

**PTO Council Meeting
May10th, 2016**

7:15pm - regular meeting

Education Center, Room 340

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees:

Executive Board

Betsy Blagdon, Co-president
Karen Manning, Co-president
Christina Hardway, Secretary
Caroline Wilson, Website Manager
Jo-Louise Allen, Special Education Representative
Frieda Dweck, Political Action
Marcia Tabanken, Ex Officio
Bree Lucas, METCO Liaison

Other attendees

David Fleishman, Superintendent
Representative Ruth Balsler
Representative Kay Khan
Senator Cindy Creem
Lisa Seras

PTO Presidents by School

Dana Hanson, Day
Teri Ginsburg, Countryside
Maureen Oates, Mason-Rice
Megan Flynn, Ward
Meredith Andrews, Underwood
Helen Haley, Newton South
Emily Prenner, Newton South

Next Meeting Dates

June 17, 2016

Introductions ~ All

Meeting Highlights:

Superintendent's Remarks ~ Dr. David Fleishman

PARCC is going on right now, and this year we aren't using technology. It is very different this year, and no one knows what the testing will look like next year. In Newton, there are not a lot of opt-outs, as there have been in other states. Additionally, the testing hasn't been as disruptive. Even in the Presidential campaign, there has not been a lot of discussion about education. Superintendent Fleishman recently spoke with President Bill Clinton informally about the future of education policy; right now it's unclear.

Approval of April 5th, PTOC Meeting Minutes – All

Motion to approve; seconded; approved.

State Legislators Presentations

All attending representatives live in Newton. Karen and Betsy formulated questions and asked for each to describe her background.

Representative Ruth Balsler

She was a clinical psychologist who ran for the legislature in 1998, and that was a career change after having worked in the Mental Health field for many years. She has integrated the two careers by making Mental Health policy a top priority. In the educational priorities, one of her top priorities has been Safe and Supportive schools that address the whole child and help to promote behavioral health in the schools as well. She is also a mother, and that has shaped her work. Additionally, she has worked for women's rights and social justice.

Representative Kay Khan

She had come into the legislature from a background as a Psychiatric Nurse. For the last 8 years, she is been the Chair on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities. This work brings her into a lot of contact with many agencies charged with serving humans in Massachusetts. The committee oversees a lot of important tasks. She visited the Head Start program in Newton, and it is a terrific program. In the program, they work a lot with the children and families who are getting children ready for school. They are also working a lot on the issue of teen pregnancy, by helping pregnant teens stay in school. They are trying to help provide counselors who help support teen mothers' efforts to stay in school. Another focus is on strengthening families, and she went to visit a family that allows a Social Worker to come into a family 3 times per week. There are many communities that don't have as many resources, and the families struggle within this context. Newton is fortunate to have many resources. Finally, people have

come to her and asked if there could be a “seal of bi-literacy” on high school diplomas, and she is interested in what people have to say about that.

Senator Cindy Creem

She started in the Senate since 1999, and she had previously worked on the Board of Alderman. She represents Newton, Brookline, and almost all of Wellesley. All three communities have a strong commitment to education and to special education. She has worked in judiciary-related committees. She is also working on the Ethics Committee.

The process of figuring out the budget between the different branches always takes a long time. This year, there has been more discussion about how tight the budget is. They are struggling with balancing the budget.

There is also the process of developing laws. When questions go out on the ballots (rather than being decided by the legislature), outcomes are heavily influenced by money and advertising. There will be a ballot initiative on marijuana, and it’s hard to say how it will go on the ballot. There is also a ballot question about raising the cap on charter schools, but the money that will fund these may be pulled from the public school system. There are underperforming districts and parents from these districts expressed concerns that they don’t allow all the children to enter charter schools—so they’ve worked on developing language which requires the charter schools to use a lottery and give everyone an opportunity to attend. They have also worked on an opioid bill to help regulate the prescription of opioids, and help to provide better training for health professionals. They also passed a bill that made it possible for people to call to report an overdose without fear of being arrested. They have also worked on a commission to study school start time. Finally, she has been involved with work on the issue of testing. This is also a METCO community and she has worked on that as well.

Q: The Transgender Bill?

A: This legislature is coming before the Senate tomorrow, 5/11/2016. They previously passed a bill that outlawed discrimination, but the public facilities issue was not passed at that time. They are now in the process of considering this bill. It’s slightly different between the House and the Senate, but they think it will pass and be signed.

Q: Could you describe the relationship between the Common Core Curriculum and Testing?

David Fleishman: There is misinformation out there, and people have tied these two together—even though they are independent. The Common Core has helped bolster the writing program and added depth in math, but there is a lot of misinformation. The federal law requires states to test in grades 3 to 8, and that hasn’t changed, but many parents don’t like the linking of the testing scores to teacher evaluations. It has been much calmer in this state compared with others, however.

Senator Creem: There is more concern about the curriculum.

Representative Balsler: There are two ways to pass a law: 1) Through the Legislature or 2) on a Ballot question. The Common Core might come up as a ballot question.

David Fleishman: Different interest groups work through the mechanisms to help influence the legislation.

Senator Creem: There is an upcoming Constitutional Convention, and they will take up the question of a graduated income tax (we have a flat income tax). There is a proposal that the legislature will take the first step to vote for soon that would provide for an incremental tax for income over income \$1 million, and that money will be allocated to education and transportation.

Kay Khan: There was a proposed increase in tax on gas, but that did not go through.

Question: Tell us more about the budget process and how it works.

Ruth Balsler: They often advocate for funding for public schools. The money that goes into the education is called Chapter 70. Other money that is important is the METCO program, and Newton includes a lot of students from the METCO program. They also advocate for Special Ed, and many children in Newton require special education services.

Kay Kahn: There is a formula that includes property taxes and is put together with the funding from the State. Places with higher local capacity get less state aid in Chapter 70 funds, but Newton does get funding from the state through the METCO program because Newton is the largest METCO district.

Ruth Balsler: The House version for education funding proposed an increase in the funding by \$55 per pupil in the district.

Cindy Creem: These are numbers that will be discussed in joint committees.

Ruth Balsler: They have always been committed to raising new revenue to help meet the needs.

Emily Prenner: High School Start Time—thank you to the legislators for supporting the process of investigating changing High School Start time. It's important to socio-emotional health of teens. So thank you for working on this.

David Fleishman: There has been progress on this, even though there are different challenges.

Karen Manning: Thank you for making mental health a priority and putting the safe and supportive school initiatives at the forefront.

Kay Khan: There is a screening program to help with better and quicker referrals, and it's also helping them students to think about themselves. They are trying to get money for this to be supported in schools. There are schools that are piloting it right now.

Ruth Balsler: Safe and Supportive Schools was put in with the anti-violence legislation after the Newtown tragedy.

Question: Recess is important but it seems to interfere with the state-mandated Time-on-Learning. How can this be addressed from the state perspective?

David Fleishman: The world has changed and all schools have higher expectations for students, so there are challenges in balancing these issues.

Question: This school screening for opioid risk—is that funded? And now there is a training for staff in suicide prevention, and there is a line in the bill that it says it is “subject to appropriation.” We are hoping that there will be funding put in by the Senate.

Question: What about the “Seal of Bi-literacy” on High School Diplomas?

Comments: Seems like a reasonable idea to encourage bi-lingualism.