabilities to determine which groups should be receiving this specifically (i.e. Seniors, Athletics, etc.). MailChimp can get then allow for specific subscriptions for specific kinds of updates. These can also be scheduled for once a day and once a week.

Q: Did this eliminate the need for a newsletter?

A: No. It just is now both on the website and on through the feed in the e-mail. It's great because the Sunday night community notes goes out with the announcements already prepped. The PTO notes are still compiled, and this cuts it down.

Q: Does RSS feed have relevance for Elementary Schools?

A: People responded that it does help. It makes separating out the Community Notes from the School Announcements easier and this has benefits in making the process more streamlined.

Comment: The PTO Council is still making decisions about what is important and sending out the appropriate messages. The best umbrella to get word out is through newsletters@newtonptocouncil.org because it reaches the widest array of interested parties.

Q: What is happening with the conversion of the Newton Public Schools Website? At the Newton School Committee meeting, they said it was complete.

A: People should contact Megan. People can link the school's calendar directly on their phone, and this might have to be redone after the conversion.

Comment: People should also talk to the Tech person at their own school.

Comment: People expressed concerns that the information seems less complete than it once was. There was also concern that there wasn't as much communication about the new places for content and the process. There also is a lack of tutorials, etc. If there are specific things that you are looking for and can't find, then you should let the PTO Council know.

Comment: People should also check to see if there is a link to your PTO.

Equity update:

Andrea Steenstrup, Equity Representative

- Thanks to everyone for getting their equity report into the committee, and it seems that the equity report was successful. It appears that limiting what can be spent on technology has allowed money to be spent on other important items.
- 3 schools are still not at Tech Standard. Leo presented this to the School Committee, and it is public knowledge at this point.

- Q: Have elementary schools received the necessary information? The PTO president discussed that their school says that the PTO should be buying technology because one of the 3rd grade classrooms is not up-to-standard.
- A: If a school is not at-standard, the PTO is ALLOWED to buy the new computer cart, but they are not obligated to do so. The School Department is working to get everyone up to the standard. If you, as a PTO, would like to meet these technology standards more quickly than the School Department can provide funds, you are ALLOWED to spend PTO money to help your school to meet the standard.

Comment: Leo also shared information re: the amount of money to replenish and refurbish, and refurbishing has allowed schools to get to standard more quickly. The replacement costs may be too much for many schools to keep up with.

Comment: The PTOs should be working with their IT specialists and if that doesn't work, then they could go to the Principal. Leo is providing every school with an inventory.

Q: The timing is really the issue. When would they be getting the funding? They are trying to plan accordingly.

A: It can be variable, and there isn't a defined schedule, and this creates anxiety. Try to get as many answers from Leo as possible. Funding availability can generally be an issue.

Q: Chrome-books are locked out for PARCC? Can they be opened up?

A: This should be dealt with by the Principal and the NPS staff.

Comment: This might be addressed through funding available at the end of the year. The NPS should be getting to the point where they can articulate this effectively.

Playground update

- They are working together with the 5 schools that are trying to raise money for playgrounds. There has been some progress in that area and the city is contemplating money in the budget for playgrounds.
- That process has stalled a bit, and they are waiting to hear the details about how that might unfold. The schools that are working to build playgrounds and are a bit frustrated by the lack of information
- The PTO Council will keep everyone updated. They believe that the schools will get the \$75,000 for funding for playgrounds, but there hasn't been much more information despite repeated attempts to get more information. People should probably contact School Committee members and Aldermen for more information.

Administrative Items

Vote on Christina Hardway as PTO Council Secretary

- Motion to elect by Theresa Fitzpatrick
- Voted in as Secretary

Vote to approve minutes from Dec. 2nd Meeting

- Motion to approve
- Voted to approve

Possible future meeting topics

- ELL Support. This is a growing and important portion of our community and someone may come in to discuss these supports

- Whitsons: There may be someone available to come in and discuss this as well.
- PTOC dues/budgets: We may discuss the budget and dues.

Other Announcements:

- April 7th may be a forum for Late School times on Newton South
- District-Wide discussion of Carol Dweck's book "Mindset" to be held at NNHS on 3/24.