

PTO Council Meeting Minutes for November 9, 2011

In Attendance:

Marcia Tabenken	President	PTOC BOARD
Alicia Bowman	Secretary	PTOC BOARD
Lori Knowles	Buildings & Facilities	PTOC BOARD
Sue Flicop	Health & Safety	PTOC BOARD
Bree Lucas	METCO	PTOC BOARD
Susan Cable	Angier	PTO President
Ted Vahey	Burr	PTO President
Jen Abbott	Cabot	PTO President
Marcel Lachenmann	Countryside	PTO Communications Co-Chair
May Chiu	Mason-Rice	PTO President
Julia Hamilton	Mason-Rice	PTO President
Sunwoo Kahng	Mason-Rice	PTO President
Heather Maffie	Peirce	PTO President
Laura Davis	Underwood	PTO President
Maria Sullivan	Ward	PTO President
Laurie Gershkowitz	Bigelow	PTO President
Rebeca Craig	Day	PTO President
Bruce Henderson	Oak Hill	PTO President

Also joined by:

David Fleishman, NPS, Superintendent of Schools

Ann Koufman-Frederick, NPS, Deputy Superintendent for Teaching and Learning

Introduction

David Fleishman:

- End of 1st quarter
- Mayor has announced a comprehensive capital building plan, including Angier being renovated or rebuilt by 2016.

- *More details on the Capital Improvement Plan can be found at:*
<http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/Exec/documents/FY2013-17%20Captial%20Improvement%20Plan%20%20%2011-7-11.pdf>)
- *The most recent Mayors Newsletter might also be of interest as it includes information not only on the CIP but also the new teachers' contract and financial forecast.*
http://campaign.r20.constantcontact.com/render?llr=itqoyagab&v=001T6gkBtjSWrNi_G79IX0tNJIHKFkkXFI6iQpskvxReAA3sj5MLVKqzNeV6Q9t1bIN37Ff55MLBPofMSMTFqMXdTC-S3tdCeUudZ0sz7tA_bY%3D

- Communication is a hot topic for every school community. No one does it well enough. Newton Public Schools does not have a centralized communications person. It would be nice but there are other priorities.
- The need for faster communication is there. A letter at the end of the day is often too late, especially with our students' access to cell phones for texting and spreading information. But administrators need to make certain what is communicated is correct and it takes time to get the facts straight. This is a challenge to be out in front of the instant communication if we are waiting for the facts.
- Instant communication is more expected. Parents and students expect information to be accessible from anywhere.
- You can never communicate the message enough. repeat, repeat, repeat
- Parent Portal is also another hot topic, area of development for Newton. Some question how much parents should know and whether this level of information may be inviting more helicopter parenting.

Ann Koufman-Frederick:

- NPS is working on some important communication initiatives
- Parent Portal (Parent Connect) has been tested at Williams, Brown & South – features: single log on. Attendance and progress reports. Alerts can be added. Other tools available and will be explored.
- Another communication challenge being addressed is blended learning. Blended learning is both face to face and virtual instruction. 24/7 access can lead to communication overload. Teachers and students will need to manage the environment to ensure productivity. This will be a culture shift for teachers and parents, but not necessarily for students as they are already working in this world.
- Pieces in Learning is the information platform that supports blended learning. It will house curriculum developed either here in Newton or elsewhere and other subscriptions

Comments

- *Previous student rep to School Committee?? expressed concern about parent portal undermining student taking on responsibility/accountability*
- *Will parents have ability to contribute to content on the Parent Portal? Most content belongs to NPS. Principals may have blogging capability. Each will need to decide. Focus is on learning not social.*
- *I use a Portal at my son's school (not NPS). It is mostly one way. I can view assignments, sign up for sports reminders, look at class schedules. I find it essential to effectively managing multiple childrens' schedules.*
- *Who will manage content on portal? How will this work? Will it be more up-to-date than school websites? Newer teachers are already working in this realm. It is a different way of operating than some teachers are used to. It will require a culture shift for some.*
- *During recent crisis training with principals, crisis team encouraged more immediate response during crisis, What are the appropriate parent expectations when there is an emergency? It is critical that all communication from school administrators must report accurate information even if it is not as timely as parents want.*
- *Burr has made a distinction in communication. Serious communication goes via connect ed. All other school, PTO communication goes through the PTO email system.*
- *There is no ability to update connect ed/first class email addressed mid-year. Must rely on PTO list to ensure correct addresses are being used.*
- *Will Parent Portal be consistent across the schools? Yes it needs to be the same at the same grade levels. Otherwise it would be too difficult to maintain. Decisions need to be made even if there isn't complete consensus.*

Review of Communication Survey

- Strong communication is critical to keeping parents informed, building volunteer base and fostering a sense of community.
- 21 of the 22 schools responded to the survey sent out last month. Findings include:
 - Electronic communication is the majority of communications. Some schools still provide select parents paper communications if no access to computer.
 - Most schools do little to no translation of PTO information
 - Most principals do not review PTO communications prior to them being sent
 - 50% of PTO presidents meet with their principal every other week. Most of the remaining 50% meet less frequently.

- Websites updated multiple times a week to every 2 weeks.
- 2/3 of the schools collect feedback on the PTO communication tools
- See attached **PTO COMMUNICATIONS** powerpoint for more detail on findings. See **PTOC COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY SUMMARY** for detail on data.
- Challenges >>> *Points to Discuss*
 - What are the right tools? >>> *Using social media tools*
 - How much information and how often? >>> *Customizing communication flow, how much, how often, opt-in, opt-out*
 - How do we streamline all the information? >>>*Cross coordinating information resources*

Comments

- *Facebook was used at Burr– needed someone for maintenance and moderation; issues arose as there were differences in opinions on what is proper. Eventually deleted.*
- *Underwood translates the newsletter into Chinese (and other?)*
- *ELL staff at Cabot will discuss upcoming events with ELL families to make sure the information is communicated*
- *Mason-Rice has a Google translator on the website; Have been testing with several ELL families. Seems to be working pretty well. Google translator is a free service.*
- *Countryside has Facebook, gets permission for photos*
- *Younger parents are more tuned into Facebook than email, check Facebook more frequently than email.*
- *Burr doing a Facebook page by year. More relevant information as it is grade specific. One person per grade is managing.*
- *Why facebook?*
- *Day converting website to simpler format.*
- *Oak Hill, Memorial Spalding, Zervas, Bowen Bigelow all use the same system. Updates are made to website as pertinent information is received, Mail chimp finds updates by category and sends out per schedule. Notices from the principal go out daily, PTO notices weekly and community notices go out every other week. This eliminates the need to have someone compile the emails and then remember to send out. Notices are sent out via Word Press If you would like to get a sample of the emails that comes from this process, email info@oakhillpto.org to have a recent notice sent to you.*

- *Would be great to have a single version of community notices by school level (elementary, middle school, high school). This would eliminate a great deal of work.*

Crisis

- What is a crisis? Unpredictable event and overwhelming. Building related, death, weather related
- Newton is well prepared. There is a Citywide Emergency Response Team.. There is also a small school based Emergency Response Team. The school based ERT meets once a month. It includes the city nurse, Riverside Community Health, Newton Police Department Newton Fire Department, NPS psychologist.
- Looking to create school safety teams, focused on making certain staff and children with special needs are accommodated/planned for in case of an emergency during school. Likely will be headed by Principal.
- PTO Goals in a crisis
 - Provide support to families
 - Reduce short and long term consequence for the school community
 - Keep things as normal as possible for the children
- Role of Co-Chairs
 - Provide basic creature comfort support
 - Follow lead of Principal
 - Provide consistency, same support to different families,
 - Be flexible and stay calm
- What to do if there is a crisis?
 - Contact the principal and determine what help is need (should have cell phone numbers)
 - Communicate with the school safety team and the community as needed
 - Contact Marcia or Sue
 - Use the PTO Council list serve to ask questions
- Tips
 - Know your evacuation site of the school. Add it to your school directory
 - Create a budget line for crisis use

- Have a list of friendly community “donators”
 - Have list of parent who can help in emergency situations
 - Regarding needs for a specific family, approach a close family friend who can relay the family’s wishes to others
 - Review emergency procedures specific to your school with your principal
 - Keep away from offers of financial support to families; it might be difficult to do for another family
 - Put Sue’s cell phone number **617-935-1727** in your phone as she has access to contacts in case your principal is unavailable.
- Refer to the attached document on **Crisis Response and Safety Team Training** for additional information

Comments

Recent graffiti event at Cabot handled well.

Upcoming meetings & dates

- Next meeting Wednesday, December 14th. Discussing equity and PTO by-laws.