

Newton PTO Council
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 12, 2020 @ 7:30pm
Zoom Meeting due to COVID-19

Attendees

Karen Hite (PTOC Co-President)	Leslie Ziarko Valera (Mason-Rice)
Will Adams (PTOC Co-President/Brown)	Liz Bouvier (Mason-Rice)
Chip Franklin (Angier)	Lucy Mermagen (Mason-Rice)
Brandon Fong (Angier)	Erika Guerra Downey (Memorial Spaulding)
Una Simmons (Bigelow)	Katy Karon (Memorial Spaulding)
Karen Markson (Bigelow)	Brooke Brindley (Memorial Spaulding)
Allison Behr (Bowen)	Michelle Spitzkoff (Memorial Spaulding)
Michelle Tsay (Bowen)	Jacob Eidsmoe (NECP/Pre-School Representative)
Sarah Healy (Brown)	Patty McCabe (Newton North)
Teri Ginsburg (Brown/Social & Emotional Wellness)	Valerie Pontiff (Newton North)
Spencer Poole (Burr)	May Chiu (Newton South/Secondary Schools Rep)
Jenn Reale (Burr)	Caroline Wilson (NPS Equity Committee /Website Manager)
Jon Spack (Burr)	Tamar Chamassian (Oak Hill)
Michele Morris (Cabot)	Milena Braga-Basaria (Oak Hill)
Agnes Pietryzk (Cabot)	Elsa Janairo (Peirce)
Jennifer Bentley (Day)	Valerie Davisson (Peirce/Nominating Committee)
Maureen Oates (Elementary Schools Rep)	Jenn Martin (Secretary)
Christine Dutt (Equity Rep/Nominating Committee/Ex Officio)	Lisa DePalma (SEPAC Liaison)
Jen Abbott (Ex-Officio)	Lindsay Pike (Treasurer)
Maura Morse (Franklin)	Anne Marie Gravel (Underwood)
Megan Reilly (Franklin)	Jennifer Tsuda (Underwood)
Jacqueline Freeman (Horace Mann)	Suzanne Afergan (Zervas)
Lauren McMinn (Lincoln-Eliot)	Maggie Schmidt (Zervas/Nominating Committee)
David Proia (Lincoln-Eliot)	

Introductions

Meeting called to order at 7:35 p.m. In lieu of introductions, members were asked to rename themselves in Zoom with their name and school affiliation.

Superintendent's Remarks

Superintendent David Fleishman (DF) & School Committee Member Ruth Goldman (RG)

DF: We are currently in a mode of “crisis teaching” and “crisis care” given where our families are right now. We are thinking about finishing up this spring semester while also planning for the summer and next year. Across the board there is experimentation, collaboration, creativity, mistakes, technical problems, and frustrations. Teachers are finding that the amount of planning time needed far exceeds that of in-person learning.

NPS administered a parent and student survey. Parents and students most miss face-to-face time with teachers and the peer-to-peer connections, rather than the academics. 40% of high school students thought the academic work load was too much because of the emotional struggle and isolation. 45% of high school students thought the amount of work was just about right.

The summer Extended School Year program may be remote this year. NPS is waiting for guidance from the state for the fall. The fall will need to include intense assessing of students to see where they are academically.

The budget going forward will be a concern. 83% of funding for Newton Public Schools is from property taxes. The next several years will be very tough since there will be a lag in revenue decline. In addition there is a 10% state cut (\$2.5 million).

PTOC Question: What is being done about Social Emotional Learning?

DF: There will be an SEL program for elementary parents on how to support your families during this crisis.

PTOC Question: How can we support seniors? What will graduation look like?

DF: There will be some sort of virtual ceremony and perhaps something in-person later. Newton needs to follow the state guidelines, whatever they will be. The City wants to focus City resources on the seniors and asks that we not use police or have car parades for the 5th and 8th grade graduations.

Valerie Pontiff (NNHS): NNHS senior class liaisons and parents are buying signs and a banner for the school to recognize the graduating seniors.

May Chiu (NSHS): The PTO is purchasing lawn signs and anxious to hear about what may be allowed in-person down the road.

PTOC Concern: 5th and 8th graders are being swept aside and not allowed to have car parades.

DF: Challenging time, we do not want to use City resources to this extent.

RG: 5th/8th grade graduations are school-centered and not city-centered.

PTOC Question: What is the preparation for more distance learning opportunities for September?

DF: Quite probable that there will be some distance learning next year. Probable, not certain. Every week things keep getting better with distance learning as we recreate public education. Professional development is now focused on distance learning.

PTOC Concern: “Crisis learning” is not producing a quality of learning that allows for students to compete with foreign and private schools who are continuing with the full curriculum while Newton is not. Can we see private schools and some public schools go back full time in September but Newton not go back?

DF: No, I cannot see that happening. “Crisis education” also includes student concerns that there is too much academic work in Newton. This is also an SEL crisis; there is loss and stress. If we don’t take care of students’ SEL needs we’ll never get to their academic needs. Private school students are struggling emotionally as well.

RG: The high school students on the School Committee expressed that they are existentially sad. This has been particularly hard on high school kids who are unmoored and desperate for their connections with others.

PTOC Question: What kind of supports are in place for our teachers? Some are dealing with illness themselves or in their loved ones. What can we do as parents to support them?

DF: Surveys of teachers show they are under more professional stress now than they ever have been. Support your teachers and reach out to them. Send a note to your teacher to tell them that you understand how tough this is for them, especially if they are balancing their teaching with having their own children at home. They are also spending so much time planning but not getting the gratification of interaction with students to know if the teaching is working. Professional development this summer will need to include training on trauma sensitive support since some students and staff will have experienced trauma by the fall.

PTOC Member (who is also a teacher): It is exceptionally hard work right now and the support from the community is phenomenal. Teachers appreciate parents being patient with teachers as teachers are learning very quickly how to teach differently. Most staff meetings are about how to make things better for students and we spend time talking about individual children. Parents are not seeing the extensive planning and meetings.

PTOC Question: What are we learning from this about school start time?

DF: Look at scheduling for next year. Not 100% positive we can run our regular school schedules for next year. We are doing some scenario planning around scheduling. Energy is focused on next year’s schedule and the next few weeks. Running the high school schedule next year will totally depend on our social distancing guidelines. Certainly it is helpful for get kids to sleep more.

PTOC Question: Why are the transitions from 5th to 6th grade so different at the different middle schools? For example, Day had a special ed parent meeting in December and a parent info session in March, but Brown had no special ed meeting and only had a parent info session a few weeks ago.

DF: The head of Special Ed at Brown left suddenly mid-year which impacted processes; additionally Brown has a new principal coming in who is running some of the orientation. Once at Day and Brown, much of what you will see will be fairly similar. The four principals meet weekly on Monday afternoons to ensure consistency across the middle schools.

PTOC Question: Will the school start date change?

RG: The conversation is less about changing the date and more about how we start (distance, a mix of in-person/distance, etc.) and what that will look like.

Minutes from February 4, 2020 Meeting

Teri Ginsburg motioned to approve. Leslie Ziarko Valera seconded. No objections. Minutes approved.

Financial Update

Update from Lindsay Pike, PTOC Treasurer

The PTOC income is from dues. All but three schools have submitted dues this year; two are still planning to send them. There have been some very small admin expenses and some recurring budget items, include the SpedPAC event, the Mayor's Prayer Breakfast, \$2000 budgeted for speakers and special events. This year the PTOC contributed \$1000 to a showing of the film Screenagers. Because some of the other events did not take place due to COVID-19, we have some excess funds. METCO reached out due to increased need this year for their scholarship. We propose increasing the PTOC donation to the METCO Scholarship Fund from \$300 to \$1000 this year.

PTOC Member questions: Why should we give so much of our total to METCO? What is the purpose of PTOC dues and what is the major goal for the rest of the money?

Explanation from PTOC Board:

- We should be spending what we are raising. Normally we fund community-wide events but have not been able to do so since we are at home.
- A criticism in the past has been that we continue to roll funds over each year rather than spend. We want to be sure the money is going toward the greater good of our school community.
- The proposed METCO donation is reallocation of money that was for a speaker for the Superintendent's forum.
- METCO approached the PTOC. Their typical fundraising, from small businesses, is not available right now. This is a unique situation and the PTOC is helping to fill the void.
- METCO enriches and diversifies our school community. There are 40 METCO seniors between NNHS and NSHS. Not all individual PTOs donate to the METCO scholarship fund.
- One of the purposes of dues is to act as an advocate for public education in the City of Newton. We are looking to provide resources for the whole community that would benefit all students in Newton.
- In June we will go item by item through the proposed expenses; we have a goal to not carry a large balance.

Jen Abbott made a motion to increase the PTO Council METCO scholarship allowance for this year by \$700 to make it a total of a \$1000 contribution to METCO. Teri Ginsburg seconded. No objections. Motion passed.

PTOC Member question: A craft fair was listed on the website as bringing in funding.

Explanation from PTOC Board: We once received proceeds from someone else's craft fair. Dues are the only source of revenue.

PTOC Treasurer Lindsay Pike: We will send out the budget for FY21 before the June meeting.

Bylaw Revisions Update

Maureen Oates, Jen Abbott and Will Adams are finishing up the bylaw revision and are sending them to a lawyer for review. We will send the bylaws to the full PTO Council before the June meeting.

PTO Budget Reporting Updates

Update from Christine Dutt, Equity Representative

- Email sent to PTO Co-Presidents and Treasurers requesting spending in current FY and planning for next FY.
- If you have particular things in your current year budget that you weren't able to do and that fall under the Equity Guidelines, and that you would like to carry forward, please bring to the Equity Committee who will consider these on a case-by-case basis. The Equity Committee has not made any blanket decisions about carrying forward allocations to the next FY.
- If your PTO is providing assistance to families as a result of COVID-19, please track that and include on your funding spreadsheet, or provide an estimate.

- FY21 budget from your PTO is due by June 15. The tech letters have been delayed due to the change in tech focus due to COVID-19. Reach out to Christine as needed to discuss a reasonable alternative.
- A spreadsheet will be going out to secondary schools.

Equity Committee/Guidelines Update

Update from Christine Dutt, Equity Representative

The Equity Committee made a proposal for some changes to the Equity Guidelines which will impact elementary schools.

- Move CAS programs out of the annual elementary cap so they are no longer subject to a dollar amount. Equity means having substantially similar access to enrichment opportunities; it makes more sense to create a norm of the number of experiences rather than the cost of the experiences.
- CAS programs will be capped at three student experiences per student per year.
- The concert series would not count towards the three experiences.
- Previews would count towards the cap and would still need to go through the approval process.
- Large special programs (murals, Ruby Bridges, etc.) would be normed to once every five years; this could ultimately be every three years. These special large programs would need to be approved by both the elementary school principal and Mary Eich, Asst. Superintendent for Teaching and Learning.
- The new elementary school Equity Cap would be shifted to \$40 per student.
- This recommendation was presented at the May 11 School Committee meeting and will be voted on at the May 27 School Committee meeting. The School Committee will decide if they want to adopt the recommendation and the start date.

Bowen Question: Why is the default to not roll over unspent equity dollars from FY20 to FY21? Bowen CAS programs were backloaded for April and May so we have significant equity spending that we were not able to spend in FY20 and want to roll it ALL forward.

Christine Dutt: The cap is annual and FY21 is a new year. Communicate with teachers to see what they actually want for FY21, if there is a particular item that you want for FY 21 then reach out and the Equity Committee will consider it. This is a question for each school.

PTOC Member Question: Why is the Equity Committee interested in having a separate line item for PTO spending related to COVID-19 for families in need?

Christine Dutt: The Equity Committee is interested in knowing what is going on and it doesn't fit neatly with a reporting category. Some schools are doing gifts cards and food and social workers have been working with PTOs to meet family needs.

PTOC Member Question: What is the actual decrease in the Equity Cap?

Christine Dutt: The decrease is from \$80 to \$40 per student, but CAS is no longer subject to that dollar amount. The historic amount of non-CAS equity spending ranges from the low to mid \$30's to \$43 over FY14-19. This current year, the average and median spending on non-CAS equity spending was less than \$40 per student.

Zervas Question: By effectively capping CAS programs at 3 programs per student, Zervas loses an additional \$10 per student in equity spending. Zervas could not spend more than we currently do on CAS programs. The historic data are not years where we had the current Equity Cap. We won't even have one year of data with the current Equity Cap.

Christine Dutt: Any time there is a proposed change to the Equity Guidelines, there are schools that are going to have to make adjustments. Anyone who has thoughts on this particular proposal should contact the School Committee and also make public comments at the School Committee meeting on May 27. The current average and median of non-CAS equity spending are both below \$40.

PTOC Member Question: Please clarify the reasoning around the book fair allocation when books are bought by parents? What about when parents buy books and give them to teachers?

Christine Dutt: The Equity Guidelines are very clear: if books are purchased for teachers and classrooms they fall under the Equity Cap.

Another PTOC Member: Scholastic Dollars are in-kind donations.

Jen Abbott: Scholastic Dollars to teachers is in-kind. About the book fairs, technically parents are not supposed to give gifts of things to teachers; this is covered by the state ethics laws about gift giving. At some

schools, teachers have wish lists and the books are purchased and given to teachers. These donations should be considered part of the PTO giving to the school and counted under the Equity Cap, even though technically the parents are buying the books. At other schools, when books are sold at PTO book fairs, PTOs get a cut of the proceeds.

Peirce: At Peirce parents buy the books and they are put in a bag from the class. At the time the book is purchased we have no idea who the parent is purchasing them for – themselves, a friend or a teacher. The concern is that teachers should not be accepting gifts.

Elementary Representative Maureen Oates: The policy around book fairs has been inconsistently implemented and historic data likely does not include book fair proceeds for many elementary schools. Now there is both a lower Equity Cap based on that historic data AND we are clarifying things that fall under that Equity Cap.

Christine Dutt: The Equity Committee understands this has been a typical practice; if the book fair is a sticking point then please reach out to the Equity Committee.

Elementary Representative Maureen Oates: Now that we are one year in to the revised Equity Guidelines, we should look at unintended consequences and see the impact at different schools. We may find a common thread with consistent challenges.

Christine Dutt: The Equity Guidelines are an iterative process and why we ask for communications. There is a diversity of practice across the 15 schools.

Nominating Committee Update

Update from Nominating Committee member Valerie Davisson

The June meeting is June 16; the by-laws state that we need to send the slate two weeks before the meeting to the current Co-Presidents and one week before the meeting to the Secretary. The Nominating Committee members this year are Valerie Davisson, Christine Dutt, and Maggie Schmidt. We will send out a request for expressions of interest in the next two weeks and collect replies via Google Form. People who are returning: Will Adams, Jenn Martin, May Chiu, Lisa DePalma, Christine Dutt, Kerry Prasad, and Valerie Davisson.

The by-laws currently include a number of positions that have not been filled in recent years, including VP, teacher rep, technology, political action and education. (Jen Abbott clarified that the technology slot was when there used to be a committee for technology and that some of these positions will be addressed in the forthcoming bylaw revisions).

The Nominating Committee will reach out to past PTOC members. There is no requirement that you need to have been a past or be a current PTO president, but this seems to be the spirit. Each school should also reach out to prior presidents at their own school

PTOC Theft Update

Update from Jen Abbott

Rebecca Craig did plead guilty to charge stemming from theft of funds from PTO Council. She is now out on parole due to COVID-19. If you hear from her, reach out to the PTOC Co-Presidents as the Attorney General would like to know.

Meeting adjourned at 9:22 pm.