

**PTO Council Meeting**  
**February 4, 2014**  
**Newton Public Schools Education Center**  
**MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

Dr. David Fleishman, Superintendent

**Executive Board**

Jennifer Abbott, Co-president  
Frieda Dweck, Co-president  
Theresa Fitzpatrick, Co-president  
Andrea Steenstrup, Equity Representative  
Marcia Tabenken, PoliticalAction/Education  
Sue Flicop, Secondary Representative  
Jo-Louise Allen, SPED-PAC Liaison  
Caroline Wilson, Website Manager  
Rhanna Kidwell, Ex-officio

**PTO Presidents by School**

Natali Atri, Angier  
Kirsten von Haseel, Bowen  
Jason Wong, Burr  
Vanessa Allen, Cabot  
Erin Edwards, Cabot  
Jamie LeBlanc, Countryside  
Anne Kalis, Countryside  
Gena Hooper, Countryside  
Karen Weissel, Countryside  
Julie Pinto, Franklin

David Levine, Horace Mann  
John Oliver, Horace Mann  
Miriam Alandydy, Lincoln-Eliot,  
Susanne Goddard, Lincoln Eliot,  
Eydie Balsam, Mason-Rice  
Kim Thurmond, Mason-Rice  
Doreen Rachal, Memorial-Spaulding  
Monica Yancey, Memorial-Spaulding  
Rachel Conn, Pierce  
Hagit Abraham, Preschool  
Megan Reilly, Preschool  
Karen Manning, Underwood  
Cindy Henry, Ward  
Carol Roe, Williams  
Christina Hardway, Williams  
Amy Waksler, Zervas  
Carolyn Judge, Bigelow  
Theresa Fitzpatrick, Brown  
Betsy Blagdon, Newton South  
Emily Prenner, Newton South

**Other Attendees**

Rich Icobuicci, Newton Schools Foundation

**Next Meeting Dates**

Tuesday, March 4, 2014 (Special Meeting)  
Tuesday, April 1, 2014

**Superintendent's Update**

*Educational Training* - Filled the group in on what training is happening in the HS  
In the Elementary schools, continuing the training on the writing units which are being taught to

the students.

*Budget* - Work on school budget for next year...better now, then when first started due to the override and other financial savings. Used to fight about what to cut ... better place with challenges and planning for next year staffing.

*Staff Changes* - Countryside Principal search, announcing finalist Thursday. Informed the group that Joe Russo retiring at end of this school year -

*Cooperative Work with NSF* - Continuing to partner with NSF on sustainability initiatives in the High Schools

*Question & Answer:*

**Question:** Long term facilities planning.

**Answer:** 3 buildings are currently in the process of being renovated or rebuilt (Angier, Cabot and Zervas). When those are done, can start on the next round of buildings

**Question:** MCAS ending.

**Answer:** NPS is in the final phases of MCAS and will be phasing it out. There will be new assessments. The new assessment tests, PARRC, are being piloted in 18 states. The PARRC test is more than one answer, more difficult reading, collecting evidence, critical thinking. Newton will have 6 elementary schools participating in the pilot test. Not all the all middle schools will participate in the pilot. Some students will have technology, some with paper and pencil. State selected the schools that will be participating in the pilot. Two classes per grade will be part of the pilot.

**Question:** High Standard---Common Core less rigorous?

**Answer:** The 10<sup>th</sup> amendment leaves it the states to determine their common core. Every state for the last 15 years has been making up their own assessments. This is less of a shift in Massachusetts. With the PARRC test, some questions have more than one answer—this test is more demanding. We are preparing for some of the changes by offering more nonfiction reading. Learn empathy in nonfiction too. Gradual shift to nonfiction. Teacher evaluations are tied to test, which will happen in several years, not at the beginning stages of the implementation of this new testing.

## **Newton Schools Foundation** (Rick Iacobucci).

*Background* – Rick has been with NSF for 2 years.

*History* - Trying to use naming rights to raise funds for technology was a false start. Shifted to innovation—landing in an area in sync with everyone- from the parents to the school curriculum. Discussed a new initiative around Innovation.

*Innovation Initiative*- 3 year campaign- Investing in Innovation. Teachers administration made up- funding for the NPS --- with David Fleishman's leadership got the initiatives in place. Pilot programs across all levels funded by last year's spring event. At the event they presented

Alumni awards. This year's fundraiser will fund this year and the next 3 years. Seed is planted, watering it with funds we are able to provide. Help shape future curriculum. If you do not innovate you will not be around. Important for the students to compete in this economy and innovative thinking and courses are key. Course to curriculum to inspire the students, over the first year NSF will contribute the following funds: \$250,000 the first year, \$500,000 the second year, and \$750,000 the third year. Some of this funding is coming from private donors, corporations, private foundations. Working closely with NPS grant office. The first five years have Environmental, STEM, Art, literacy, closing achievement gap. All these courses provide social and emotional learning.

*Annual Appeal* – featured student at MIT – heavily recruited by Colleges - this is because of junior/senior year at the Innovation Lab. What motivated and inspired him at Newton North brought him to MIT and helped shape his future. This is the inspiration to invest in programs that have a long lasting effect. These programs will be across all schools at all levels.

Honor thy teacher –another- opportunity to donate funds to NSF. You don't feel comfortable to put together a class gift. There were 500 teachers honored last year – ad in TAB.

*The Event* - Celebration of Excellence to take place on Saturday, May 3, 2014, at Newton North High School. Cost will be \$50 per person.

Last year the event honored only alumni. This year they are expanding the honorees to teachers, current and past, community leaders. An email went out today on how you can nominate anyone that is deserving of this honor.

There will be an entertainment component. Jimmy Tingle (local comedian) will perform. *Loose Change* (a band composed of both current and former parents and teachers from Mason-Rice and Zervas) will perform. Food donated by local businesses – beer and wine.

*Final Comments* - Commented on PTO's and key to a successful PTO is our volunteers for your PTO's. Also commented on the recent great article in the *Boston Globe*. PTO addresses immediate needs – NSF compliments what PTO's are doing. Ways to improve curriculum. If PTOs needed help with ideas for a fundraiser –he is happy to brain storm ideas. Wants to keep communication open between the two organizations. . Amelia is a NSF Board Member, new parent from Pierce. There are sub-committees on their board, which include students from the NPS. Our door is always open.

Q&A- on Campaign

Five areas of study that run concurrently or in order... environmental issues--- combination of...looking for balance and equality.

**Question:** Elementary in one or across all

**Answer:** This could impact several areas, training teachers. For the most part, they are systemic (DF) Responsive Classroom – hit teachers in all school. Both HS have sustainability issues/ classes. Engineering initiatives at all four middle schools.

**Clarification** from Marcia Tabenken (a member of the NSF Board): These are not NSF program, they are NPS programs and NSF is providing money for those programs

## Website Update (Frieda Dweck)

We reminded everyone of the usefulness of the PTO Council website. First thanked Caroline Wilson, the PTOC website manager, for her contributions to maintaining and updating the website. Caroline has been making sure that all the information on the website is up to date and accurate. Encouraged everyone to use the website as a resource of information for their PTOs. Examples of information that can be found on the website include, information on Tax Form 990s, speaking with reporters, what political activities PTOs are permitted to engage in, information on most sports teams for kids in Newton, links to all PTO websites, and many other links and resources. Encouraging everyone to use the website as it is an awesome resource.

## Proposed Revisions to Elementary Equity Policy (PTOC Co-Presidents)

*Broad Overview of Proposed Changes to Equity Policy* - the equity task force took a close look at the equity policy. In looking at it, it was determined that it needed to be updated (definitions still have “Draft 2003” written on it). This also coincided with recent efforts by the PTOC to address the issue of PTO funding of technology.

Technology Task Force and Equity Task Force met 3-4 times over the course of the last several months.

*Changes to Equity Policy:* The Equity Task Force Team went through every line of the existing equity policy and deliberated its relevancy. We then made some structural changes to the policy, and some substantive changes to the policy. (*Attachment of Summary of Proposed Changes*)

Structural changes include the following:

- (a) more clearly defined the categories of PTO spending under the policy/. There are 3 categories; (1) items for which the PTOs can not spend money; (2) items for which PTOs can spend money but which are capped; and (3) unrestricted items.
- (b) made the definition section more consistent. Took a look at what was in budget items – for example a publishing center which is no longer relevant and took it out (no longer have). Library automation – took out

Substantive changes include the following:

- (a) included two policy statements regarding the purpose of the equity policy – to prevent inequities in schools, and to commit to balance any inequalities that do arise.
- (b) removed copiers from items that could be paid for by PTOs and put into restricted items. PTOS should not be buying school copiers.
- (c) **Equity Committee** –which is in the current policy, but no one paying attention to the reports – important that we establish and equity committee- needed to meet at least once a year – look at reports, schools compiling – if action is needed it be taken –clarified the role PTO Council, School Committee/Dept

- (d) Beefed up financial reporting requirements – specific dates for submission of reports included.
- (e) Gift policy – change – back door to avoid the equity policy--- gift to individual school should not be a way to avoid equity--- proposed changes –incorporate into equity cap and opportunity to accept – amortize over 4 years

### *Summary of Proposed Technology Cap - (attachments)*

Recognizing that inequalities have developed over the years between schools due to the inequitable funding of technology by PTOs, the technology task force and the equity task force got together to see how changes in the equity policy could address those inequalities.

Since technology has increasingly become part of core curriculum, ideally, we would want NPS to take on the responsibility of funding technology and have PTO spending on technology restricted. Decisions regarding funding of technology should be made by the School Department and not by PTOs. So as to not eliminate PTO funding of technology completely, the task forces believed that spending on technology should be limited by a cap.

What should that cap be? The joint task forces reviewed data from many sources: tax returns, equity reports, data from Leo Brehm. We have been compiling data over the last 14 years. On average, over the last 5 years, PTO have spent approximately \$300,000 on technology funding in the elementary schools. The trend has been increasing upward.

A graphic was shared which illustrated clear imbalances among PTOs' funding of technology. (a clear trend of schools that historically fund more for technology, and schools that have not).

The proposal that is being suggested is a technology cap of \$25 per pupil. We believe that is an amount that an average school can fundraise. It constitutes about a 50% change in current PTO spending habits, reducing PTO funding of technology to about \$150,000 per year.

Elementary School Equity Policy is a long standing value. It is over 20 years old. The School Department should be providing core curriculum and should be maintaining equity—current system of PTOs funding technology with no cap is creating the inequalities among the schools. This discussion on including technology under the Equity policy has been talked about for a long time. To date, not enough action has been taken. This is the first step. There is still more work to be done. This is a chance for School Department to make positive changes--- look at issues annually.

These changes have been discussed with the superintendent and with members of the School Committee. They are all aware that PTO funding of technology is an issue and did not express any surprise that this effort is underway to try and remove some of the PTOs' ability to fund technology.

The amount of fundraising that PTOs have done historically is increasingly becoming a burden on PTOs.

### *Questions & Answers:*

Horace Mann comments: 4 to 1 ratio on spending -raising for CASC – not technology--- enhancing curriculum that is what PTOs raising money for – tech has become as essential to learning as a text book.

Philosophically agree it should not be our PTO burden... (the majority of those present mentioned that ‘philosophically, they all agree PTOs should not be funding technology).

We can not decide how the school dept should deliver their curriculum.. the school dept that picks the text book hire the teachers... PTOs should not be involved with the decision --- Schools get ‘wish’ lists from Principals regarding technology

Mason Rice Comment – (regarding the schools that do not have big fundraising efforts ) Felt that these schools able to fundraise and chose not to...

How does it solve the problem?

Give the schools time to have their fundraisers-- ‘strange negotiation’

Informative in the planning..

Shameless in public school to have the gaps that we have---

Lincoln Eliot comment -- ‘poor people’ # reflected in chart is better than we are at present— they have to sacrifice in other areas—CASC field trips, talk about phasing – they are in favor of the cap. On principal – an adjustment from where we have been.

General Comment – This effort sends a message that we are mindful of the inequalities and believe in equities in the school. NPS should do a better job to fund the technologies—advocacy of this group—is powerful – we are a strong voice and can effect a change. Some schools who cannot hit that cap #.

Countryside--- #'s from Leo--- two schools that have met the benchmark goal-- all libraries are equal—access devices and carts--- wide range of how schools have approached it-- 100% of goal to 16%. Decision made by the School Department.

Sue Flicop--- Bowen co chair--- PTO Council (4yrs). School committee can come up with the \$150,000. School Department budget is over \$170 million - they can find the money to make up the difference.. Over \$2 million in technology over all – money is precious to PTO -- ‘chump change’ to the School Committee.

Idea for banking of money raised for technology?

Memorial Spaulding- they were dead last two years ago with respect to meeting the technology standard. Major contributions happened in two years \$20K –

General Comment - Our Children will not get hurt—

Stay competitive – capital vs operating budget—Rhanna spoke in SC public statement

Wanted money to come from elsewhere --- aldermen micro mgr money (city wide) – school committee wanted to work and figure out the solution-- \$25 can be negotiable -- reasonable place to start – could phase in --- serious about moving forward

MS – what each school has—determine where everyone is before we put constraints--

Cabot- last several years ago, now doing well

Bowen- funding for playground—challenging --- demographic—(\$30K) historically can not raise more---

## Playgrounds

Advised everyone that there are currently five PTOs engaged in the process of reconstructing new playgrounds (Bowen, Burr, Horace Mann, Peirce, and Underwood). It was suggested that if the schools undergoing the process wanted to combine their brainpower and resources by meeting together, PTO Council would be willing to facilitate that. It was also suggested that the five PTOs connect with the four other PTOs that have recently completed new playgrounds in the last five years (Countryside, Franklin, Mason-Rice, Williams).