

## Chenery PTO Meeting Minutes

April 10, 2014 • 7:00PM

**Welcome/Presidents Remarks**—Welcome by Co-President Nancy Grayson, followed by introductions by all attendees. There were 11 parents in attendance, as well as Principal Kristen St. George and Assistant Principal, Upper School, Daniel Coplon-Newfield.

**Social/Emotional Development and Guidance Curriculum**—Kristen St. George talked about the social/emotional development and guidance curriculum at Chenery. She provided an overview of the work that the counselors and nurses are doing with our students. This is probably the work that parents hear about the least from their children, but it is nevertheless important and hopefully impactful work. Given the bullying response and social competency mandates in Massachusetts, this activity must be assessed and monitored over time. With only 3 school counselors for 1,300 children, Chenery is significantly (100%) understaffed in this area. Counselors are in the fifth-grade classroom with the children over the course of the year, giving lessons as well as addressing specific needs that arise. They break down skills to make the children more aware of this body of knowledge. Team functioning is essential throughout life, and is relevant beginning in the fifth grade due to the children's being organized in teams. Bullying, boundaries and friendship are emphasized, and cyber safety is worked in to the discussion as the children get older. How to be a good friend is addressed. By eighth grade, cyberbullying, sexting and boundaries are covered.

While challenges and issues vary by grade, the requisite underlying skills are the same and these skills are addressed in the classroom and beyond (e.g. lunch groups, community lunches for 30 students at a time (typically, although not always, self-selecting), the transition from grade eight to nine). Eighth graders hear a good deal about the role and responsibilities of being a bystander and upstander, and about the importance of telling an adult about problems. These messages are reinforced in relation to and during the Ferry Beach and DC trips, out on the playground, etc. The aim is to give students the tools to navigate social, emotional and academic situations. Children at this stage are only four to five years away from needing to be able to let go of parents as the central force in their decision making. They need to begin to consult less with their parents over time and think through questions on their own. Health teacher Monica Frender also works with students on these issues. The guidance counselors' classroom time is heaviest with the fifth grade, in keeping with the state mandate.

Daniel Coplon-Newfield noted that the three counselors, like the classroom teachers, are fully committed to this age group and coordinate very well with the teachers, including the health teacher, on the intrinsic social issues with this age group. He also noted that, despite the lure of spring weather, structure continues throughout this final quarter of the school year. The second and third rounds of the MCAS are coming up in May. He also mentioned that the PARC test, which is being piloted by the state, was done on paper (not computers as at some schools). Students were randomized and assigned to the test. Report cards will be posted tomorrow. Transitions are the major themes for the month of June, including visits from the five Belmont High School guidance counselors to eighth graders.

**Chenery Update**—Principal St. George talked a bit more about school counselors in middle and high school. There is a great deal of serious and significant work in both places. Stressors, hospitalizations, behavioral infractions are happening more and more, and at a younger age. The kinds of work shifts from one age group to another, but younger students need as much contact time as older students. Three counselors are not enough. Prior to the 2009 school budget cuts, Chenery had had four school counselors.

Principal St. George provided a Lower School update on behalf of Lower School Assistant Principal Chris Fleming. The school is prepping the fifth graders for the two-night Ferry Beach Ecology School trip. Fathers are needed as chaperones. Author Julie Berry has been spending time with the fifth graders recently, which students really enjoy; and “Ben Franklin” is visiting the fifth graders tomorrow.

The sixth graders have Myth Masters next Friday. They are beginning to show excitement over their impending move to the Upper School. Spring sports, school concerts, etc., tend to stretch students and households. Parents can call the school if they/their children need a little extra time for something. Fifth graders have the math and technology MCAS in May, while sixth graders have the math MCAS.

Visits to the four elementary schools will happen later this spring. The fifth grade model will change next year to a two-teacher team structure, with one teacher covering math and science and the other teaching ELA and social studies. This is being done for academic reasons and will not solve the class-size issue. (The new fifth grade class will have approximately 350 students.)

A parent asked about the school’s dress code with the coming warmer weather. Kristen St. George responded, and was echoed by Daniel Coplon-Newfield, that, developmentally, children at this age are appropriately trying different personalities and styles and often are comfortable with their and their peers’ clothing choices. A good approach for taking up this topic with one’s child can be to explain that some people do not feeling comfortable with certain forms of attire. Also, thinking about school as a work place where a certain level of casualness is not appropriate can be a compelling approach. Baseball caps are not allowed at Chenery. Principal St. George acknowledged that what is accepted by society and what is available in stores can be problematic with respect to the dress code. Expecting one’s child to adhere to the household’s standard seems to make the most sense from a practical standpoint.

### **Committee Chair Updates**

- **PTO Clubs**—The deadline for the PTO clubs has been extended to tomorrow, with good enrollment numbers to date. It is a six-week program because of the fifth and eighth grade field trips late in the school year.
- **International Fair**—The International Fair is the only multi-cultural event sponsored by the PTO and was very successful, with a great turnout of country/culture-specific tables and many guests, as well as a variety of student and professional performers (song, dance, musical instrument).
- **Star Party**—This is an educational night that sixth graders can choose to attend (with their parents). An inflatable planetarium, funded by the Foundation for Belmont Education, was set up in the gym. The cafeteria housed a number of educational displays and activities. Astronomers were outside with telescopes. It was a bitter cold night, so the hot chocolate on offer in the cafeteria was very popular.
- **Cookie Dough Fundraiser**—Information was a bit delayed in getting out, but we managed to net about \$3K (against a \$4K) goal, so we were fortunate in the end. The PTO is eager to explore other fundraising options so would welcome any suggestions.
- **Green Team Clean Up Day**—This is taking place on May 4 (1-3PM) at Chenery, along with similar activity at all of the schools around town that weekend. Butler is also holding an Electronics Day (“anything that plugs in”) on May 3, and the DPW is taking textiles, styrofoam, hard plastics, and metal, and will offer use of a secure shredder on May 3. There will be bags and recycling bins for clean-up at Chenery that day, along with planting taking place on the school grounds. Lunchtime

recycling continues to go nicely, even without parent monitors, with a great deal (half) of waste diverted from the trash stream. This translates into cost savings for the town. Composting is an upcoming requirement the schools will have to face.

- **Belmont Walk to School Day**—This will take place on May 7, and Chenery parent Sarah Wang is partnering with Safe Routes to School to raise awareness of the event. Listserve emails with more details are forthcoming.
- **Teacher Appreciation Luncheon**—This will take place on May 15. The committee orders sandwiches and asks for drink donations.
- **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Party**—This event is scheduled for June 18. The organizers hope to get a seventh grade parent involved early in the planning. It is a fun night for the kids. The aim is to keep it simple, with a DJ and dancing, and limited games. This will happen on a Wednesday, rather than the night before school ends, which will make recruiting the 40 volunteers that are needed a bit easier. There is also a short reception the morning of the last day of school.
- **5<sup>th</sup> Grade Ice Cream/Bingo Social**—This will take place on April 15 and is a fundraiser for the Ferry Beach scholarship. About 200 kids are anticipated for the event. The committee is using the school district's food service for the ice cream.
- **8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Fair** is under discussion. We will get back to the Chenery community if this is finalized.
- **6<sup>th</sup> Grade Ice Cream/Bingo Social**—date TBD. The proceeds will be saved for use with the class's eighth grade DC trip. As noted above, the fifth grade has a similar event. The eighth grade has the talent show for this purpose.

**PTO Treasurer's Report**—Elena Hanley noted that our income is down for the year, but that our expenses are also down for the year. Our current \$4.5K net income will go down with incoming expenses. That said, income will come in with the last round of PTO clubs and cookie dough sales.

Nancy Grayson explained that the PTO granted funding for two new garden boxes for the courtyard, a sound mixer for the auditorium, and anti-bullying t-shirts.

The Treasurer's Report was approved.

**Secretary's Report**—The minutes for the February 6, 2014, meeting were approved.

**Adjournment**—The meeting was adjourned at 8:40PM