

Newton PTO Council Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 4, 2018 @ 7:30pm
Newton Ed Center, Room 210

Attendees

Karen Hite (PTOC Co-President), Christine Dutt (PTOC Co-President), Jen Abbott (PTOC Equity Rep), Andrea Steenstrup (Equity Working Group), Liz Hiser (PTOC Secretary), Anne-Marie Gravel (Underwood), Caroline Wilson (PTOC Communications & Website), Maggie Schmidt (Zervas), Jenn Martin (Zervas), Colleen Nolan (Angier), Sean Reedy (Angier), Will Adams (Mason-Rice), Claudia Rossi (Franklin), Maura Morse (Franklin), Crista Martinez Padua (Memorial-Spaulding), Nina Tebaldi (F.A. Day), Bill Kenneally (Ward), Gabriela Kroszynski (Ward), Teri Ginsburg (Brown), Cristina MacMahon (Williams), Joann Calcagno Tahn (Williams), Angie Abend (Williams), Leslie Ziarko Valera (Mason-Rice), Maureen Oates (PTOC Elementary Rep), Lisa Weinman (Bowen PTO Exec Comm), Lindsay Pike (PTOC Treasurer), Sally Brickell (NNHS), Zlatena Simeonova (Ward Treasurer), Valerie Davisson (Peirce Treasurer), Rebecca Anderson (Peirce), Alexandra Ozerkis (Peirce), Nicky Chapman (Cabot), Jas Rai (Mason-Rice), Cristal Balis (Burr), Spencer Poole (Burr).

Guests: David Fleishman, Superintendent of Schools
Ruth Goldman, School Committee Chair

Christine Dutt called meeting to order at 7:30pm. Attendees introduced themselves.

Approval of Minutes

Caroline Wilson moved to approve the minutes from the October 9, 2018 PTO Council meeting. Cristina MacMahon seconded. All in favor. Motion passes.

Superintendent's Remarks

David Fleishman

Two events last week, the Newton Family Conference (Sat., 12/1) & School Committee public hearing (Tues., 11/27) in response to a citizen petition on high school curriculum brought our community together, enabled us to talk about our differences and challenges.

Q: Was Tuesday's meeting publicized?

A: It was a public hearing and was posted per regulations, along with supporting documents.

Update: Link to video of the hearing (4 hours long), recorded by NewTV is here:

<https://vimeo.com/303729815>

Q: FY20 Budget development: What is the timeline?

A: We are on a "regular" schedule. Work begins Dec. 1. Proposal will be public March 8-9.

Comment: Suggest watching last week's School Committee meeting on NewTV online, at the end of the regular meeting. Worth it for high-level budget summary.

Q: Suggestion for communication from School Committee. Could you send an email to PTO Council with short summary of each upcoming SC agenda that could be forwarded/shared by each PTO with their members?

A: (Goldman): We have been sending a summary after the meetings to individuals who subscribe to e-updates. Will ask an SC member to send the agenda with a supporting link beforehand to PTOC.

Q: Re: Tuesday public hearing - Does NPS have a crisis management strategy for responding to misinformation or if people are still upset about a topic?

A: Explained that engagement of groups who may be spreading misinformation gives them added publicity, so NPS does not want to give additional air time. Difficult to open the door to engage any groups regarding a specific item of curriculum.

Q: Is there any redress for the targeted teachers?

A: There will be a training on how to respond to public records requests.

Q: Were any middle school teachers targeted?

A: No

Q: I attended the hearing. There was overwhelming support of the teachers and the school system from the young people who spoke (alums and current students). Very powerful. What are you doing for teachers who are asked to do things that are stressful? Is there anything that we can do?

A: A note of support from PTO Council would be meaningful. As individuals, if you or members of your parent community know certain teachers—they are in the History department—a personal note of support would be helpful. A letter of support collected signatures from 400 NNHS graduates.

Comment: It's a shame that this group is ruining it for others.

Q: Did the SC agree to do certain things to communicate about the curriculum as a result of the hearing?

A: Up until now most questions we get on the curriculum have been about math. However, NPS will now have information on the website about how all our curriculum is created: State frameworks -> curriculum coordinators + faculty create curriculum as a team (with training) -> SC gets updates. MA state frameworks are designed to keep politics out of curriculum.

Q: Why is this group targeting Newton?

A: *Boston Globe* article* is coming out tomorrow, it begins to answer this. One group is local, one is national. Wellesley Public Schools took field trip to a Mosque and became the subject of inquiry. We (Newton) are a good target, we're a big school system. There is an overall danger to bringing this to public education. They have a right to do it, but their tactics are around public records requests (i.e., requesting copies of emails) which is intimidating to teachers.

*Link to *Globe* article: <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/12/09/some-newton-history-teachers-miss-class-time-respond-public-records-requests-from-critics/Yq3qjIXnPCi7tUO8biBspN/story.html>

Q: Can NPS sue for harassment?

A: Public records laws got more accessible a year ago, aimed at people who weren't responding to requests and hiding things.

Q: Can we advocate with our legislators to tighten the law?

A: It is awkward for public officials to do so. If parents want to know why their children's teachers are spending time complying with public records requests, go for it.

Q: How big are these groups?

A: Estimate 50-60 (about 20 people are local). 18 people spoke against the curriculum at the public hearing, about half of them were from Newton. 2 are parents in the district but not of students in these targeted classes.

Equity Guidelines Information and Working Group Update

Ruth Goldman

Emily Prenner, Christine Dutt and Jen Abbott

NPS Equity Policy is short (2 paragraphs), a simple statement about how any money coming in from outside the district is managed. Equity is part of NPS mission and core values.

One of our most important tenets is that our schools be more welcoming and inclusive to all students.

Equity guidelines are proscribed in the School Committee's Equity Policy, which tasks an Equity Committee with updating and monitoring them. (FYI, last meeting of "old" Equity Committee, before recent revisions to guidelines, was 2014). Last year a reconstituted committee crafted an updated set of guidelines. Effort was led by an NPS staff person, included PTO Council reps (parent pov) and an SC member. New guidelines are more detailed than in past. 2 biggest changes were to the overall spending cap (a cap existed but it was reduced) and to add a cap on technology spending.

Implementation of the new guidelines begin on July 1, 2019. Guidelines are a living document, considered a 2-year pilot, to be evaluated.

A separate Working Group has formed to consider feasibility for pooling funds. They will make a recommendation to the SC in March, 2019. Goal: SC deliberation over 3 subsequent meetings and vote.

Equity Committee (standing group) vs Working Group (time-bounded group, specifically tasked). Members of Equity Working Group: Kathy Shields (School Committee), Kathleen Smith (Underwood Principal), Orla Higgins Averill (Angier Assistant Principal), Christine Dutt (PTOC), 3 parents.

New policy & guidelines now apply to **all 3 levels**, policy used to be for elementary alone. Now clarifies what applies to whom and defines spending categories in practice. MS & HS PTOs will report data in same way as elementary. Secondary schools' data shows that spending across MS and HS is fairly even. Now, the PTOs will report in similar categories, will be able to compare better. Make further recs if necessary.

Important that the Equity policy (and guidelines) apply to everybody and that there be uniform reporting. A technology standard exists for Elementary + MS levels; no limitations @ HS level.

Q: Regarding the disparity in PTO funding between schools – does school system give money to make up the difference?

A: No. Some schools qualify for Title I funds from Federal Government due to percentages of low-income student population. However, NPS does not have any mechanism to subsidy.

Q: What about Creative Arts & Sciences (CASC) grants? CASC administrator alerts PTOs if there are 3rd party grants available, encourages them to apply (i.e., from Mass Cultural Council).

A: Any/all schools can apply for these grants.

CASC is all outside money vs Library + Technology, which are a mix of outside & district funding.

Q: Concern that guidelines take away from schools. Can funds for schools that aren't able to fundraise as much come from Newton Schools Foundation (NSF)?

A: NSF is a separate 501 (c) 3 with specific mission to grant funds in 3 areas core to NPS mission: new and promising programs, teacher professional development and programs that help close achievement & opportunity gaps. In theory, PTOs could apply for grants but there is a proscribed process & grants are reviewed & approved by an independent Board, not the district.

Q: Concern about a lack of information about what any policy around pooling funds would be.

A: Agreed to task the Working Group with figuring this out, communicating with PTOs and parents along the way. Christine presented a draft FAQ slide to be included in info sessions and visits that the Equity Committee members will make to PTO/parent meetings. Reminder that the task of the Working Group is to address the inequitable distribution of resources, will have a feedback/input mechanism for community members & PTO leaders and that no specific end result is proscribed.

Q: Will Working Group look at possibility that parents might stop giving to their child's PTO if those resources are pooled?

A: Yes. Making list of pros/cons/scenarios/possible outcomes.

Q: Do schools prioritize spending on different things?

A: When you look at reported PTO spending data, you can tell each school culture is unique. The idea is that within the equity cap, there is flexibility. This is why school visits by the Working Group will be important. Historically, capacity for fundraising at each school is different. Gap has now gotten too wide.

Q: Our PTO tries to spend as much as we can on equity but if not will there now be requirement to spend the full cap in order to yield equal student experience?

A: As long as spending is within cap, it's all your choice.

Q: Technology – points for consideration a) Optics at the end of the 2-year experiment: if PTOs front load spending now, before reduced cap is in effect, the tech cap will look like it's adequate b) Data on spending for new (renovated/rebuilt) schools will be skewed – they won't be putting PTO funds into technology during the 2-year pilot. c) History with NPS IT is problematic, telling schools they "need" equipment but can't pay for it.

A: There are actually still tech gaps--especially with laptop carts--at the renovated/new schools;

A: More nuanced, helpful tech letters from NPS IT will be forthcoming (e.g., will distinguish aging equipment).

A: There is also a conversation we could have about flexibility - could schools bank funds year over year or split cost of (e.g., a cart) with NPS?

Q: Any dialogue with schools re: fundraising practices? Can we share best practices to help with fundraising overall?

A: Yes, working group is discussing.

Q: Working Group is standalone or part of PTOC?

A: Working Group is not part of PTOC. It's a subcommittee of the Equity Committee which is chartered by the School Committee.

-BREAK-

Open Discussion/New Business

Just Think! Expo

Sally Brickell distributed a flyer for NNHS PTO's event on January 8th Just Think! Expo for middle and high school students and their parents/guardians.

Speaker Initiative

Teri Ginsburg reported back that David Fleishman does not need speaker funds for this year's Superintendent's Forum. Reminder that Council approved \$3,000 from reserves to be spent on district-wide parent education/speaker.

If any PTOs are currently working on speaker ideas and need funds, want to collaborate with other PTOs or are interested in forming group to explore speaking opportunities, contact Teri (brownppto@brownpto.org)

Ruth Goldman mentions that there may be speaker topics/ideas coming from the 12/1 Family Conference that could be leveraged. Contact the Superintendent.

Idea: Debbie Irving, local author on white privilege – book *Waking Up White*.

Point was made that there's not a lot of history on speakers within current PTOs. What works? Who is good? Teri will send out bullet points.

Future PTO Council meeting topics

If you have ideas of topics you would like to cover, please contact Christine (co-presidents@newtonptocouncil.org)

Resumed Equity Guidelines Discussion

Comment: Smaller schools might have to dedicate more \$ to CASC because they don't have economies of scale (smaller auditoriums = more performances). Please look at per capita CASC spending.

Q: How do we email the Working Group?

A: Send email to PTO Council Co-Presidents they will forward.

Update: WG direct email is equityworkinggroup@newton.k12.ma.us

Q: Mixed message from NPS IT re: what is new technology standard. Annual letter is not clear.

A: Working with new interim head of IT. The letter is actually sent to each Principal. Conversation should be between Principal and NPS IT, not between PTOs and IT department. There has been much transition in IT department. All agree that communications need to be better.

Q: How can we communicate this information to our parents? We may be taking away all the “greatest things” about the schools. I am not qualified to lead this discussion.

A: Info sessions will help PTO leaders discuss with parents. We will have a presentation deck + handout. Jen, Christine & Emily will visit schools and support the discussions.

Q: How do we raise issues mid-pilot?

A: Through the Equity Committee – need system of feedback – more to come on that.

Q: Will PTOs be required to cut from non-equity to fully fund equity?

A: No.

Additional Comments:

- Parents can believe in equity & excellence. But regarding the pooled funds idea, parents trust their individual PTOs (whose members they know personally).
- There is lots of info available on the new equity policy, guidelines, Working Group – it’s everywhere. But how do we deal with low info/busy parents and the inevitable questions & concerns that bubble up at end of any process. How to deal when it’s concrete?
- Do we even have to accept this policy/guideline?
- The key is to achieve equity on educational materials + technology that students receive.
- Concern raised that current interim head of IT is NPS’ 2nd interim in leadership of IT function in as many years.