

**PTO Council Meeting  
April 7, 2015**

**7:30pm - regular meeting  
8:15pm - joint meeting with PTO Treasurers**

**Education Center, Room 210**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Superintendent's Update**

*Student Assignment Update: The Working Group is working hard on options, and if you go to the website (<http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/2315>) you will see the options. There are some schools that have too many students and some have too few student (and this may even be true at the Secondary School. There will be a meeting coming up soon about this). On April 28<sup>th</sup>, there will be another presentation on the scenarios. As this progresses, the community will become more engaged. The working group hopes to finish by the end of June, but this will continue over time as they move forward. There are more modular classrooms than two or three elementary schools. They are working to get rid of the modulars and build bigger spaces.*

Q: Is April 28<sup>th</sup> a public meeting

A: There will be presentations on different scenarios. They are working to designing ways to work through the options. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, there will be another meeting.

Q: Do you vote on it?

A: The Student Assignment working group consists of members of the administration, a principal, the long range planner, and members of the school committee. Ultimately, this is a School Committee decision.

Q: Will Buffer Zones always exist?

A: The benefit of buffer zones can be that they can deal with situations in which classrooms that are wildly imbalanced. Some schools have no extra space, and that could leave some schools with class sizes of 25 or 26. The downside of buffer zones is that it leaves some unpredictability for children attending school. BUT—this really deals with a problem that existed a long time ago in which there were very large class sizes in some schools.

Q: Will they change which secondary school an entire school will go to?

A: That isn't happening at the moment. We even have to be mindful of this in middle schools. Down the road, it may have to be looked at.

Q/Comment: There are tools that they show in the meeting to help make these plans. And this tool shows what happens if they change the lines in a certain geographic region, and how this alteration changes the numbers. People may want to attend these meetings because it is difficult to replicate on the website. They are trying to balance the issues of affecting the fewest people while solving the largest problems.

A: Doing nothing is not an option because some students will be out on the street.

Comment: We can help get information out and will discuss it later.

***Start Time for High School: The research shows that adolescents don't go to sleep until later and they have a cycle that is shifted later. BUT, if this were easy—all schools would have done it. It is a complex issue, especially with bus traffic. They have a team looking at different options for addressing these issues. Sports, jobs, etc. are a problem. The elementary school parents have had a problem with it in other districts. The research is overwhelming.***

Q: Research IS overwhelming

A: There is a report in May that addresses some of these issues

Q: Who is proposing this?

A: The school Committee is considering it. Need to identify the obstacles and the hurdles and figure out how to address them before pushing forward a plan.

Q: Newton South school council seems to be proposing some of this.

A: Yes, that's true.

Q: Has this ever been considered?

A: Yes, but not for some time.

***Social and Emotional Development:*** May 11<sup>th</sup> School Committee meeting will address this. There has been work at the High Schools and some grades at middle schools about signs of suicide. They have also been addressing some Brain Growth in the schools. They have gotten a grant on Social and Emotional development. Amy is workshop leader about social and emotional development and has done an amazing job. We can't do this alone, and Amy will help lead this.

### ***General Questions:***

Q: Newton North Principal Issues

A: He never settles and they will have a good pool next year. And there wasn't a perfect match for the position.

Q: Teacher Contracts?

A: Public negotiations in papers are not good. He's not that involved with the negotiations. It's a difficult time, and parents want their teachers to be happy. This is a challenging and they want to get it done as soon as possible. Both sides want to get this done. They hopefully will.

Comment: If someone wants to engage, then they should contact their School Committee Members.

## **Social & Emotional Learning - Amy Kelly**

As David mentioned, they were awarded a large school climate transformation grant. This is a Safe School Culture grant, and they now have Social and Emotional learning in class. She is working with a colleague with Mental Health and Higher Ed experience and work in Brandeis. What this grant allows them to do is to continue to set social and emotional learning in Newton and build on excellence and provide consistency across the schools. At the end of 5 years, they want a framework for what kids

receive at the elementary, middle and high school levels. Some students need a little more and some need a lot more, and the framework will articulate those standards. They are also working to build teams. The four goals are to strengthen supports for student through the framework, to implement consistent and fair discipline practices, to build on peoples strengths, and to strengthen meaningful partnerships with parents and community health and state and regional health partners. They plan to train all elementary educators in the responsive classroom approach. Everyone in the schools at the elementary levels will be trained in this practice. They will also be offering the responsive home workshops to mirror the practices in the classroom. There is also a self awareness, a social awareness, relationship skills, and self management part of the process. The brain growth falls into the self management arena. What does it look like? The first phase of the grant is about collecting information and finding pockets of excellence and identifying best practices and figuring out what works best in Newton. They have done 21 site visits and they are continuing that work. They are beginning to look at the data and identify trends across the districts. They will soon be reaching out to families and get family's perspectives on the schools.

Q: When will consistency plans be made for Middle school and High Schools?

A: They want to have the same approach across all levels. What does this responsive classroom process at the Middle school level involve, so that there is consistency across the grades? It doesn't have to be called the same thing, but it needs to have some identifiable similar elements. She will keep it moving. They have 4 and a half years left. One of the things that she has learned is that there are really wonderful things happening in the schools. She is working on having grade levels share those best practices.

A: (from Superintendent). They are working on the Brain Growth mindset across all the middle schools and providing consistency to try to get all the middle schools to be offering the same growth-mindset oriented activities. The High Schools are also working on how they think about getting feedback to promote a Growth Mindset.

Q: Are you going to look at homework and stress levels?

A: We are having conversations about all these issues right now.

A: (from Superintendent): They surveyed about homework, and they are working on it.

Response from parent—BUT, it hasn't changed their policies, and students are very stressed.

Q: Is there hope that homework will be lessened anytime soon?

A: Homework is a factor but stress arises from a lot of areas. Homework is not a simple issue. He asks students for their schedules, and there are students who take AP classes with a lot of homework. Kids take too many AP classes, against their advice. Everybody should read Frank Bruni's new books on CEOs and he identified a variety of colleges that they attended. There are ramifications for limiting the number of classes because other districts don't do this.

Q: Is there research on how much homework there is?

A: What's really changed is that kids are taking more AP classes than they used to. There is, in some ways, more competition for college placements.

Q: Research on AP courses and getting into college?

A: Kids are well-prepared for college, but this is a national issue.

Superintendent Comment: Mental Health is a big issue and important.

## NPS/PTO Communications - Caroline Wilson

On the school committee's website on the [March 13th meeting](#), there is a copy of the Communications Strategy Sub-Committee Presentation. One of the goals of the school committee for this session was to work in collaboration with the NPS to enhance communications with the key stakeholders. Everybody who lives in the city is a stakeholder. The school committee developed a subcommittee to work on developing communication strategies that will, ideally, improve on what was the status quo. There is a working group to address communication and Caroline is the rep to this group. They are working on figuring out how to reach people. The test case is the student assignment process. She thought that she might discuss how the student assignment process is addressing these communication strategies. The committee has been cognizant of the fact that the superintendent has been sending out info, and a website page has been set up specifically for dispersing the presentations that have been put together for these processes. The Communication Strategies Working Group is developing a framework for communicating things like the social emotional learning areas, the student assignment, and the building projects. As communications are done, the Communications Strategies Working Group is interested in hearing feedback from people both who have sent info and received info. They want feedback specifically on the feedback process (rather than the contents of the initiatives). She is going to put together more info and send it out.

Comment: There is going to be a lot of important information coming up from the School Committee, and people should look for this communication and discuss the communication process. Basically, is the process of communication working? Are having dedicated websites useful? Please communicate and offer feedback on the communication. The Working Group is really going to appreciate hearing from you about what aspects of the communication are working or not working. The website for the student assignment is <http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/2315>. As things get fleshed out, there are going to be more people invested in the process.

Q: Are they listening?

A: The model is raise awareness and then see what happens as a result.

Q: Could there be a shared calendar for activities across all schools? Could there be a master calendar?

A: They brought this up a couple of years ago, but then that communications director left. There is a coordinated calendar on the NPS website, but not all events get fed into this calendar.

Comment: There is a new website that is being rolled out.

Comment: Who is responsible for feeding this information? There are school-based events on this calendar. The school committee meetings are also on the NPS website. Make certain that people are aware because they will be interested. There is information on the public website. It could be on district news, etc. Then you can also give people the opportunity to learn about all for this. More will come. Share the information in a way that is helpful.

## Technology Inventories

If your school has any questions about the technology for your schools. There will be some follow-up meetings on the technology inventories, etc. A benefit of the technology inventory is to get information

on needs, and some schools felt they had incorrect info on what they have and what their needs will be over the next several years. If you have questions about what you have been given in the letter from Leo on the student technology access standard, send all concerns and questions to Jen Abbott.

## 8:15pm with PTO Treasurers

### ➤ Discussion of suggested financial practices for PTOs

There was an incident with the PTOC Treasurer this past year, and they realized that they wanted to help other PTOs build best practices to follow so that these problems could be avoided in the future. There is a working draft on suggested practices for any PTO to follow. They've realized that there are a lot of different ways to look at pieces of them. They are looking for suggestions for the future. In no way is it a final document, and these are suggestions and it will bring some consistency. Thinking our own experience, things that are suggested aren't necessarily followed all of the time. And there is probably some room for improvements in many PTOs. The documents will be finalized and then sent to everyone. National PTA and PTO Today are good sites for resources. Some of the practices are more generally applicable.

Comment: PTO president should encourage treasurers to talk to each other. This is a responsible position and this would be helpful.

Response: The email list will be kept live and it will keep going, but there are technical difficulties at the moment that are being worked out. The groups are also broken down by group.

Other question: How much do PTOs spend per student or get per family?

Answer: There is some of that information, and this can be given to treasurers

Is the equity report every year?

Answer: supposed to be

Question: Can you put a section on tax prep in?

Answer: Yes, they will work on a section for the website. Treasurers can perhaps meet.

Question: Does anyone have a situation where they are looking after another fund that is not PTO but it is a pass-through?

Answer: That's come up, and they can work on it.

Comment: Tax expert might be helpful

Comment: Innovation funds and they have five separate bank accounts. For teachers to put money in for gifts are a problem. In the past, there was a lot of different accounts and the reasons don't really exist anymore. A few years ago, they had a push to get rid of some of these accounts. It's an ongoing issue.

Comment: They use the federal id number.

## Discussion and vote on Revised FY15 PTO Council Budget

Delayed for future meeting due to time.

Q: Newton Serves—who pays custodial fees?

A: It's unclear. There was an assumption that they didn't but they will check into it. Janet Trasuleses is the contact person for Newton Serves. If you search for recent correspondences from the Newton PTO Council they might address some of this. They will check into it because it is a significant amount of money.