

Members present: Joel Stenbridge, Barry Wanger, Ryan Augusta, Lisa Rucinski, Ellie Wood, Eleanor Richard, Prevenya Harris, Bob Parlin, Jeanne O'Reilly, Chip DiMarco, Janet Wertheimer, Deena David, Lucia Dolan

Introductions

Invitation for public comment, no comments offered.

I. Meeting Objectives – Principal Stenbridge

- Develop a plan for communication of the construction completion list.
- Agree on plan regarding traffic safety.
- Begin to understand/address issues underlying student stress at South.

II. Timeline for School Improvement Plan

- At December meeting, Joel will deliver data points and targets to Council.
- Council should advocate/lobby for South to school committee in Jan, Feb, March given anticipated budget cuts likely to affect classrooms.
- In May, council to review progress and revise SIP for '11-'12

Comments on process:

- Budget process is hard for school committee too
- Suggestion re: strategy: that we present our needs as part of SIP and go as a unified group to present to SC, SC does not want to hear multiple people saying the same thing (yet they seem to respond to majorities represented)
- Joel urged us to speak as a body since that has not happened in the past, process has been more PTSO-driven

III. Construction

After our last meeting, Liz, Deena, Marci and Joel discussed prioritizing the list divided into safety, instructional, and energy-related. Must-haves will be identified. Council needs to identify goals for this project, don't want bad PR.

How to communicate work in progress? Should we do a fundraiser? Answer: no, too much money already asked of parents in other ways and what's left are big-ticket items. Before presenting priorities, Joel said we need to discuss what to do with the list next; we need to decide best way to pursue it. Question of who owns what, school or city. Most items on list should have been done as part of construction project, some are new.

Outcome: Council to create list of must-haves, Joel to take list to Mayor Warren w/blessing of superintendent; some aldermen may want to advocate for us; we should also notify Claire Sokolov. At Nov 30 meeting, list to be presented, discussed?

IV. School Traffic/Safety

Since last meeting, Barry followed up with Charlie Shapiro and Geoff Epstein.

- John Panica is working on signage (Deena suggests we make sure there is an additional person on this).
- Painting lines is the responsibility of the school committee, as is working on a traffic flow pattern within school property.
- Much discussion about reducing parking fees for senior lot:
Geoff Epstein says school committee would not approve this, Deena says parking has dropped off and she has a study with statistics to share on this, thinks lower fees would bring in more money, most think the high cost is the reason so few students park in the lot, since so many park on the street. Suggestion that new annual fee should be lower than both current semi-annual fees and there should be a deadline after which spots should be made available to juniors. Joel said he would ask school committee about going back to \$180/semester fee.
- Other safety issues: concern about driving in back of school, North has police presence during heavy traffic but we don't, apparently because our timing aligns with police shift change, question of lights in parking lot, suggestion that we should write letters expressing our concerns about too many near-accidents at South.

V. Student Stress

Long discussion on this. Here are highlights:

- So much work, no time to be a kid, kids not getting enough sleep
- Not enough time for seniors with SATs, ACTs, class tests, for METCO students even less time, no sleep
- Expectations too high, vibe of competition constant, helpful when teachers say students should not talk about grades
- Competitive environment has pros and cons
- Students worry about failure
- Stress of siblings following "successful" older siblings
- Multiple brilliant kids applying to same schools
- Financial stress of college felt by some but not all
- Some teachers try to reduce stress, examples are homework-free weekends, not all buy into this
- Pressure for kids and teachers to go faster, do more
- If teachers are easy on kids, kids may take advantage and prioritize their work to favor work assigned by teachers who are harder on them, do teachers who budge lost credibility?
- It's all driven by college
- Teachers should be more understanding of seniors, esp. at college application deadline times

- Things have gotten better within the school as compared to years ago, but college competition now much greater, colleges now more demanding
 - Need to educate students and parents about more/different college choices
 - Need to remember there is an enormous spectrum and pressure exists for all
 - Success does not come from college you go to, suggestion we have a day where successful people who didn't go to Ivy League schools come talk to kids about their careers
 - Suggestion that half-days be used for workshops or school-wide events since 20-minute classes not useful
 - Need to know scope of this problem before finding solution
 - Teacher worry that if you nurture a student, the student may not get a similarly nurturing teacher the following year
 - At least it seems competition at South is not dangerous, has not led to bullying
 - Question: is online grading reducing stress? Seems like no but parent portal coming in January so this will be discussed
- Final comments:
- All agree these discussions are useful, Joel says South is stressful now but we're not alone, stress not bad in and of itself, too much is bad, not enough is also bad, we do this to ourselves, need ways to deal with it and manage it, need to promote good choices (eating, etc) need to be aware of what we can and cannot change. Joel to look at other schools (Needham, Lexington?) for potential visits to see what others are doing.

Submitted by Lisa Rucinski, October 31, 2010.