

**Newton PTO Council
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 10, 2019 @ 7:30pm
Newton Ed Center, Room 210**

Attendees

Chip Franklin (Angier)	Michelle Spitzkoff (Memorial Spaulding)
Allison Behr (Bowen)	Valerie Pontiff (Newton North)
Sarah Healy (Brown)	Kerry Prasad (NPS Equity Committee/Countryside)
Spencer Poole (Burr)	Caroline Wilson (NPS Equity Committee/Website Manager)
Agnes Pietryzk (Cabot)	Valerie Davison (Peirce/Nominating Committee)
Jennifer Bentley (Day)	Karen Hite (PTOC Co-President)
Maureen Oates (Elementary Schools Rep)	Will Adams (PTOC Co-President/Brown)
Christine Dutt (Equity Rep/Nominating Committee/Ex Officio)	Jenn Martin (Secretary)
Jen Abbott (Ex-Officio)	Lisa DePalma (SEPAC Liaison)
Megan Reilly (Franklin)	Lindsay Pike (Treasurer)
David Proia (Lincoln-Eliot)	Anne Marie Gravel (Underwood)
Lauren McMinn (Lincoln-Eliot)	Jennifer Tsuda (Underwood)
Leslie Ziarko Valera (Mason-Rice)	William Kenneally (Ward)
Liz Bouvier (Mason-Rice)	Sofia Hamula (Williams)
Lucy Mermagen (Mason-Rice)	Omer Mendelson (Williams)
Erika Guerra Downey (Memorial Spaulding)	

Introductions

Meeting called to order at 7:30 p.m. Ice Breaker: your favorite way to show appreciation of teachers.

Superintendent's Remarks

Superintendent David Fleishman (DF), introductions and moderator for session.

Khita Pottinger-Johnson (KPJ), Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education. Her background is as a social worker and she most recently served as the director for social emotional learning instruction and support services for the Boston Public Schools, and previously served as a principal.

Elizabeth "Beth" Fitzmaurice (EF), Assistant Superintendent for Student Services. Head of student services at a few school districts, head of education collaborative in Worcester. Currently working to complete her doctorate at Boston College.

KPJ: Likes to spend time in the schools. She's at 1-2 schools a day, for a total of 5-8 schools a week. She serves as a coach and mentor to support school leaders, supports the district's assistant principals, and supports Title 1 programs and supplemental services in schools to ensure access for students and families. Her philosophy is that collaboration should bring in the resources needed so students have a robust experience. She is liaison to the after school programs and partners with human resources around programs for interns. She also works on the student assignment process.

EF: Oversees all things student services and special education programming (pre-K to age 22). Works with guidance and school counselors on different supports for students and the teams in place for social emotional and mental health. She collaborates with the City of Newton on nursing for all schools. Spends bulk of time working with principals and school leaders around building up robust supports for all children to bolster their education. She works with families and with SEPAC.

DF: Beth and Khita will share with principals in January on what they have learned on the job so far.

EF: So far has learned that every staff member has an unwavering commitment to student success. School leaders and personnel are very dedicated to families as true partners in education. School personnel are really invested in celebrating student voice, student decision-making, and student advocacy.

KJP: Newton has a highly diverse and talented student body which contributes to an experience for students that mirrors what they will be exposed to in the real world. Students have talent and leadership capacity.

Faculty and staff are highly committed and have a growth mindset orientation in their work. Educators are willing to collaborate, to learn, to try and to think new things. She is in awe of the commitment of parents.

DF: Discuss a couple of goals that you will take on.

KJP: The Newton Public Schools goal of Excellence – primed to continue that work collaboratively. All teacher leaders and central office staff get together regularly for continued learning. Khita and Beth bring the expertise to facilitate the sessions with a focus on universal design to ensure that all students have access.

EF: Deeply committed and philosophically aligned with universal design. Looking for where her contribution fits into the already abundant talent. She is connecting with professionals who are working to build foundational tier supports for all learners within schools. She is interested in furthering staff and student wellness, including student mental health, making sure that students have a voice in helping themselves. Looking beyond SEL and mental wellness – where do our academics fit into that to make sure it is an integrated connection of all types of learning, including student growth and development.

PTOC Question: Why doesn't Newton have a gifted and talented program?

DF: In Massachusetts many districts do not have such a program; Newton had a program 30 years ago and then ended it. In Newton's environment of inclusion, NPS wants to figure out how to dedicate resources to all children. Making decisions early about who is "gifted" is tricky; early identification is a concern for "late bloomers". NPS tries to keep classes heterogeneously grouped as late as possible, with a focus on differentiation among literacy and writing, and making challenge work available.

EF: The MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recently reported on gifted and talented programs. Newton focuses on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and targeted supports and opportunities in lots of different ways, including integrating Social Emotional Learning in with academics.

KJP: She worked in a school district that piloted using the gifted and talented approach for all learners, assuming that everyone had the capacity if access was created. The results challenged educators to shift their mindset as to what students are capable of.

PTOC Question: How is UDL operationalized? How is outdoor movement integrated into learning?

EF: Leaders in each building make the decisions on how to operationalize UDL within their buildings.

KJP: UDL means multiple means of representation of learning: verbal, visual, kinesthetic, tactile. UDL works to give people the permission to see what others are doing and take that along to their classrooms.

KJP: Newton has a focus on getting kids moving, including students reading on the floor, on their fidget chairs, allowing students to be who they are in their settings.

PTOC Question: Vision for inclusive education can be controversial.

DF: A big difference between NPS and other school districts is the culture of inclusiveness. NPS talks about inclusiveness rather than Special Education since the range of diversity extends beyond Special Education. The job of NPS is to meet the needs of kids in different ways and, as much as possible in the general education environment, in a range of ways. Inclusion is also about being culturally responsive and welcoming and inclusive for all.

EF: All means all; that spirit and philosophy is alive and well among staff and the student body. She experiences this as an individual as students greet and welcome her and each other, which speaks to the culture and spirit of the inclusive spirit that is set by the leadership team and NPS staff.

PTOC Question: What can we do more of as PTOs to support inclusiveness?

DF: PTOs can share accurate information about inclusion and co-teaching, and correct misinformation about how resources are used. PTOs can support schools and staff after challenging incidents.

PTOC Question: How to talk about ugly bullying incidents isn't as pervasive a classroom discussion as it needs to be.

DF: The responsive classroom model is designed to address how to have a respectful culture.

KJP: Adult intervention is needed when emotions are high; kids need to feel safe to tell an adult who can help them navigate the situation. Restorative practices model the skill of having that conversation: How did the situation make me feel, putting a child in the position of the other person while effectively communicating at the same time. NPS trains staff to work with students when this type of situation arises.

Minutes from Oct 2019 Meeting.

Motion to approve minutes, Chip Franklin
Second Jen Abbott. Approved.

Media Request Reminder

Will and Karen: The Boston Globe has expanded its coverage of Newton through a partnership with Boston University. The BU journalism students have been reaching out to PTO leaders. Some reminders:

- Make sure you aren't answering for another school.
- Forward questions to PTOC Co-Presidents or other PTO leaders if you aren't comfortable answering a question.
- These are journalism students; sometimes it is difficult to understand their objective and they may be making some assumptions without having done much background research.
- Respond in your own time.
- Their email addresses are Boston Globe.
- There is a page called "Speaking with Reporters" on the PTOC website.
- Be sure you understand on record, off the record, and on background.
- It's okay to speak on behalf of the PTO if the PTO has voted on that particular issue.
- Follow the same set of guidelines with other reporters, such as Newton High School students.

PTOC sponsorship of city-wide events.

PTOC has up to a \$2,000 allocation for city-wide events. Horace Mann is interested in having PTOC sponsor a showing of Screenagers at NNHS. The \$1000 provided by the PTOC would help cover fees and publicity. Peirce, Horace Mann, Lincoln-Eliot would host the mid-January event and it would be open to all Newton families. The Horace Mann principal will moderate. Valerie Pontiff mentioned that NNHS may be able to have this count as their second showing and will reach out to Screenagers. Patti McCabe recommends hosting a panel of speakers after the event, like NNHS/NSHS did last year; currently the Horace Mann principal has agreed to moderate the session.

Teri Ginsberg has met with representatives from FORJ, SEPAC and METCO about opportunities; all three are considering options. Also mentioned was publicity (\$300-\$500) to the "Just Think: Students Making Smart Choices" expo at Newton North. Other ideas? If so, reach out to Will and Karen. Make sure they are city-wide

Miscellaneous

- **Newton Community Education Board Appointments:** Jennifer Bentley and Kartikey Trivedi. Appointments were made.
- **Updated Bylaws are in progress.**
- **OurNewton.org** – Suggestion from Valerie Pontiff to put their logo at the bottom of their communications.

- **Online Records.** Suggestion from Valerie Davisson to add elected slates for June meetings going back to 2012.

Kerry Prasad. PTO ELL Committee

The most common languages of Newton's ELL program are: Mandarin, Cantonese, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Korean, Hebrew, and Japanese.

Official documents are translated by NPS translators, i.e. Report cards, progress reports, IEPs Health Information is translated by the city (DHHS). Like flu vaccination flyers.

The ELL Committee is a PTO program started at Countryside and brought up to Brown.

PTOs have three missions – community building, communication between school and parents, and fundraising for enrichment events.

At Countryside, the mission of the PTO ELL Committee is to improve communications between Countryside School and ELL families, and to smooth the transition of the family to a new and unfamiliar American school culture.

For Brown Middle School, the PTO ELL Committee maintains a list of Cultural Leaders available to all parents and staff in school. Current Cultural Leaders are Russian, Turkish, Taiwanese, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, Hebrew, Cantonese, and Arabic-speaking.

Who is on the Committee?

ELL Teachers

ELL Committee Chair (parent volunteer)

- Liaison between PTO and ELL teachers and families
- Attends PTO meetings to represent ELL families
- Keep cultural leaders abreast of PTO happenings

ELL Cultural Leaders for each language/culture, who are *not* just translators. They are “on call” for teachers and families, and help explain things, calm academic fears, and serve the role of a big buddy program for the parents. This can be done in person, in writing, and by phone.

How does it work: Formal translations.

Privacy concerns so can't email the actual students and need to work through the ELL teachers.

Example. PTO Committee Chair knows about the PTO Picnic. Passes the flyer on to the ELL Cultural Leader for written translation in Google docs. Goes back to Committee Chair. The Committee Chair gives the translation to ELL teachers, who then send it to ELL families.

How does it work: Creating connections

ELL events have fun family participation. Example: Friends-giving at Brown had 90 people attend; teachers bring side dishes.

SEPAC. Lisa DePalma – SEPAC works exactly the same way. Great model that is happening in other groups. Lots of schools invite the SEPAC liaison for a given school to the PTO Board meeting to have that voice. Similar to having the voice of other cultures.

METCO Jen Abbott – outreach to METCO families needs the same model.

Break Out sessions cancelled.

Meeting adjourned at 9:02 p.m.