Newton South School Council Meeting – Minutes
June 12, 2008

In attendance: May Chiu, Bella Ertel, Sue Flicop, Peter Meyer, Martha Hausman, Eu Ro Wang, Amelia Pennell, Hema Roychowdhury, Xiaoguang Zhen, Deb Youngblood, Didem Vardar-Ulu, Marcia Okun, Helen Haley, Principal Joel Stembridge, Ricardo Gessa, Jessica Basile, Deb Bernhard.

**Principal Update Fire Alarms:** More this year than before –pipe burst in winter; however, the three more recent events have been alarms pulled by students. Currently in conversation with the fire department to modify the way to access handles of fire alarms to minimize accidental activations. A student pulled the alarm in one of the last three events; that student was described as someone with challenges understanding consequences. The school might go back to procedures it had in the past, where parents volunteered to monitor hallways during exams.

The school doesn't have enough cameras to monitor every pull station in the building, and the administration is not interested in spending money to add few more cameras just to monitor the currently unsupervised stations.

The school doesn't consider yet having a fire-alarm puller in the building and will continue monitoring the nature of these types of incidents costly incidents.

It has been acknowledged explicitly not only the amount of money those incidents cost, but also the fact that when assisting the school during mock emergencies, other parts of the city that might need these services, will not receive them because they have been diverted to Newton South, putting other residents of the city at risk, as well as valuable resources in perils.

**Principal Update One-to-one Devices:** The school would implement a pilot program with an entire class, where every single student will have his or her own chrome books and the instruction with be supported mainly by on-line tools. The chosen class has been the upcoming sophomores (2018-19 Sophomores), mainly because this coming year MCAS will be on-line based.

In the following year, the school will expand this initiative to other classes. In about 1.5 years, about 75% of students will have a computer. In addition, the school administration and district will be working with utility companies to provide Internet access to the homes of the few families in Newton (for now, just Newton) without current access to the Internet.

No one will be required to rent of buy a chrome book.

It is important to consider how to work around students who are already struggling when it comes to reading and will be doing so even more with screen-supported readings.

Privacy would be also an important factor to consider, particularly if the school is moving more to a model of on-line based instructional resources.

Regarding students accessing content in the Internet, the school administration believes in independence and self-responsibility. A technology committee will be discussing how to provide literacy to students around using technology responsibly and ethically.

In term of logistics, currently classrooms do not have charging stations to provide electric power to the device of every student.

Concerns were raised regarding cheating and how chrome books will increment the prevalence of this practice, as well as a mechanism to ensure consistency around teachers’ practices when it comes to on-line learning. The school administration is working with the School Committee to require all teachers to provide information on-line.

**Principal Update High School Late Start**: it has been in the making for years. The High Schools were asked to develop a school schedule without extending the ending time to present to School Committee in June 2018. The High School Committee needs more conversations and school-based work to gain support and staff buy-in. Currently the High School Committee is looking to present plan by December of 2018 with recommendations to the School Committee of a new high school schedule. If that happens, the early the school will see a new schedule is by 2019, or 2020, but that does not contemplate the piece regarding a later starting time. Presenting a letter from the NSHS School Council to the School Committee continues to be seen as a good move.

**Late Start Letter to School Committee Review**

The School Committee will have on their upcoming agendas the late starting time issue. Despite some words missing, the presented letter seems to be appropriated. The idea of the letter is to remind The School Committee that regarding to the redesign of the school schedule, the late starting time issue continues to be a priority for our school. In addition, and independent to the late starting time issue, once we have a new schedule, it could be relevant to revisit the graduation requirements, requiring taking and passing courses from personal finances, to race, class and gender, to culinary arts. Sue Flicop made a motion for the council to vote to send letter to School Committee this June. May Chiu seconded, and it was a unanimous Yes vote by all members present.

**Traffic update:** In a meeting held today about school safety in both high schools regarding traffic, DPW Director of Operations, Jason Sobel will discuss with the Mayor and the DPW Commissioner concerns regarding these issues and to get approval for an RFP to review Traffic conditions at both High Schools, including past recommendations. The RFP would include short term (i.e. moving cross walks) and long term (i.e. traffic lights). Newton South School Council is looking at the reality of our school and the specific safety issues associated with commuting in and out of it. May Chiu will continue to follow up in September on the DPW’s progress. We see this opportunity to improve the traffic challenges we have at South. For now, nothing is needed from the School Council or PTSO.

Alicia Bowman, Safe Route to Schools has gotten a grant to fund bike racks for High School. Plans for South is to install 30 new racks, solar powered, covered, with air pump. May Chiu is expecting the proposal from Alicia Bowman and will forward to Principal Joel Stembridge.

**Work groups:**

1. Celebrate the Faces of South: It has been planned to host a Freshmen Faces Session at South, where freshmen will have the opportunity to talk in front of their peers about something they are passionate about, and in a rather small setting, such as the Lecture Hall. The event should take place around the February break of 2019. Teachers will screen students’ speeches before the event. Unlike the sophomore speeches, it is not supposed to be an academic competition, but a gentle way to engage in voluntary conversations. Similar to the Monologue Project, mostly attended by NNSH students –this year many African American students at North talk to their peers about pressing issues affecting their communities. The “Freshmen Faces” session initiative should keep records of what is presented. Video format is also an alternative. It can be particularly beneficial to shy students, giving them the opportunity to share their ideas by pre-recording their speeches. Again, participation is entirely voluntary, and it is an experimental and non-academic exercise.

2. Enhance Teacher/Student Engagement and Communication: Evaluate and develop initiatives to strengthen the sense of belonging and connectedness, particularly between students and teachers. A five-questions survey was conducted among students during long advisories. The group received responses from 105 students (about 5.7% of students’ body). For more details, please refer to the document regarding the School Council – Student/Teacher Connection Survey results.