

Newton PTO Council
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, February 4, 2020 @ 7:30pm
Newton Ed Center, Room 210

Attendees

Karen Hite (PTOC Co-President)	Leslie Ziarko Valera (Mason-Rice)
Will Adams (PTOC Co-President/Brown)	Erika Guerra Downey (Memorial Spaulding)
Allison Behr (Bowen)	Katy Karon (Memorial Spaulding)
Michelle Tsay (Bowen)	Michelle Spitzkoff (Memorial Spaulding)
Sarah Healy (Brown)	Patty McCabe (Newton North)
Teri Ginsburg (Brown/Social & Emotional Wellness)	Valerie Pontiff (Newton North)
Spencer Poole (Burr)	Caroline Wilson (NPS Equity Committee/Website)
Michele Morris (Cabot)	Elsa Janairo (Peirce)
Maureen Oates (Elementary Schools Rep)	Jenn Martin (Zervas/Secretary)
Christine Dutt (Equity Rep/Nominating Committee/Ex Officio)	Anne Marie Gravel (Underwood)
Lauren McMinn (Lincoln-Eliot)	Jennifer Tsuda (Underwood)
	Sofia Hamula (Williams)

Introductions

Meeting called to order at 7:35 p.m. Ice Breaker: your favorite teacher and why.

Superintendent's Remarks

Superintendent David Fleishman (DF) & School Committee Member Matthew Miller (MM)

Enrollment

DF: The Enrollment Analysis Report was presented at the January 27 School Committee meeting. There are big cohorts currently moving through 5th and 6th grades and eventually on through high schools, at which point we will see a drop in elementary for the foreseeable future. The birth rate is dropping across the country and there aren't as many children in metropolitan areas (per Boston Globe). Next year Ward and Underwood will each be down to twelve sections. When there are only two sections per grade it makes it difficult to mix peer groups and maintain a focus on social emotional learning. Newton still wants to be sure we have enough school capacity, that schools are accessible, and that schools aren't falling down. At the middle schools, Oak Hill is getting an addition at the same time Day enrollment will drop by 100 students in the next five years.

PTOC Member: How do you predict transfers from other districts, such as those who come for a few years?

DF: We look at cohort survival ratio by grade, which is the number of students who stay from one year to the next. From Kindergarten to 1st grade, that number is 1.00 or higher in Newton. NPS also looks at the history of the private school population. Recent research shows that as immigration slows, we may see a further drop in Newton. "In-migration" is families who move to Newton after their children are born; in Newton a factor in in-migration is immigration from other countries.

PTOC Member: The current political climate may also mean immigrants will stay longer rather than leave the United States.

PTOC Member: What are the trends in high school enrollment?

DF: Newton North observed more students arriving in sophomore year and Newton South was over projection which is really unusual. One year is not enough to call it a trend.

High School Start Time

MM: Changing high school start time significantly changes schedules for all grade levels, including the 13,000 students and families, and 2,500 NPS staff members. School start time also impacts the teacher contract. Changes may become divisive and there needs to be a continued public engagement process around any changes.

PTOC Member: Regarding the high school schedule changes, the winners seem to be the learners who are having trouble. Everyone else is losing with longer blocks and less learning time. The teacher's union shouldn't need to negotiate for teachers to work less; the process seems mismanaged. Meanwhile test scores are plummeting.

MM: There are people whose opinions fall on both sides. Faculty, staff and administration are working on the contract piece. There will be a very large community-wide communication effort that will include PTOs, parents, and multiple surveys.

DF: We do have to renegotiate contractually. Test scores are not plummeting. NPS needs to support the social-emotional needs of its students. Fewer classes in a day leads to less homework and fewer tests in a day. In student surveys, homework ranks high as a stressor.

DF: Moving high schools to start later means elementary schools will start earlier, which will be divisive.

MM: This is especially a concern for Boston families.

PTOC Member: What about having all the schools start at same time?

DF: Issue with sustainability and traffic. Feedback on the options has been more negative for most elementary parents because of early bussing time. Elementary school students may be waiting for the bus in the dark, and will get out earlier in the day.

PTOC Member: Brookline did it and it worked.

DF: Brookline didn't have school buses. With tiered bussing it doesn't work; in Newton the same bus does multiple routes in the morning and in the afternoon.

PTOC Member: What about the tweaked high school schedule?

DF: We are working to see if the new high school schedule will work. It moves social emotional time into the middle of the day instead of having it at the end of the day; having check-ins available with teachers mid-day will be helpful to many students.

PTOC Member: Will there still be early release days? The cost for working parents of after school care is high.

DF: Premature to know that level of details at this point.

MM: Love Tuesdays because of the professional hours for teachers and how much they can accomplish, but hate them as a parent because of the childcare concerns. How can we have the same set-up without parents having to pay for childcare? One way forward is to have a unified childcare system across Newton instead of the 15 different systems we currently have.

DF: Full-Day Kindergarten is a step forward.

Green Newton School Connections

Joana Canedo, Chair of GN School Connections

Waneta Trabert, Sustainable Materials Management Director for Newton Department of Public Works

Matthew Miller, School Committee member on School Sustainability Working Group

Timeline

- School Connections group was formed in 2017 as a branch of Green Newton that specifically works with schools.
- School Sustainability Working Group was formed in 2019 with representatives from the City of Newton, Green Newton, NPS, and the School Committee.
- Recycling policy developed for schools (School Committee Meeting May 13, 2019)
- Newton City Council approves the Climate Action Plan (November 18, 2019)
- The School Sustainability Working Group (SSWG) presents update at the January 13, 2020 School Committee meeting. See attached slides.
- School Connections presently has representatives (combination of parents, staff, students and teachers) from eleven different Newton Schools (Angier, Countryside, Mason Rice, Peirce, Underwood, Williams, Zervas, Bigelow, Brown, Newton North, Newton South) with a goal to share resources and experiences to help each other with sustainability. The hope is to institutionalize sustainability in NPS in a way that is not reliant on a handful of volunteers.

Primary focuses are waste management, energy, and transportation.

School Connections is here tonight to ask PTOs to collaborate. Their goal is to have representatives from ALL schools, and for schools to have recycling systems, green teams, and parents, students and staff who are engaged with sustainability. At the very least, identify a volunteer who is willing to receive the GN School Connections emails. There is no optimal model – at some schools the effort is staff and students, at others primarily parent volunteers. You can reach Joana Canedo for more information at

schoolconnections@greennewton.org. Next meeting is Thursday, February 13 at 3:45 p.m. on the 3rd floor of Newton Free Library.

Waneta Trabert, the Sustainable Materials Management Director at Newton's Department of Public Works, is helping lots of schools to improve their recycling efforts and initiate composting and food waste recovery. So far the effort is focused on schools who approach Waneta, who then works with them to create a systematic way to set the system up for success and not rely on volunteer effort. It's really important to engage and get buy-in from custodial staff. She can be reached at 617.796.1491 or wtrabert@newtonma.gov.

Composting/Food Waste Recovery (Waneta Trabert) Successfully implemented off-site composting at two elementary schools beginning in January 2019. The next school to launch is Mason Rice after February break. Now in discussion with adding it at Newton North at the start of next school year (no guarantee that it will happen). Oak Hill has reached out for on-site composting for their garden club; some other schools compost on-site as well.

Textile Bins (Waneta Trabert) NPS has recently contracted with a company that will collect textiles. The bins will be at a specific location at each school. Some revenue will be collected from the sale of the textiles, which will pay for someone to actually help out at each school. Liam Hurley will reach out to principals and then reach out to PTOs to make sure they know about the bins and how to use them. Lesson learned from PTOs from solar panels at Brown – always communicate with the PTOs. There will be plenty of time to raise concerns about bin placement and for feedback. The company will be fully responsible for the bins; the custodial staff will not have responsibilities with them.

Recycling (Waneta Trabert) Every school has now been assessed for recycling; NPS is in much better shape for recycling than many districts. For at least the last ten years all schools have had recycling infrastructure outside the school; focus now is on what is done inside the schools. The biggest problem is education. DPW is paying attention to schools who reach out to Waneta. Even if a school doesn't want the full, holistic approach, DPW can give signs. This year we have focused on improving recycling at Newton North. In discussion at NSHS to improve recycling there. Bigelow reached out recently as well.

Parents and students, especially at the secondary schools, are disheartened by seeing recycling bins emptied into the trash. There is misunderstanding/miscommunication about why this is happening. It is primarily due to contamination and there is need for volunteers to improve recycling education at each school. Waneta has uniform signage to distribute and best practices, i.e. paired bins. Every trash can should have a recycling bin next to it, except in the restrooms.

A PTOC member expressed concern that at high schools custodians say they can lump all the bins together because their contract doesn't require them to recycle. Waneta's reply is that through the work with School Connections, we understand the breadth of the issue and have focused on engaged parents and staff working with custodians to gain a buy-in with individual custodians, rather than forcing their hand. It's difficult to prioritize recycling in a union contract. So far the experience has been that custodians want to participate.

Water bottle refilling stations (Matthew Miller) PTOC Member – request to add a water bottle filling station near the cafeteria door at Newton North. School Committee Matthew Miller – PTOs have been funding water bottle filling stations at elementary schools, but this really needs to be a priority at all schools. The goal is first to replace existing fountains with the water bottle refilling stations, and then to think about placement of new stations. For placement of new stations, students should be involved. Currently PTOs pay for the fountains and NPS pays for the installation. PTOC member – custodians are not allowed to replace filters; they have to call someone from the City who will replace them.

Newton Power Choice Ann Berwick, Directory of Sustainability for Newton, passed on a request to PTOC that Newton would like more families to opt up to 100% renewable energy with Newton Power Choice.

Food Service Update (Matthew Miller)

Matthew Miller chairs the Food Service Advisory Group, which has representatives from each school, meets monthly, and advises Whitson's. This summer they ushered in Whitson's and are now focused on the continuity for next year and how to start communicating. If a parent or student reaches out with a concern,

direct them to the feedback form on the NPS Food Service website:

<https://www.newton.k12.ma.us/Page/799>. The current main concern with Whitson's is staffing; this is a problem in other districts as well. It's a hard market to hire people into, but also ultimately Whitson's contractual obligation. FSAG is thinking about writing a letter.

School Committee Update (Matthew Miller) PTO presidents should definitely get on the mailing list to receive School Committee updates. Go to the NPS website under School Committee to sign up. Matthew Miller and Tamika Olszewski are the communication liaisons for School Committee. They are working to have the SC updates "opt out" instead of "opt in" for NPS families. The School Committee hosts "virtual office hours" every other month via Facebook.

Transportation Update (Matthew Miller)

Matthew is also a member of the School Transportation Steering Group. Bus registration will be moving online for 2020-2021; parents will no longer receive the packet in the mail asking them to register. The plan is to kick off bus registration in May; PTOs will receive more information before it goes live. The fee will remain \$350 with a tiered late fee to motivate families to register for the bus in time to get the bus routes situated for the fall.

PTOC members expressed concerns with pedestrians being hit in crosswalks. Jenn Martin, Chair of Newton's Safe Routes to School Task Force, invited PTO presidents to reach out to their Safe Routes to School representatives to work on making their own school's arrival and dismissal safer, and invited PTO Presidents to attend SRTS meetings, the next one being February 7 at 9:30 a.m. at the Waban Library.

Minutes from December 10, 2019

Maureen Oates motioned to approve the December 10, 2019 minutes. Teri Ginsburg seconded. All were in favor; none opposed or abstained.

Other Updates

- PTOC helped fund additional publicity to expand the January 7, 2020 expo "**Just Think: Students Making Smart Choices**" open to all high school and middle school students and their families. There were around 1000 attendees between the daytime and evening session. PTOC is also helping fund the **Screenagers** event on February 11 at Newton North, open to all Newton students. Do you have an upcoming city-wide event you need help sponsoring? Reach out to Will and Karen.
- The PTOC **Bylaws** are being reworked this year.
- Will and Karen looked at what other organizations do and it doesn't seem to be best practice to post past Executive Boards on organization websites. PTOC will **post the Executive Boards** going forward, but not going back.

Meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.