

Chenery PTO Meeting
Thursday, October 8, 2015, 7:30 PM
Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome / Co-Presidents' Remarks

Wendy Conroy and Jamie Shea

Wendy Conroy welcomed attendees and invited all present to introduce themselves.

II. Foundation for Belmont Education (FBE) Overview

Jamie Shea

Jamie Shea, who is FBE President in addition to being Chenery PTO Co-President, gave a brief overview of the mission and activities of the Foundation for Belmont Education. She and Wendy listed activities including curriculum enrichment, last weekend's Dan Scharfman Run and the upcoming Spelling Bee.

III. Principal's Report / Chenery Update

Kristen St. George

Kristen St. George noted that Chenery has 1,320 students, including 40 new students. There are an additional 30 students in the LABBB program, bringing the total number of students in the school to 1,350. There are 20 new teachers this fall, which is a particularly large cohort. Chenery teacher Caitlin Corrieri, in attendance at the meeting, runs the district's mentor program for new teachers. John Hartunian, former Upper School math teacher, is new to his role as Assistant Principal, which he began the day after the last day of school this past June.

Kristen also noted smaller changes throughout the school: some spaces were configured over the summer to accommodate more students and staff members. The library now houses an additional computer lab with full instructional capabilities. The school has gone from 13 to 14 6th-grade classrooms. This was accomplished by moving the aforementioned computer lab from a classroom to the library. The 5th and 6th grades are now housed in one wing. This decreases travel time between classes for students, as do new travel patterns that have been formulated to decrease congestion. The school is also working with students about how they leave after lunch and come back from recess, to make travel patterns as calm as possible. This will be important as the school continues to grow. In addition, there are some reconfigured office spaces. Conference room space adjacent to the large community room is now being used for small group instruction. Also, outdated library stacks were repurposed as student work tables. There are now lower stacks in the library, which has increased the light in the space.

Last Wednesday was an early-release day for the purpose of faculty and staff professional development, as well as a potluck luncheon. The district's main focus this year is on social and emotional learning, at the classroom, school and district levels. Last Wednesday's program was an opportunity for Chenery faculty and staff to look at research on the subject of social and emotional education. Professional development, as well as classroom and school-wide work, about social and emotional learning will continue throughout the year.

Upper School

Daniel Coplon-Newfield, Assistant Principal

The summer affords the staff time for planning and preparation for the start of the new school year in September. A major summer project was to think about how to articulate more clearly to students, teachers and staff who we are as a school. The school is looking at how it responds to behavioral issues and what it really means to be respectful, responsible and ready to learn every day. There are plans to recognize publically, beginning this winter, students who are doing what we expect them to do. We are also doing targeted work with students about social and emotional learning—articulating that the curriculum is designed in part to connect class content with social and emotional learning. There is also targeted work with students with the guidance counselors, with programs taking place tomorrow for 8th-grade girls and, separately, for 8th-grade boys.

Lower School

Jonathan Hartunian, Assistant Principal

Jonathan explained that a summertime internship he did in a prior year gave him a preview of the administrative and planning activity that takes place at the school during the summer. Having shifted from the role of teacher (for 15 years) to administrator, he can clearly see the great work of the teachers at Chenery.

Author Julie Berry has visited the school. Information on the FBE Spelling Bee is forthcoming from the school, as well from as the FBE. Scholarships for Spelling Bee registration are available.

Daniel spoke up to mention that sign-up for parent-teacher conferences begins tomorrow. The Washington, DC, field trip for 8th-graders deadline is October 30. He also reminded parents to establish Edline access for teacher, school work and school communications. The 5th-grade overnight trip to Ferry Beach will take place the week of May 23.

A parent asked if Kristen St. George knows the predictions for school enrollment. She responded that the superintendent recently shared data on that, which shows continued growth in enrollment. She stated that this building will not dip below 1,300 until at least 2020. By that time, we will see a total of 800 additional students in the school district over the level 20 years prior. The district recognizes that modular classrooms likely will be necessary at all grade levels. The status of the current high school building is up in the air, pending state and the local community's funding decisions. The significant growth in enrollment will make modular classrooms essential and possibly lead to consideration of different school configurations and what grades will be housed at what level of school. A new high school is a factor in this.

Jamie Shea noted that John Phelan points out that Chenery is a linchpin of the enrollment challenges in the town. Chenery, which was designed for 280 students per grade, absorbed earlier school overcrowding by housing the 5th grade. While the soundest move from the standpoint of pedagogy and child development would be to move 5th graders back to elementary schools, the high school physical plant needs immediate attention. The town has applied to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for a subsidy to build a new high school.

In response to a parent's question, Kristen St. George described modular classrooms. These can be spacious and comfortable for students and teachers. She also reported that the superintendent will be sharing more information about enrollment challenges in all grades and possible options for school district responses to the situation. A parent asked about the town's support of these pressures. Jamie Shea mentioned that the district's tremendous teachers are also under significant pressure in the face of larger class sizes. Ms. St. George mentioned that parent involvement at the community level is important, and that this support is invigorating to teachers and staff—the override was a powerful positive message to folks who work in the Belmont public schools. Wendy Conroy noted that the roll out of small teams for core subjects in the Lower School has been a creative way to address large class size.

IV. Social and Emotional Learning

Kristen St. George

Kristen St. George said that this topic will be talked about throughout the year in meetings with parents (e.g. PTO meetings). Research shows that adolescents need to be known well by at least one adult, as a person and as a learner. In addition, students need breaks to enable their brains to recalibrate. They also need to learn to be resilient, flexible, self-aware, and independent. These qualities need to be taught explicitly and require a lot of practice. Adolescents' learning really begins with children knowing that they are known and understood by adults around them. The district is beginning to engage in a

strategic way about social and emotional learning. The school will host a program on this topic for parents later in the school year.

Jamie explained that the FBE has underwritten this entire program for the school district, which includes programs for elementary, middle and high school parents on this effort.

V. Chenery LABBB Program

Kristen St. George

The LABBB program is a collaboration of the Lexington, Arlington, Burlington, Bedford, and Belmont school districts, to pool resources and provide services to students from those communities who need a very different and highly skilled level of instruction due to their particular physical and cognitive needs. Belmont hosts LABBB programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels. One of Kristen St. George's goals this year is to provide more opportunities for mainstream and LABBB students to interact with one another more. This takes place in art class and the Best Buddy program; and the school is looking for students to volunteer in a LABBB classroom in place of study hall. There may also be opportunities for mainstream and LABBB students to have lunch together in a LABBB classroom and the cafeteria, perhaps once a week.

VI. Treasurer's Report

Elena Ruggiero

Elena Ruggiero presented the September budget and noted that the goal for the annual appeal is \$28,000. Curriculum enrichment and financial support (scholarships) for the Washington, DC, and Ferry Beach trips are the PTO's primary expenditures each year.

VII. Committee News / Upcoming Events

The PTO Club committee co-chair in attendance announced that there are 15 PTO club offerings this fall, with 173 students participating in the clubs. (209 applied for a club.) Eighteen students have received a club scholarship. The committee is actively looking at ways to streamline club communications and logistics. Wendy Conroy clarified that there are PTO clubs, Chenery-sponsored activities (these carry the district's \$150 activity fee for the year) and the BASEC after-school program. Wendy also mentioned that the Chenery reference guide, a new resource for students and families, was compiled over the summer and is available on the PTO website. The Chenery Handbook is also on the website.

Green Team update: The Safe Routes to School representative is stepping down, so a new representative is needed to keep the most recent representative's good work going.

Wendy reminded meeting attendees that the school directory is forthcoming. If one is not sure that they notified the school district of their willingness to be listed in the directory, they can contact Wendy to be put in touch with the volunteer handling the directory data.

The pasta dinner for 5th grade and new families is taking place on October 22, with flyers going out in students' backpacks tomorrow.

VIII. Secretary's Report

Wendy Conroy

Wendy Conroy presented on behalf of PTO secretary Lyn Hamer. She noted highlights from the May 28, 2015, PTO meeting and asked attendees to review the meeting minutes. Wendy asked for a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded, and the minutes were approved unanimously.

IX. Adjournment 8:30

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.