

Newburyport PTO General Meeting Minutes

Held virtually via Zoom

10/21/2020

7:30pm

Board Members Present: Katie Suchecki, Interim Co-President; Trish Boateng, Vice President; Pam San Antonio, Treasurer; Shannon Cormier, Assistant Treasurer; Christine Cioffi, Secretary; Andrea Eigerman, Cultural Enrichment Co-Chair; Joanna Fernandes, Cultural Enrichment Co-Chair; Adriana Kosten, Molin VP; Melanie Beaulier, Molin VP; Christy Teel, Grades 1-3 VP; Melissa Bouse, Communications Chair; Amy Sullivan, Bresnahan Pre-K/K Principal; Lisa Furlong, Nock Principal; Jamie Sokolowski, Molin VP

Special Guests: Sean Gallagher, Superintendent, Newburyport Public Schools; Sheila Reardon Spalding, School Committee; Tina Los, Newburyport Youth Services, ECAB Network; Kat Preftes, Human Rights Commission

Meeting called to order at 7:30pm by Trish Boateng, Vice President.

I. Welcome and Introductions (Trish Boateng)

Trish opened the meeting and welcomed the PTO and guests. She explained that this General Meeting will focus on Anti-Racism Efforts in our schools and community. She then introduced Joanna Fernandes, Co-Chair of Cultural Enrichment for the Business aspect of the Meeting.

II. Vote on Positions for 2020-2021 School Year (Joanna Fernandes)

Joanna briefly explained the open positions for the current school year and asked for a vote for all three of the following:

- PTO President – Andrea Eigerman
- Nock VP – Katie Suchecki
- Pre-K/K Rep – Allison Teneriello

VOTE: The PTO unanimously voted in favor to elect the slate of Officers nominated.

III. Special Topic: Anti-Racism Efforts in our Schools and Community (Trish Boateng and Special Guests)

- A. Introduction – Trish introduced the topic for the Meeting explaining that this is the beginning of the conversation as to how to support our students while living in a predominately white community. She then turned the Meeting over to Sean Gallagher, Superintendent of Newburyport Public Schools to explain some of the work that is already in process.
- B. Superintendent Gallagher – He began by commending the community for their outstanding dedication to children and volunteering to help the community. He mentioned organizations such as the Human Rights Commission and the World of Difference, explaining how they've

helped our community with leadership against bias and discrimination. Also, Essential Partners at the college level and Constructive Dialogue (former family therapists) who help with differences of opinion and ideology to find common ground in an effort to avoid personal attacks. Students have also been working with the faculty to make the curriculum more interesting. Dr. Michael Laitman is also assisting the district leadership team to continue educating against bias, racism, discrimination, and prejudice. He emphasized that this administration does not shy away from issues and has been successful addressing problems when they arise.

- C. Sheila Reardon Spalding, School Committee – Ms. Spalding informed the PTO that the School Committee passed an Anti-Racism Resolution this past summer that was a draft originally from the Massachusetts Association of School Committees they reworked to make applicable to the Newburyport community. The resolution calls on the school district to offer professional development on diversity, equity and inclusion for its staff; hire a diverse teaching staff; and for the curriculum to include the history of racial oppression and works from diverse perspectives.
- D. Tina Los, Newburyport Youth Services, ECAB Network – Ms. Los explained that Newburyport Youth Services strives for positive youth development. The mantra is to model characteristics that help individuals thrive in life. She described a youth group that was in place prior to the Pandemic where young people of color participated unanimously alongside a clinician to discuss issues experienced while growing up in a predominately white community. She suggested that work needs to be done throughout the city to make a policy change that will make a lasting change for diversity, equality and inclusivity.
- E. Kat Preftes, Human Rights Commission – Ms. Preftes indicated that she reports to the Mayor to advocate for equality. The Commission performs advocacy work, writes articles, and works on communication plans. She administered a bias survey to all city employees. The mission is to move toward inclusivity and to battle stereo-types. She offered her support to the PTO and its initiatives.

IV. Question and Answer Session (Trish Boateng)

Trish facilitated a question and answer session for the remainder of the meeting.

- A. A question was raised regarding the efforts that can be done at the Pre-K/K level to give them the tools they need to enhance their understanding in a non-threatening way.
 - a. Response: PBIS is geared toward how to treat others. Social interaction is always an opportunity to learn (snack-time sharing). Teachers get professional development on the topic.
 - b. Response: “Be safe, be kind, and be responsible” also help the younger students with the treatment of others. The Bresnahan is aware that their teachers are predominately white. The Nock does have a better balance of non-white teachers.

- B. A question was raised regarding the hiring practices.
 - a. Response: It is an ongoing challenge, but the district is working with the North Shore Collaborative on this effort.

- C. A question was raised regarding changing the curriculum to make it more sensitive.
 - a. Response: Dr. Laitman is helping with this by looking at it from a different lens.

The November meeting will be held virtually at a date to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 8:35pm.