

**PTO Council Meeting  
February 7, 2017  
7:30 pm - regular meeting  
Education Center, Room 210**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Attendees:**

**Executive Board**

Executive Board  
Betsy Blagdon, Co-President  
Emily Prenner, Co-President  
Jen Abbott\*, Equity Representative,  
Maureen Oates, Elementary Rep.  
Caroline Wilson, Website Manager  
Karen Manning, Ex-Officio  
Doreen Rachal, Health&Safety  
Monica Yancey, METCO  
Jo-Louise Allen, SPED-PAC

\* Also in attendance as school PTO Co-President

**Other Attendees:**

David Fleishman, Superintendent

**PTO Presidents by School:**

Jessica Rhein, Angier  
Christine Dutt, Burr  
Liz Flaig, Countryside  
Dana Hanson, Day  
Lindsay Pike, Day  
Karen Hite, Lincoln Eliot  
Joanna Mitri, Memorial Spaulding  
Marie Yunis, Memorial Spaulding

Tamara Bond, NECP  
Matthew Miller, Oak Hill  
Suzanne Demeo, Peirce  
Lisa Schwarzberg, Ward

## **Next Meeting Date**

April 3, 2017

## **Introductions ~ All**

## **Approval of the Minutes**

The PTO Council Minutes from meetings on October 4, 2016 and December 6, 2016 have been distributed electronically for review. Betsy Blagdon opened the floor to any discussion or requests for revision. With none requested, she asked for a motion to approve the Minutes as written. Marcia Yancy made the motion to approve and Karen Manning seconded. The Minutes were approved unanimously.

## **Financial Report**

Betsy, as acting Treasurer, reminded the group that the budget had also been electronically distributed. There were no questions or comments from the group on the budget. She asked for a volunteer to perform a review of bank statements and other financial paperwork as a non-signatory auditor of the books. **????** volunteered to look them over and approve by signing each document.

## **Superintendent's Remarks ~ Dr. David Fleishman**

Welcome. We might have to call a snow day on Thursday if the forecast holds up but it's too soon to call. Like to thank the PTO's for monetary support in these times of NPS financial freeze. There is a spending freeze in the district because of the budget deficit. The deficit is shrinking but even so, only essential items are being approved for the rest of 2016-17. In addition, we expect 2017-18 budget to be very tight and some tough choices will be made. Factors contributing to this include limitations of Prop 2 ½ and the rising transportation costs (22%).

There are several Principal searches drawing to a close, including eight finalists. The meetings with finalists at Day may have to be rescheduled if there are any weather closings this week or next. We hope to be able to announce our new Principals by the end of February Break.

Please spread the word about the March 22<sup>nd</sup> forum geared for K-5 parents about how and why to talk to your children about race. It will be held at Angier and led by Mike Feldstein and Maricel Sheets. The District is hoping this will be as successful as Responsive Home which helped bring the valuable work of Responsive Classrooms into people's homes.

Q: Can the talk be videotaped for wider distribution/viewing by those who cannot get there?

A: No, we thought about this and decided that because we hope to hear comments and questions from parents and guardians in an interactive format, we don't want to inhibit anyone from speaking up, feeling comfortable.

Q: Is leadership having a hard time still due to the election?

A: There have continued to be incidents of intolerance against both supporters of Trump and those who protest him. There is fear on both sides of many of the issues of current events. Principal Turner at North wrote a letter to families encouraging good and tolerant behavior.

Q: What effect do you think the appointment of Betty DeVos will have on our district and our children's education?

A: Not much really. Education gets only 3% of the Federal budget. The role is more of providing a bully pulpit and not much else. Overall, education is low on the agenda. We only get a very low dollar amount of Federal support, Congress controls the purse strings. State funding is the bulk of public education and therefore, the state budget is more important to watch.

Q: Is there staff support for dealing with the racial intolerance and other post-elections issues?

A: The good news is that kids are becoming more engaged and interested in current events. Staff is trying to keep information developmentally appropriate and to support all students without taking a position. It gives teachers an opportunity to teach students about studying facts, finding good material, verifying facts, etc. Determine real from fake news.

Q: Can educators say that there are inaccuracies (such as false claims made by the President)?

A: The approach is to have the kids read reputable sources and draw their own conclusions.

Comment: Turbulent events such as the recent campaigns and elections can provide a chance for learning about respecting differences and even respectful disagreement.

Comment: Turner's letter was very helpful and it noted specifics and provided a needed transparency.

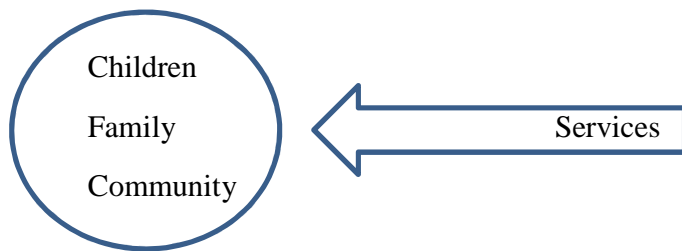
Joe-Louise Allen introduced our speaker...

### **Student Services Presentation ~ Karen Shmukler, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services**

Karen Shmukler is Newton Public Schools' Assistant Superintendent for Student Services.

She started in Newton last July after being hired away from Brookline School Department where she worked for 11 years. She is South African and trained as a clinical psychologist. In the 1990's Karen worked in the Department of Mental Health where she worked on reintegrating kids into their homes and public schools. Getting them out of restrictive institutions/hospitals and back home. From there she went into the educational part of this work.

Services, be they general ed or special ed, should wrap around the kid instead of vice versa. Look for and implement non-categorical solutions.



Karen presented several detailed slides and elaborated on the many facets and functions of Student Services, including:

- Guidance (both college/career guidance and counseling services)
- Special education
- Home/Hospital instruction
- Homeless and Foster Care populations
- Counseling and clinical services
- Health and Wellness (both School Health and Public Health)
- Stabilization Program
- Springboard
- General education
- Transition Planning Program
- Post Graduate opportunity

Karen mentioned that the percentage of Newton students on an IEP is 19.5% of the student population, higher than the state percentage of 17.2%.

Q: How can PTO's support and help Karen and the Student Services Department?

A: Memorial Spaulding had an Inclusion Night which was very successful.

A: Karen encourages PTO's and the PAC liaisons to forge a strong partnership and to engage the entire school community. Sharing resources and training is valuable. Spread to parent community that the NPS website has comprehensive descriptions of programs and services here:

<http://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Domain/108>

A: PAC liaison position at each school should be filled and the person in the role should be a member of the PTO Board. This will increase two-way communication within each school. The person doesn't have to have a child receiving services, although most are. See [NewtonPAC.org](http://NewtonPAC.org). The annual award dinner in June is a good chance to hear about the organization and celebrate its work.

Q: Why is Newton's IEP percentage higher than the state average?

A: Karen is not sure but maybe because we have the great resources, people are coming here to utilize them.

Q: What about Middle and High School programming? How were they started and what is the long-term plan?

A: The SPARK program at Brown was started by parents in collaboration with Aspire. It's known that kids do better when they can be in the school environment. There are specialized cohorts at the Elementary level and long-range growth in the ABA program. Training requirements for Special Education personnel do differ depending on the grade level.

## **Equity Presentation ~ Jen Abbott, Equity Chair**

Jen has been meeting with Eileen Keane, the new IT person at NPS. NPS is working on a technology inventory, and they understand the burden is on the school system to provide the technology for the students, since it's so much a part of curriculum. Eileen has send a letter to principals to share with their PTOs with the latest technology priorities. Grades 3 through 4 are up to date, and they are working to identify the next priority with the highest need. The updated standards may be scaled back from the current ones. Equity spreadsheets should go to PTO Treasurers soon.

Adjourned 9:02PM