

## **CMS Meeting Minutes April 2, 2015**

**Welcome remarks :** Co-Presidents, Elizabeth Dustin and Wendy Conroy, and Upper school principal, Daniel Coplton-Newfield and Chenery School principal, Kristen St-George. The third meeting of the CMS PTO 2014- 2015 school year. Unfortunately, our new Lower School Principal, Tom ? was sorry to not be able to attend this meeting.

### **Fine and Performing Arts Curriculum Update: Arto Asadoorian, Director k-12**

AA gave an overview of the arts program at CMS and BHS. Department goals are:

1) Creating, 2)Performing, 3)Perceiving and Responding, 4) Connections. AA talked about how the teachers are very engaged in making the curriculum something more than just the kids creating something nice, but making it a more thought provoking experience.

He also discussed the FPA's Guiding Beliefs which are available to view on the school website:

<http://www.belmont.k12.ma.us/bps/fpa/>

Visual art, music and drama are taught at CMS (dance is taught in P.E. at CMS, but not at the HS.

ALL students learn in the arts and what they start at CMS is still available for them at the HS.

The FPA curriculum happens during the school day, which we are very lucky for, as this is not the same for all districts. Fortunately, there is a Huge support for this in Belmont.

AA talked of the value of studying the arts – citing it helps kids in other areas of schooling, but mostly contributes to making a better person, more accomplished in the Arts! Unique opportunities are created in the arts – e.g. 5th graders are creating their inner monsters in clay!

### **PQ (Parent Question):** Will the Override vote affect the arts at CMS?

**AA:** If it fails 8th grade kids will lose their arts/music elective - band, orchestra, and chorus will stay - just lose the elective option. Also affects HS electives. Draw/painting, photo/ceramics – explained how students could take, e.g. ceramics 1 and 2, but 3 will be no longer be available. **PLUS:** Belmont has once again been named one of the Best Communities for Music Education, 2015, by the NAMM Foundation (National Association of Music Merchants). And, John McLellan - MICCA Hall of Fame!

### **Social Studies Curriculum update: Deb McDevitt, Director**

DMcD talked about the hard work teachers are doing to engage the kids in this program – very much student centered work is offered. She then spoke about the Common core, and it's document based questions. Common Core: Ask students to work with more non-fiction, literacy standards. DMcD described the Common Core to us – it's new in Belmont, it asks kids to look at more than one source (of text) to solve a problem, and consider who is behind the source. All staff are teachers of reading and writing, and working on how to get kids to develop an opinion on sources, asserting and defending claims for example. She then discussed Document based questions in Social Studies, the importance of reading sources – to create an argument about a question or topic - and understand the alternative argument, and back it up with evidence.

DBQs currently in the classroom: listed by grades:

Grade 8: loyalist or patriot

Grade 7: conflict diamonds

Grade 6: Hammurabi's Code

Grade 5: The Slave Trade

Also talked about how this works for the kids in PARCC. Combining 3 different texts' into one stronger more concise argument. An important life skill for the kids being able to assess documents and judge the source and combine reports to make a better judgement on something.

### **PQ:** Why PARCC instead of MCAS?

**DMcD:** Belmont did it as part of a pilot program last year with 7/8 graders (?) - now everyone doing it. The difference is mostly timing - parcc is timed, mcas is not. Also, the parcc text is more vigorous than mcas - what we expect our kids to be capable of is better tested in Parcc than MCAS.

Deb goes on to describe more detailed differences between Parcc and mcas - parcc comes out as more complex, but in a better way. DCN also helped describe the benefits of parcc, and explained we are waiting for the State to decide if parcc will stay for good.

**PQ:** How did the pilot go?

**DCN:** talked about this years experience. Kids were not as stressed about time restriction as teachers feared. Talked about the kids having to field test the parcc last spring for research/testing quality purposes only, no results given back.

**PQ:** Number of days of Parcc testing seems a lot. Why?

**KSG:** Parcc tests have more days, but the sessions are much shorter. May work out as similar time in the end. 11 days of assessment - perhaps is too many days - need to find a better balance from the state.

**PQ:** Can parents provide feedback to the Parcc people?

**KSG:** Unsure? Need to find out and get back to parents.

**PQ:** The lapse in time is why between parcc tests? Some in April, rest in May.

**KSG:** The tests in May have a different purpose than the earlier ones – looking for different skills. The 8th graders still take MCAS science as there is not a parcc equivalent.

Parcc or Smarter balance: these are the two common core offerings (common core was offered nationwide only a couple of years ago). One year from now MA will make a final decision on whether we formally implement Parcc. Not sure what will happen to science Mcas - if there will be a science parcc equivalent by then.

**PQ:** Will parents get parcc feedback?

**KSG:** Sometime after mcas results come out we should get something back about the kids parcc results.

**DCN:** We don't know what the report we get back will look like. It will be a learning process for all of us.

**PQ:** How do they grade the parcc? More complex questions and answers are more difficult to grade.

**DMcD:** Don't know!

Comparing experience with teachers across the schools - pushed by DMcD. Teachers need to work together. Teachers across subjects within grades connect, compare, and share. Makes the Team structure of the CMS so important to Chenery - need the override to keep the staff numbers to make this work.

**KSG:** (Without Override pass) could revert to an OLD Junior high style of moving through larger classes with more varied kids per class. Less opportunity to connect with the same adults and peers.

**PQ:** Will it be more departmental?

**KSG:** Yes/ more like high school. teacher may teach 2 grades, or 2 subjects.

#### **Senator Brownsberger's presentation and Q&A:**

**WBB** asked KSG about PARCC testing time - KSG described some hours - some are about 90 minutes long for example. Some kids mistook the mcas all day timing as them having to take all day to do the test, so parcc time restriction good for fixing that.

#### **State and Local Budget Process:**

**WBB** described who he is and where he represents (including Belmont). Talked about how he got involved in politics because of education and budget cuts 20 years ago. Similar things going on then as now. Had committee meetings - became board of selectmen - and now...

More than our education going on in his work now - it's one of many important issues he works with. Charter schools in Boston are a big issue. Parents are important to him as they are the ones to advocate for the kids. He wants their opinions. Talked about the **State Budget** - Belmont is mostly property tax. The state this year can only do so much to help Belmont (recovering still from the recession) - Healthcare is HUGE in this state now - about 40% of the state budget!! MassHealth: one in four people in the state are in masshealth now. We have been too optimistic over the years about spending, and hoping things would work out but recession hasn't brought the \$ in. The state ran over budget by about

5% this year. Need to wake up to what real costs are, esp. mass health. So state can not be the safety net for Belmont education.

**PQ:** Does he know what the state money will be to Belmont? Anything like the NO campaign is suggesting?

**WBB:** The numbers may or may not materialize. Went on to describe the Governors Budget process, and concluding that we have no idea what we're going to get.

**PQ:** Chapter 7 - will it be cut?

**WBB:** Should be level funding we get from the state, hopefully better.

**PQ:** Why don't we allocate more money to the schools in Belmont than everything else?

**WBB:** He tried to make this happen when he was a Selectman. Partly successful, but it's still an issue. Everything else on the town budget is very important too. The 2.5% has squeezed the budget for years, over everything.

**PQ:** Why are some of the warrant committee Yes, and some No on the override vote?

**WBB:** The Warrant Committee have more power than when WBB was on it. Currently both our selectmen and warrant committee are strong. Only the selectmen can put the Override on to the ballot.

**PQ:** Does Belmont want to attract more businesses?

**WBB:** People want it all! Quiet neighborhood, low taxes etc. - go to Watertown for a more business neighborhood. Talked about the Cushing Square example - taking so long to make happen in Belmont. Talked about the differences between Belmont and surrounding communities.

**PQ:** Will the Uplands building happen?

**WBB:** Describes the Uplands area, and that its all public land. Nobody came forward to buy the land. He doesn't believe it would flood our schools with kids/ swamp the town with people, but it would make beautiful parkland and protect wildlife if not being built on. Belmont passed the community preservation act but we didn't buy the land. You need ALOT of people to love the land to make a town buy it. It's just not a big enough priority.... so much against it.

**PQ:** Missed opportunity for office park space?

**Wbb:** Maybe?

**PQ:** What are we getting?

**WBB:** Affordable housing? Not a great place for families - better for young professionals. His gut feeling only. Doesn't know the actual unit mix - so can't really say.

**PQ:** Is the override unreversible?

**WBB:** Legally, you can have an underride.

**PQ:** If the override passes will schools be able to restore things from years gone?

**KSG:** NO. It will just bring us to an almost level place. It won't help us build the future.

**DCB:** We could get our 4th guidance counselor back. That's a restoration of a service. The growth in student numbers has grown too much to make it enough though.

**KSG:** Grade 5 languages will not be brought back YET. Maybe one day.

**WBB:** Would appreciate people getting in touch with him. Website: <http://willbrownsberger.com>

### **Chenery Update:**

**DCN:** Talked about the 3 guidance counselors doing great work at CMS, especially during the new Parcc experience. 113 students had to do a make up day of parcc - missed for ? Butler had 130 students total take parcc!

- Ferry Beach and Washington trips are coming up. 92% of kids going to DC. Thanks to the PTO for their help with these trips. (PTO donated \$4000 to each trip).

- Student placement concerns are coming in from parents/kids especially for transition from 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 9<sup>th</sup> too. Big steps.

**PQ:** 10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> graders won't know how many classes they can take next year?

**DCN:** Don't know! We do know how many sections we may run. We are basically planning for both - full schedule, and class cuts.

**KSG:** Talks about how a plan will happen and will work - no matter what.

#### **Lowerschool updates:**

**KSG:** Talks about the new LC principal Thomas Brow, he's great! He has new energy, constantly with the kids and teachers. Tom feels he getting to know the kids - he has visited all the classes, lunches, and recesses. A great resource on feedback. He's experienced in the skillful teacher course - he's a teacher in this in another district - this is a great resource to have - he brings that expertise to CMS teachers. He reminds KSG of the great instruction and great teachers at CMS.

KSG also says that April is a tough time of year - its important for teachers/students that the ballot question is just next week! Kids are playing up - been a long winter and kids have been indoors a lot. They need a change of pace. April break will be a great time out. The school is busy: Wrapping up Parcc, Gearing up for Ferry beach and DC, parcc back in May.

KSG explained there is always an opportunity for parents to share their thoughts and information about their child with the school - be it a form or a call.

**Approval for the last meetings minutes:** Approved.

**Treasurers Report:** (Treasurers were absent, so given by Elizabeth and Wendy):

Income category: 5<sup>th</sup> / 8<sup>th</sup> grade - the income came from talent show , and will be a bingo event for Ferry Beach.

Added a new line: miscellaneous: Amazon Smiles program. Designate a charity for a portion of your purchase - CMS! Target also has a Red Card program - money goes to the principals.

**Fundraising:** Genevieve Gift wrap - money came in less. May drop the gift wrap fundraiser and focus on annual appeal or an alternative raiser.

Gave money to the DC and FB trips. \$4000 to each for kids who couldn't otherwise afford to go.

**Treasury report approved.**

**PTO Clubs:** Meghan: Next session coming up. 6 week session. Sign up online.

**Heather Nahas:** Bingo party coming up! April 14<sup>th</sup>. She forgot to mention what a lovely flyer the PTO secretary had made for her ☺

**Boston/Belmont Friends:** Finding ways to find time for METCO students to spend time with their Belmont friends. Aiming to improve connections between the kids. Had a great Bowling event in Boston recently.

Outstanding Teacher of the year award is coming up: you could nominate your chosen teacher (deadline March 31) - submissions have just been sent to the committee. One teacher will be chosen from each school. April 15<sup>th</sup> winners should be announced.

7<sup>th</sup> Grade dance is May 8<sup>th</sup>.

Last dance for 8<sup>th</sup> graders is their moving up party.

Staff luncheon coming up.

Last PTO meeting is May 28<sup>th</sup>.

ELA Curriculum Director will talk at the next PTO meeting about new initiatives.