**School Council Meeting – September 26, 2017**

Attendees: Dan Rubin, May Chiu, Martha Hausman, Sue Flicop, Amelia Pennell, EuRo Wang, Deborah Bernhard, Ricardo Gessa, Hema Roychowdhury, Clare Landrigan, Joel Stembridge, Deb Youngblood, Rebecca Levy, Charlie Myette, Marcia Okun, Michelle Luo, Helen Haley, Risa Shames

1. **Principal’s Update**

Joel described the role of the School Council:

* Established by State law
* Advisory board to the Principal, Principal will bring ideas to us
* Past topics have included: growth mindset, late start time
* Council can be political, but the Principal can not. The Council can write letters to the School Committee or in the Tab to advocate for a position.

Updates:

* This year Joel wants to focus on building a stronger voice for students and faculty. How do we make South more spirited.
* Courageous conversations – talk to freshman about school norms
* Teachers have formed teams to explore the following issues: community service, spirit, senior experience.
* Principal’s decisions
  + Close the L bench because of noise
  + Eliminated the pep rally the day before Thanksgiving and replace it with Lip Dub. Student leaders will help plan the event. Brought 120 student leaders together during F block and brainstormed ideas to build community.

Norms for the Council

* Speak your truth, not someone else’s – don’t take on other people’s issues
* No names on notes
* Share the air
* Assume good intent and curiosity
* Differing opinions can co-exist
* “And”, not “but”

Start Time Update

* School Committee voted in Spring 2017 that starting high school later is beneficial.
* Charged the Principals with creating a shorter schedule, 6.5 hours
  + Align North and South schedules
  + Consistent end times Monday- Friday
* Plan to survey teachers and students
* Could mean more blocks or fewer long blocks
* By June, there will be one or two schedules for the School Committee to evaluate
  + There may be collective bargaining needed with teachers union
* May be an opportunity to give feedback
* May want to ask School Committee candidates their views on this

1. **Teen Use of Social Media**

Deb Youngblood presented the topic of Teen use of Social Media – the Newton Health Department is working with the School Department to develop guidelines for parents. Council members spoke about how social media affects social and emotional development. Looking for volunteers for the workgroup.

1. **Focus for the Year**

Last year, we had presentations from the Faculty Wellness Committee and the AWARE students. This year, we would like to focus on School Culture and making South a more welcoming place. What impacts school culture? Joel presented one possible action item that we could focus on – eliminating the weighted GPA. He and Dan Rubin explained what it is and we discussed its merits and its drawbacks.

**Weighted GPA** - A weighted GPA means that students get a bump in their GPA for more difficult classes- honors and AP classes. It is first calculated in the middle of junior year and it appears in Naviance. Freshman year grades are not included. Seniors get their GPA in the fall. What about the student who is doing really well in ACP classes – their GPA will never be as high as those taking more difficult classes. What is the purpose of the GPA? Many colleges recalculate it, so it is not meaningful for those colleges. But many colleges continue to use it as a shortcut to review applicants.

Views of Council Members

* Ranking promotes competition among students
* Growth mindset lens says that we value achievement over growth.
* Not all students understand it
* GPA motivates students
* Lots of places where we rank students in high school – varsity vs. JV
* We live in a competitive country
* Unweighted GPA –a student may not challenge themselves to take harder classes.
* Not sure how much it would really affect school culture, if college is the end goal.
* Student passion - some students are taking high level classes because they love the subject.
* We need more research to see if it would make enough of an impact on school culture.

**Next Steps** – May and Martha will send a short survey to Council members asking them to rank possible topics for the School Council to engage in this year.