

Newton School Council  
June 1, 2010  
Minutes

**Members Present:** Joel Stembridge, Bob Parlin, Debbie Linder, Ariel Kaluzhny, Eleanor Wood, David Deutsch, Jeanne O'Reilly, Marcia Okun, Tom Lee, Lisa Rucinski, Jane Starkman, Deena David, Barry Wanger, Sue Kirshenbaum, Chip DiMarco, Marci Sapers, Mona Hochberg.

**Guests:** Lucia Dolan and Ted Dalicandro.

**Public Comment**

Ted Dalicandro, a special ed teacher, addressed the Council regarding what he saw as a serious safety issue concerning parking and traffic around the school. He pointed out that the signage is poor, some drivers go the wrong way in the area in front of the main entrance, and the number of cars parked on the narrow Brandeis Road, are all issues that should be addressed.

He also pointed out that there are a number of empty spaces in the student parking lot that could be used to eliminate some of the Brandeis Road parking issues. He asked the Council to consider taking action. The Council agreed to put it on our agenda for the fall. Barry Wanger agreed to look into it this summer. Lucia Dolan volunteered to participate in any effort the Council considers.

**Principal's Report**

Joel Stembridge provided an update on the School Improvement Plan (SIP). The Administration and Faculty have been working on adding an academic component to the SIP approved last spring. The focus is to "raise documented achievement for all struggling students."

The three primary objectives:

- Improve standardized test scores, grade point averages, and other indices of academic success for students in Curriculum II classes
- Improve standardized test scores, grade point averages, and other indices of academic success for students who are earning grades of C and below in Curriculum 1 classes.
- Increase the number of students from underrepresented groups taking honors and AP classes.

Specific initiatives under consideration include an after-school tutoring program for struggling 9th and 10th graders, peer tutor opportunities, adult help centers, and building a repertoire of best educational practices that are in common use in classrooms throughout the school.

Stembridge said some of the funding for the after-school tutoring program would come

from money already allocated for tutoring from METCO and MCAS programs.

There was some discussion relating to the fact that Curriculum 11 class size is usually smaller than Curriculum 1 classes – some thought the spread was too large, others thought smaller class size is good because of the extra attention some Curriculum II students need.

Stembridge pointed out that Curriculum II classes should be for students who need to work at a slower pace and they should not be for those with behavioral issues. “We need to find (more effective) ways to engage those kids,” he said.

The Council approved the direction that the SIP is heading. The final recommendations are expected to be ready for Council to act on by late summer or early fall.

Security Cameras. Stembridge said the School Committee is expected to act on the proposal for security cameras in public locations at North and South High Schools at their next meeting. He said funding has not been approved, as yet. He said the School Committee is working on policy guidelines regarding the cameras.

### **Parent Portal**

Stembridge said the School Committee selected South to pilot a parent portal for the new school year. The portal will provide parents with an opportunity to gain on-line access certain information about their children. There will be a special Parent Portal Committee composed of parents, students and teachers, not associated with School Council, to review and advise on the plans.

The pilot program may include information on daily attendance, mid-term teacher comments, and end of term grades.

There was considerable Council discussion on the Parent Portal. Among the concerns:

- How much information would be mandated
- How much extra time would be needed by teachers to provide information
- Too much parent involvement could be detrimental to students who need to learn to take responsibility for their action
- Could impact school culture
- Need to determine a way to measure the effectiveness of the portal
- Need to study, which parents are using it – if it is only those whose children are doing well is it needed?
- What information would be included?
- Invasion of student privacy

### **Election**

Barry Wanger was re-elected as co-chair. Marci Sapers was elected as the new co-chair. Susan Kirshenbaum, out-going co-chair, was recognized for her distinguished leadership and service to the Council.

## **Council reflections**

Council members were asked to review this year's Council and list areas that they thought were successful, needed improvement, and ideas for further discussion. The following is a summary of comments put together by Sue Kirshenbaum:

- What is working well on school council?
- What do you think should be improved in the future?
- What important agenda item do you think should be addressed by the School Council (or other forum) in the future?

### **What is working well on school council?**

Rotating minutes responsibility and quick publication

The group itself is great

Joel's leadership

Balance of faculty and parents

Smaller working groups i.e. website and bylaws

Snack rotation and type of food

Principal is focused and has a clear idea of how the council can be of help

Good energy and spirit of cooperation

Sending agenda in advance

Introductions around table each meeting

Improved student participation in discussions

Sticking to agendas

Having concrete tasks to accomplish

Having strong representation of parents, faculty and students

Different perspectives of teachers (from different disciplines) parents and students

Good discussions

Nice feeling in the group

Improved attendance by all

I like the large cross-section of people

I like how Joel made this a priority

Great having students involved

Much less "my kid" issues than in past years

### **What do you think should be improved in the future?**

Mixed representation of students (race, gender, curriculum)

Several mentions - include male students

I worry that our sub-committees chat a lot and don't always come up with concrete plans

Identification cards with names

Introduce people at beginning of each meeting

Joel could be somewhat more succinct

Review SIP at the beginning of the year

Include progress on SIP during the year based on established metrics

Try to limit discussion and or length of comments – sometimes it goes on too long

It would be helpful if the meeting time and notes were school announcements, as I often

don't receive the emails

Any chance we could have a "moodle" for on-line discussions in order to streamline the meeting

The large group is great but if we could figure out a way to incorporate break-out/small group conversation as it is a way to talk things through

Need to limit discussion on topics, such as parent portal, for which there is another outside committee addressing the details

**What important agenda item do you think should be addressed by the School Council (or other forum) in the future?**

Student drinking and driving

Issues related to students who are NOT struggling

Limitations of parent portal (several mentions)

SIP should provide more background up front (context) to bring people up to speed

Follow-up from security cameras i.e. metrics, did they help?

Student and faculty training on bullying/cyber bullying with programs for parents too

Advisory role

How to evaluate teachers – parent and student input

Race to the top is going to have implications for curriculum, MCAS and perhaps teacher evaluations

I wish we could address how we choose the content taught

- Minutes submitted by Barry Wanger