

## **BUTLER PTA General Meeting December 14th, 2016**

Minutes taken by Parul Garg, Recording Secretary

**Attending:** Rola Baghdady, John Phelan, Danielle Betancourt, Kate Weinstein, Katie Auffinger, Laura VanderHart, Parul Garg, Katie Dunks, Andrea Russo, Kate Bowen, Yvette Leeson, Julie Crockett, Eric Perkins, Shonool Malik, Tracy White Wendland, and Azra Nelson

**Welcome and Opening remarks** to the community and PTA board by Superintendent John Phelan

John Phelan had the following items on his agenda to address:

1. School Building Committee work
2. Space Taskforce
3. Budget
4. Social Emotional Learning/Achievement Gap
5. School Calendar

### **School Building Committee work**

#### ***A) Building***

High School building has been an issue since 2002. In 2003 Town of Belmont did some building feasibility study and with 2011-2013 high enrollment surge, the town acknowledged space needs and went to MSBA. Currently we are in process of planning and presenting 3 options to MSBA for accommodating growing space needs. option being building a new high school for :

- a)Grade 9-12
- b)Grade 7-12
- c)Grade 8-12

The later 2 options will also give relief to the enrollment and space problems at elementary and middle school levels while option a) gives no relief to the other 2 levels of schools.

Mr. Phelan said as per the analysis, we are seeing an average increase of 100 kids per year for last 5 years and it is projected to grow even more.

He also mentioned that as per MSBA requirement, the project has to go thru 8 modules since they will be spending 40-50 million dollars on the new building.

After successfully completing the initial eligibility period in November 2016- known as Module 1 - the Building Committee proceeds to Module 2 where they begin forming the school's project team, including project manager and a design architect. It would take up to 6 months to do so. Then another 2-3 years to do a detailed blueprint of the building. We will know the final cost of the project by 2018 and then final vote will be done in 2019. So most optimistically, the building will be ready by 2022-2024.

*Azra Nelson asked if the town has thought about adding a new elementary school building next to the high school.*

*Phelan responded that in the beginning the town presented 6 options which included having an extra building or clubbing PreK- K or connecting the new library to high school together to give relief to elementary schools but MSBA denied those options because to approve any option, it has to make sense for the kids, for the educational flow of the school system.*

## **B) Hiring Facilitator**

Kate Bowen asked what are we as a district doing to engage working parents in the planning process?

Phelan said, we are very fortunate to hire a facilitator for the project. Next week, he will be presenting the committee with his plans to include all the community members which could be people who work during weekdays, who can't come in person, don't speak the language or aren't technology savvy.

Also the committee plans to include not only the parents but teachers, administrators and the non-parent community members.

## **Space Taskforce**

Laura VanderHart asked are we planning to demolish the current high school building or keeping a part of it and renovating other parts?

Phelan said, the architects will present designs based on the grades option we will pick. MSBA estimates 10 years from conception to end of the project for this reason. It allows only 18 months to 2 years for actually building the facility. There is a lot that goes into planning given the time, money and grade levels configuration.

A parent asked if we decide on Grade 9-12 configuration for the new building what will be the plan for K-8 space requirements.

Phelan said, the committee is aware that going forward the class sizes at elementary school level are very high. We have about 340-350 kids in each class and the current 2nd grade will have about 410 students by the time they reach 5th grade(middle school). So the district plans to address the space issue by adding modular classrooms if need be.

But currently, at least at elementary school level we are and will try to do without modulars. we have couple rooms available at Winn brook and Burbank Schools.

He also said we could just add 5 more classrooms to each grade but then we need to make sure of we have enough room in the parking, cafeteria, supporting staff and supplies to accommodate the increase.

A parent asked, given that we will be in back of the line for MSBA approvals for a new building, should we not start the process for new elementary school building in case we decide on 9-12 grade configuration?

Phelan advised, to wait till they vote on the options to make that decision because if we decide on 7-12 option for high school, then it will elevate the enrollment pressure from K-12 district wide.

He also said teachers, administrators and community members have been asked to be a part of Steering committee on the space Taskforce so they could get a complete picture of what people want.

He also mentioned that the company who does enrollment projections, re did them after October 1st to adjust for the current numbers and the projecting are very accurate for next 5 years and close enough for next 10 years.

### **Budget**

Phelan addressed that they are looking at FY2018 and asking if there are any enrollment driving needs impacting the budget, what do we need and why.

He gave the example of Language budget which is \$14000 for grades 5-12. so if the enrollment increases for 25 kids in a classroom to 28 there will be about \$3000 more budget requirement not only for hiring extra teacher, but for books, games and other equipment.

He also thanked everyone for passing the override. He said because of the override the town is able to give back money to the schools, have been able to buy items needed in each school which otherwise they had to go to PTA/PTO/POM/FBE and the like, for.

The district could offer more wellness classes, creative writing classes, get more material and equipment in the classrooms and so on.

### **Social Emotional Learning/ Achievement Gap**

Phelan said when he joined Belmont district as a superintendent, he was given SEL as the biggest agenda to work on. He said, it is very important for him and the district to build relationship with every child, every parent and make sure every family feels welcome and kids are ready to learn. SEL brings good teaching values embedding culture in every classroom by opening brain pathways in students and teachers.

Kate Bowen asked how are we tracking SEL in each school over the years and going forward?

Phelan said the Research Facilitator will be providing measurement tools, surveys for teachers, students and adults to measure the achievement gap and SEL.

Principal, Danielle also mentioned that at Butler, there is a team comprising of herself, school nurse, school psychologist and teachers who track this data and contact and engage with parents about the issues and try to resolve them.

## **School Calendar**

Last year there was a big survey and decision was to eliminate various religious holidays to respect the wide diversity of the town's population, so everyone feels inclusive.

Current discussion on that is whether we should as a district open before or after labor day and the school committee will vote on it next week. There have been mixed opinions about this in school committee members.

Positive of opening Wednesday before Labor day is that kids can be prepared and be ready for school when they come for full week after labor day.

Phelan also mentioned that when Belmont passed this "no religious holiday" vote, 6 different school district superintendents emailed him congratulating asking for ways to do this in their districts. Lots of educators including Phelan agree that because of no holidays we have continuity and productive instructional time for students. He also said that lots of towns are moving towards having this, no religious holidays or less holidays policy to provide quality, uninterrupted education to students.

Phelan said we have been very lucky to have a staff of about 550 with 98% attendance, despite the fact that some staff takes day off on there religious holiday. Belmont has been fortunate to hire enough substitutes to cover for the holidays. He said, this year (2016-2017) is a test year with regards to no religious holiday policy and we did fine during jewish holidays. The next big test would be in April for Good Friday and they have already been asking for teachers and staff vacation and day off plans to address and plan for any issues beforehand, if at all.

In the end Phelan, asked the people present as to who all would like the policy of opening schools before Labour day and there was 50-50 split in the number of people who like it or not.

Shonool Malik also made him aware of the fact that many of the families travel internationally during August and use that week before Labor day to do so. So it would be really bothering in inconvenient to those people.

Meeting Adjourned at 10:45 am.

