

**PTO Council Meeting
May 12th, 2015**

7:30pm - regular meeting

Education Center, Room 210

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees:

Dr. David Fleishman, Superintendent
Cynthia Creem, Senator
Ruth Balsler, Representative
Kay Khan, Representative
Margie Rose Decter

Executive Board

Jennifer Abbott, Co-president
Karen Manning, Co-president
Christina Hardway Secretary
Andrea Steenstrup, Equity Representative
Marcia Tabenken, Political Action/Education

Bree Lucas, METCO
Jo-Louise Allen, SPED-PAC Liaison
Caroline Wilson, Website Manager

PTO Presidents by School

Matthew Miller, Memorial Spaulding
Bob Ludwick, Day
Sally Brickell, Newton South
Emily Prenner, Newton South

Next Meeting Dates

June 12, 2015

Superintendent's Update

***Student Assignment Update:* Public Hearing next 7:45 next Monday, 5/18. 2 steps: expand buffer zones and then think of bigger changes with redrawing of lines. There will be wildly imbalanced schools if we don't do this. Some schools are already overburdened.**

Meeting with the state legislators-Senator Cynthia Creem Representative Ruth Balser, Representative Kay Khan

Marcia introduced Kay Khan and Representative Ruth Balser.

Kay Khan: She mentioned that many in her family have attended or are attending Newton Public Schools. In January the governor comes out with his budget, and the House submitted their budget in April. They finished their debates on April 30th and the Senate has also submitted their budget. In her opinion, the House budget looks good. They've proposed to raise Chapter 70 funds by about \$470,000 (close to a half million dollars). The Senate will also have to discuss this. The House also added money to the Circuit Breaker, increasing this funding quite a bit. The House budget also increased METCO by \$2.2 million, also representing a significant increase. They have also restored funding for the full day kindergarten grants. The Early Education and Care funding was increased in the House by a great deal, indicating that the House was committed to children and their education. They also proposed increasing other relevant budgets for education for children, including alternative education programs for children who have been suspended. The House also proposed increased money for children-related transportation needs.

The Newton Chapter 70 trends show a significant increase over time, and it has—overall—gone up progressively.

Superintendent: The enrollment increase and Kay Kahn's work have helped the funding for students in Newton.

Kay Khan: There are 325 bills before the education committee. One example is one introduced by Kay Kahn to help pregnant and parenting teens. This bill would fund a student liaison to help these young women to complete their education. It is modeled on a program in Chelsea that was very successful, and it is quite cost effective. It could also include guidance counseling (though in Newton the numbers of pregnant and parenting teens is low). Another bill that she advocated for involves putting a state seal on the diploma as an indicator of bi-literacy for kids who achieve bi-literacy. It wouldn't cost much and might help high school graduates quite a bit. It's unclear how much is necessary to be considered bilingual. It encourages the idea of learning foreign languages and might help promote economic development as well. There are 51 sponsors, but it won't be mandated. Towns can opt-in for such a seal.

Ruth Balser: Securing funding for local aid, and especially education, is really top priority. Given that reality, it was a tough fiscal year (which seems to be true every year), and they have (as always) looked at, not just Chapter 70, but also METCO and Special Education as possible funding sources for local education. The delegation has always worked together on that. She has had a special focus on the Safe and Supportive Schools. In 2008 an omnibus mental health bill was passed. As part of that, there was a small part for a commission. She has focused a lot on behavioral and mental health. The Safe and Supportive schools program is a grant program and an amendment that she has introduced each year adds in \$200,000 for grants. She was happy to learn that Newton was one of the early recipients of the grants, after the tragedies of Newton. The Safe and Supportive schools program was originally a mandate, but the Senate amended that language so that it was an opportunity more than a mandate. Therefore, schools must come forward and ask to be a part of the program. They have increased the money so that more schools would apply. Schools should really put forward a plan which includes mental-health related programs including truancy, etc.

Cynthia Creem: The new Senate president is in favor of education programs, and there may be more support for schools. (Senator Creem also mentioned that the Newton Public schools had received the Martin T. Meehan Educational Leadership Award in recognition of the district's sustained response to three teen suicides in five months during the 2013-2014 school year.) The proposed funding amounts were a bit different across the House and the Senate, but all of these numbers get played with in the joint committees. In other years, there were much bigger differences. The final budget numbers are not going to be any lower than the lower of those two numbers. They are trying to get more money to education. In the Senate, they are resistant to passing mandates. If the school district already has a comparable program, they can get an exemption, but sometimes there is resistance to mandates. Senator Creem has filed a bill seeking to establish a task force designed to study the impact of a later school start time on the health of middle and high school students. They have gotten off to a bit of a slow start because they are working on setting it up. They have also been working on other things like a task force related to MBTA and other activities. She is Chair of Ethics, and Assistant Majority Leader.

Q: The Governor had rolled a lot programs into one grant program, but did the House and Senate pick that apart again?

A: They are all doing their things and the Governor does his thing. You hear the Governor is going to fix the MBTA program but then the House and Senate have their ideas. They don't always work off the same documents and then there is comparison, but they would have to look up the documents to see where they are.

Kay Kahn:

- On June 30th, there will be discussion about The Foundation Budget, but that has been happening for 20 years.
- Educational Task Force will look at unfunded mandates, which might be an issue. The Superintendents have reported that over 100 things have been added to the school day. There is also discussion of the achievement gaps.
- There are several bills that are focused on expanding access to high quality early education program. She thinks it is important because it's necessary to have kids ready for school. This helps the kids directly, but it also helps the kids indirectly through helping their parents. Some kids don't speak English and as a first language and these programs help kids get ready to enter school.

Cindy Creem:

- There are two versions and one of them is focused on providing more opportunities. The question is how we are going to do it in some communities versus others.

Ruth Balsler

- There are a lot of bills (over 5000), and she is interested in knowing what we would like our Representatives to support. Is it Early Ed? Or Special Ed? Or something else. In her early years, she spent a lot of time on Special Ed, but that was when it was threatened at the time.

Questions & Answers

Q: Health Services provided in school to be reimbursed by insurance?

A: (That was Cindy Creem's bill, and she is working on it).

Q: Later start time for schools is really important on a lot of levels, including mental health. Could the State Legislature support a coalition of communities; is that a possibility? What about Charlie Baker and the budget that he puts forward? Do you anticipate cuts?

A: In terms of the late starts: There would have to be a groundswell to get this thing off the ground. There doesn't seem to be that much interest at the House level. You need to get communities together to push for this in order for the House to respond, even though it is a big issue and the research shows that this is an issue. There has to be an effort from outside the legislature. As for the Senate, that is something that they hear more about it. She agrees with Kay, and she says that a big group of people makes it more of an issue. So, they need to have more support.

A: As for Chapter 70, the Governor has been supportive of Chapter 70, but he seems to want to make other cuts in Kindergarten, etc. There has been a strong statement about non-Ch70 education grants. For example, the insurance companies covering in-school insurance –covered costs--the insurance company lobbies push back quite a bit, and they try to halt change. They are weathering the storm, and no one has a crystal ball. They have had a strong statement from the Governor about no new taxes. She thinks there will be some consideration of tax credits to companies, and there aren't easy answers. She thinks that some of the things that they do requires more funding, and there is a resistance for increased funding.

A: Ruth Balser: She has been on board with the late-start times since she was a kid! She shares this, and if it is a top-issue, then she will focus on it. And it means that people need to network and have others advocate for it as well. As for the money, the House and Senate have such overwhelming numbers about the budget, they can override any vetoes and their education funding numbers are higher.

A: Kay Kahn: The early retirement package could bring 5000 people to retire from the system, and that could really deplete their agencies. The services agencies will not have enough people left to do their jobs. In social services, cuts will affect K-12 indirectly.

Ruth Balser was involved in the Mental Health Parity bill and the private sector was concerned because they were concerned about being charged for services in school.

The insurance agency and the bottler agencies are some of the strongest lobbies in the state, and changing anything that affects these industries takes a lot of public support.

Q: What about PARCC? She has a daughter who has anxiety and this girl is 10, and will have 10 standardized tests in this year. In other states, there has been resistance to standardized tests. Has this come up with the legislators?

Response from David Fleishman: We cannot hold state legislators responsible for this. The 10th amendment historically has made the states responsible for education. And then over the years, there were bills to help poor communities, and then in 1983, Washington DC and Governors have been in partnership to promote national standards. Then Schnorr Report said that we could link testing results to federal funds. States have SOME power, however, when they pull out of PARCC or something like that. The debate in NY has to do with the percentage of funding to be linked teacher evaluations. The standardized tests have to be linked to Common Core, and PARCC is aligned. He would separate out the Common Core standards from the PARCC-related issues. The PARCC tests don't take more time, but they occur for a shorter part of the day but over more days. Massachusetts has been more moderate about PARCC than others. There is variability in student response to PARCC, and it isn't clear how it's going to play out. Changing MCAS so that it aligns with the Common Core would take a lot of resources.

Kay Kahn: Parents can opt out.

Superintendent: Not a lot of parents are doing that.

Response: The places where they are doing that have technology infrastructure issues. BUT, in this state, we have had standards-based education for a long time.

Jen: If there was a choice between sticking with PARCC and staying with MCAS who would make that determination?

Answer: The State Board of Education.

Question: If they voted, would it be for a year?

Superintendent: That would take resources and time.

Cindy Creem: Several communities have things in common. In underperforming communities, they are in favor of testing as way of helping their kids rise. In more affluent communities, they are concerned about time-on-tests, and the stress. If you are part of Mass Association Schools, then you are part of a larger group.

Kay Kahn: It DOES differ across schools.

Jen Abbott: We may need testing, but the quantity might be an issue. Another Question regarding the opt-out: The Massachusetts Teachers Association is in favor of opt out. What are the repercussions of opting-out?

Superintendent: All kids should attend school every day.

Ruth Balsler: Is opting-out a protest? Or is it a way to help protect children from anxiety? Because that may lead to other issues for anxiety.

Question: What about protests? How much data do you need?

Answer: The protestors were well-off kids and it hurt the school a lot.

Answer: What are the ramifications of this down the road? For teacher evaluations?

Superintendent: There is angst among people. We are confused as a nation because we test and we want socio-emotional health.

Question: The mandate piece: Circuit Breaker and METCO are big and thank you for keeping on this for the small communities who need this. Anti-bullying legislature is the example of putting the carrot out to encourage school systems to support kids. Mandates require that it be done in one way, and it is better to avoid that.

Ruth Balsler had hoped that the anti-bullying would be a larger bill that would involve a lot of local choice and would get rid of a lot smaller mandates. It was also meant to be included in the School Improvement Plan. Also the late start time is another example, there are some districts pushing forward this process but moving it into a mandate might be an issue. As Cindy said different places have different issues. In some districts, kids ride the bus a LONG WAY to get to school.

Kay Kahn: Also autism is an issue.

Cindy Creem: Calls and letters are a good way to communicate. There are a lot of committees, and they may not be informed quickly without this info.

School Committee Meeting update

Student Assignment Process: Every school should communicate clearly about the forum on long-term student assignment plan. There is a more immediate plan to introduce buffer zones, and that plan should be voted on quickly because families will need to make plans. Almost all the talk about buffer zones and changing lines has to do with families who have not yet entered the school. People should come to the public forum and provide comments. Presentation from May 11 is already on line. Margie could give info. GOING to the meetings is very useful.

NPS policy on gifts to staff: They have feedback on the gift policy, and they encouraged them to be VERY clear about the policy. Under the current policy, the language says teachers can't accept gives,

but there is a lot of range on how that has been handled. They are asking that the policy be clear and consistently applied across the schools.

Andrea Steenstrup: It should be clear and equally applied across schools. If the teachers are given group gifts then it could create inequity. It sounds like there is converging language around this policy. They asked for a delay in the vote.

Karen: Question to group: What is the feedback? It seems that there has been a big split between some things that are personal and some aren't. And the personal gifts have come from the group as a whole.

Response: There is an acknowledgement that a home-made gift should be allowed even if there was some money donated.

Emily: It's different at the High School level because class gift is not really feasible. So, how does it get enforced or worked through at the High School level? The compliance and enforcement will be a bigger issue at the High School Level

Andrea: Teachers all get ethics training.

Karen: What if a teacher was taking the gifts?

Response: that is why it is coming from HR, who can work through the issues.

Karen: It should be broadcast so that the parents know as well and don't put the teachers in a bad spot.

Response: We need to get the language clear.

Question: When to begin communicating this and how? It's going to be about May or June so does the PTO want to draft a communication about it?

Response: The principals need to communicate this so that there is a consistent message. The school needs to send this to principals and the PTO.

Marcia: Honor Thy Teacher is a good way to support teachers and professional development; it is equitable across the schools, and the principals find out and so does the Superintendent. It's a good way to show support for the teachers.

Response: They will use encouraging language for Honor Thy Teacher fund.

Andrea: Language includes the idea that Newton Public schools allows unlimited gifts to charity organizations like the Honor Thy Teacher and PTOs

Response: It could play out several ways depending on how the meeting goes.

Update on Technology Access Standard will be coming soon. Larger schools may be allowed a fourth cart.

Survey Coming Soon to get feedback from parents on the best way to get communication. Margie Ross Decker: what are the best ways to get the information to parents? Please give info on the agenda

Training for PTO Leaders and others on Socio and Emotional Health on June 4th and 5th. They want to train 250 adults in Newton. This training is at the Community Rowing House.

Mayors Breakfast on May 20th.

Next meeting: **Annual Meeting and vote on 2015-16 slate and budget
June 12, 2015, 9:30am, Jen Abbott's house, 26 Whitney Rd.**

Other dates to remember:

May 18, 2015 – Public Forum on Student Assignment 7:45pm

May 20, 2015 – Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, 7:15am

May 27, 2015 – Next School Committee Meeting, 7pm

Topics likely to include possible vote on proposed Buffer Zones for 2015-16 school year, discussion of policy on gifts to staff, high school start time presentation.