

Newton PTO Council
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, October 15, 2019 @ 7:30pm
Newton Ed Center, Room 210

Attendees

Brandon Fong (Angier)	Lucy Mermagen (Mason-Rice)
Michelle Tsay (Bowen)	Erika Guerra Downey (Memorial Spaulding)
Sarah Healy (Brown)	Katy Karon (Memorial Spaulding)
Teri Ginsburg (Brown/Social & Emotional Wellness)	Michelle Spitzkoff (Memorial Spaulding)
Agnes Pietryzk (Cabot)	Jacob Eidsmoe (NECP/Pre-School Representative)
Michele Morris (Cabot)	Patty McCabe (Newton North)
Gayatri Aryan (Day)	Valerie Pontiff (Newton North)
Jennifer Bentley (Day)	Elsa Janairo (Peirce)
Maureen Oates (Elementary Schools Rep)	Jennifer Bekarian (Peirce)
Christine Dutt (Equity Rep/Nominating Committee/Ex Officio)	Valerie Davisson (Peirce/Nominating Committee)
Jen Abbott (Ex-Officio)	Karen Hite (PTOC Co-President)
Maura Morse (Franklin)	Will Adams (PTOC Co-President/Brown)
David Proia (Lincoln-Eliot)	Jenn Martin (Secretary)
Lauren McMinn (Lincoln-Eliot)	Anne Marie Gravel (Underwood)
Leslie Ziarko Valera (Mason-Rice)	Jennifer Tsuda (Underwood)
Liz Bouvier (Mason-Rice)	Sofia Hamula (Williams)
	Suzanne Afergan (Zervas)
	Maggie Schmidt (Zervas/Nominating Committee)

Introductions

Karen Hite called meeting to order at 7:30pm.
Ice Breaker

Superintendent's Remarks

David Fleishman

Thank you for serving as PTO leaders, which takes time and energy, especially emotional energy. A few updates:

- NPS planned safety training for all staff for early this fall rather than as a reaction to something in the news. Language used for safety training is developmentally appropriate.
- Fewer students showed up the first day than was projected, which was helpful in the first year of Full Day Kindergarten. This also means that there are not classes that are larger than desired. One exception is Newton South, which had a higher enrollment than projected.
- The current challenges NPS faces are long-standing Newton challenges. Challenge of contracts. History of protracted negotiations goes back at least into the 1970's. Challenge of school facilities. Newton didn't invest in school facilities for over 30 years, we've made an incredible amount of progress in the last ten years. There isn't enough space at Oak Hill so an addition is planned. Other NPS buildings need a lot of work.

Q&A *Superintendent Fleishman*

Q. Concern that in relationship to our peer group schools, Newton isn't advancing (per test scores). SAT/ACT scores are not keeping up with our peer districts.

A. The best way to monitor progress for an individual child is for parents to look at their child's progress (MCAS scores and in other ways). Other districts may spend more time on test prep. SAT/ACT scores are influenced by out-of-school tutoring. Newton's demographics are different than the "W" schools. Brookline is the only district that is comparable to the Newton.

Q. Has NPS considered redistricting elementary schools in Newton so that low-income students aren't concentrated within a few schools?

A. Integration is incredibly important, but Newton isn't diverse enough to do this. There are no schools with concentrated poverty in Newton, and middle schools are fairly balanced. If elementary school boundaries were redistricted it would shift middle school boundaries. Instead NPS provides certain schools with more resources, like more ELL.

Q. Where is the high school start time project? Is the new high school schedule starting next year?

A. We are working on a plan to engage the community and resolve with teachers at the same time. It's hard to change the high school schedule without also changing the start time, but may not be impossible. Concern about young children waiting for the bus in the dark.

Q. There seems to be a decrease in parent contact time at the high school.

A. Lots of School Committee presentations about student contact, with time in the middle of the day for kids to connect with teachers. Lexington High School also has a block in the middle of the day. Newton High Schools have more class time now than any other high school anywhere. By changing class times, there are fewer minutes spent transitioning between classes. Benefits: fewer shorter classes, more time to connect with adults outside of class, more time to connect with students in small groups.

Q. Can NPS find more time in the day for play?

A. Middle schools really struggle with breaks; they must have 790 hours in class. Some middle schools are piloting "Laps for Lunch" so kids can move. Supervision is parent volunteers; teachers need to eat, too. Schools are adding movement breaks in the classroom and mindfulness.

Q. What is the impact of developments in the City?

A. There is much more space at the elementary schools than there used to be. Zervas, Cabot, and eventually Countryside have more elbow room. We are watching middle schools carefully. Brown is the district for both Northland and Riverside; eventually something will be down at Brown since it was built in the 1950's and hasn't been touched. This year's kindergarten class was the smallest in years, last year was smallest in 10-12 years. There are some big cohorts moving into the middle school.

Q. How are the contract negotiations impacting teachers?

A. Prolonged teacher negotiations have a demoralizing effect on teachers and others. The list of items being negotiated is long. The School Committee has to make sure the system is financially reasonable, and settle the contract and leave the district in good financial shape.

Q. Does NPS have an official position on the NewCAL project?

A. NPS does not take very public positions on issues like this. We do share thoughts privately when we have concerns, and speak with the Mayor's team with specific concerns. NPS thinks about students, families, parking, shifts based on community issues. [Jen Abbott notes for PTO leaders, PTO's can take a position when it impacts school community, like override & school designs; otherwise PTO's should stay away from taking a position on things that can be controversial].

Vote to Approve Minutes.

Valerie Pontiff moved to approve the minutes as presented from the June 11, 2019 meeting. Maureen Oates seconded. Motion passed.

Newton Community Education Open Board Positions

Will Adams and Karen Hite

NCE is a self-sustaining arm of NPS that provides quality programs (music, arts, sports, tech, finance, etc.) to Newton community members of all ages and offers access to school facilities for community learning at a reasonable cost. The NCE Board consists of an 11-member commission that establishes program policies (8 members are appointed). The Board should reflect broad diversity of the City, and serves as a vehicle for community input.

PTOC has two appointments to the Board, ideally a 1-year term for one and a 2-year term for the other so that the terms will be staggered going forward. Please email the PTOC Co-Presidents your statement of interest by Friday, November 1. Historically the Board meets on Wednesday evenings.

Because NCE uses school facilities, they have an interest in the facilities meeting the needs of their participants and may help out with water fountains, benches for lobby, etc. It's a good opportunity for someone on the PTOC to be a voice and conduit for the PTOs.

PTO Financial Best Practices

Jen Abbott

In 2014 funds were stolen by the volunteer PTOC Treasurer. The theft was reported to the police. PTOC records helped with the criminal case; the legal case is ongoing and the defendant is in custody. The PTOC does not expect to recoup the losses.

Financial Best Practices: High Level Overview

1. Maintain checks and balances. Recommend having two treasurers, make sure all people have different responsibilities and are checking each other.
2. Document financial procedures in writing and follow them consistently. Now is the time to review the practices you may be concerned about. This will protect you and your volunteers as well as your PTO. Strong financial procedures protect volunteers from wrong doing.
3. Keep a paper trail (can be electronic). You need documentation to support every transaction.
4. Meet regularly with Co-Presidents, Treasurer and Board to discuss financial processes and reporting.
5. Maintain records – bylaws, tracking finances, to pass along records over the years.
6. Change your passwords regularly for anything financial.

See “Suggested Financial Practices for PTOs” for more details, also available on the PTOC Website.

Q&A with Jen Abbot

Q: Can PTO Council develop a standardized 2-page annual report for the PTO to fill in, like a nonprofit annual report, that includes the value of volunteer hours.

A: Quantifying volunteer hours seems daunting.

Q: How did the PTO Council have so much money in 2014?

A: The PTO Council and Newton Schools Foundation were beneficiaries of third-party fundraising events. PTO Council was engaged in discussions about what to do with the reserve.

Karen Hite: The current PTOC balance is purely from dues and PTOC is actively searching for a partnership with an existing organization that will benefit the entire district.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Attachments

[PTOC-suggested-financial-practices-June-18-2015 \(PDF\)](#)