**NEWTON NORTH SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING – MINUTES**

2nd meeting 7pm November 5th, 2012

Room 103

**1. Attendance of School Council Members**

Jen Price, NNHS Principal & Co-Chair

Jo Doherty, Parent Representative & Co-Chair

Margaret Albright, Parent Representative

Jackie Gelb, Parent Representative

Andrea Steenstrup, Parent Representative

Ellen Gibson, Parent Representative

Bev Spencer- Community Representative

Chris Alberg, Teacher Representative

Sonya Jampel, Student Representative

Irene Golden, Student Representative

Lynne LeBlanc PTSO

Sally Brickell PTSO

All School Council members identified above were present at the meeting. In addition Beth Swederskas, Head of NNHS’s Counseling department, & Sarah Hoffman, one of NNHS counselors, were present for the duration of the meeting.

**2. Acceptance of minutes from last meeting – October 1st, 2012**

The motion was proposed and seconded and the minutes were passed by unanimous vote. These minutes will be posted on the School Council website as soon as the website has been updated.

**3. Opportunity for Public Comment**

No members of the public were present at the meeting.

Jo Doherty identified the procedure for hearing public comments as established in the School Council’s by-laws as follows. The meeting chair will provide a sign in sheet to be located on the closest table to the meeting room door. School Council members were asked to introduce themselves should a member of the public arrive & to confirm whether they wish to address the meeting. If so they are requested to sign in in the order of their arrival, identifying their name and address. Providing this has been done, public comment will be heard as agenda item #3 and speakers will be called upon by the meeting chair in the order of sign in and allowed a maximum of 3 minutes to address the School Council provided they do not address any student specific issues.

**4. Review of Actions Outside the School Councils area of interest for 2012/13**

**4.1 Status of the 2011/12 School Council’s communications survey**

Lynne LeBlanc & Sally Brickell reported that they had been in contact with Meryl Kessler, the previous School Council co-chair, who was in charge of this project. The survey, conducted late in the school year, generated almost 400 responses from students, faculty and parents. These responses were divided amongst the School Council members for tabulation so survey results could then be computed. Not all tabulated question results had been received by Meryl and it was unclear as to which questions she had or did not received. Although it was noted she has retained all the original survey responses.

Jen asked Lynne and Sally to send her the completed question tabulations and then to send her the raw data from those questions awaiting tabulation, including access to the original survey responses. Jen will then make arrangements to have various interns working at NNHS to complete the tabulation, computation and analysis for publication.

**4.2 Document existing School Council procedures and update the Council’s visibility on both the NNHS and PTSO websites**

Jo Doherty distributed to all those present an update of the School Council web site information, to be accessible from a School Council icon prominently displayed on both the Newton North High School and PTSO websites. This information also contains the by-laws of the School Council.

Jen requested that all School Council members review the document and refer to Jo any comments or issues of concern within a week of this meeting. Any issues of gravitas raised within this timeframe will be addressed at the next school council meeting. Otherwise Jo will arrange for the document to be used to update the School Council website and to increase the website visibility of the School Council.

**5. Discussion/Brainstorm of the School Council's project of interest for 2012/13**

Principal Jen Price thanked Beth Swederskas, NNHS's Dept Head of Counseling, and Sarah Hoffman, NNHS Counselor, for attending the meeting in order to facilitate and contribute to this discussion. The School Council would like to extend its grateful thanks to both Beth Swederskas and Sarah Hoffman to maximizing the value of this discussion with their insights and thoughtful considerations.

At the last meeting School Council members agreed by unanimous vote that it’s project this year will be to focus on developing programmatic ways in which the college process could be made more understandable & accessible for all students and their families at Newton North, especially those academically proficient & advanced disenfranchised students, such as African American, low income, ELL & Latino students. Jen reiterated her wish that every student attending NNHS have equal access to an excellent education. Substantial progress has been made in eliminating academic gaps of students while at NNHS but Jen underlined her concern also extends to that of post school graduation education opportunities.

Jen identified that a tracking software system has recently been purchased which enables her to track students throughout their term at NNHS by ethnicity and achievement etc,. Data for the class of 2012 has just been entered into the system and her intention is to enter data from the preceding 6 graduating classes.

NNHS makes great effort to connect with students and their families from the METCO and ELL programs as well as the PILOT (a program for students with significant social and emotional issues) and the LINKS (a program for Juniors and seniors who struggle to attend school) programs.

However, despite these and many other efforts Jen feels the school’s success in supporting it’s students is as a result of her staff going above and beyond their duties in order to support students who are struggling to improve. Jen underscored her desire to design and implement a systematic approach to support academically proficient and advanced disenfranchised students and their families in college accessibility and planning that does not depend so completely on best efforts of staff. A system that once implemented will be of benefit to all students at NNHS.

Beth Swederskas explained how Naviance, a web based post-graduate management program used by many high schools nationally, is employed at Newton North. During a students sophomore year it is used to explore their career and high school interests. In junior year it is used for post graduation planning and assessment so that the student early in their senior year is able to short list and finally select colleges to apply to.

Beth informed the School Council that a test prep software called “Prep Me” was recently purchased by the school with funds raised by the PTSO from it’s Ed Ex campaign. This software will allow practice test taking of the PSAT, SAT, ACT and possibly the PLAN without any fees for any student that has a Naviance account. Therefore removing a major financial obstacle to student preparedness for many families.

Beth also stated that her department is undergoing a review of existing counseling documentation to ensure accuracy in reflecting current practice. Included within this review is the college prep timeline prepared by a previous school council. It is her intention to establish a comprehensive reference book, which will contain all relevant information used/produced by the Counseling Department in college advisement. It will include an accurate timeline of events, activities and student actionable dates.

Discussion took place about how best to identify those families whom would benefit from the programmable support structure to be devised by the School Council. There were various suggestions including:

* Families do not attend the college night typically held in Jan targeted at Seniors;
* Those who do not take advantage of the 2 college nights held recently in October when college representatives are on hand to answer questions students and their families might have;
* Families who do not attend the sophomore parents night typically held in January (this year Jan 13th);
* Families who do not access their child’s grade via the Parent Portal.

Bev Spencer underlined the need to access those families who do not have access to the internet.

Jen outlined some examples of how she & the staff at NNHS are reaching out to families who might need additional support. Parents will be notified that report cards have been issued and are available to access via the Parent Portal. She is able to ascertain which families have not accessed the Portal and plans after a week to call those who have not done so to find out if internet access is an obstacle and whether they would like the report card mailed. Another example is teacher parent conferences – for the first time teachers will have the capability to pre-booking conference times for families that might need additional help ahead of the general sign up. Jen also indicated that using the automated calling system she also has the capability to send a telephone message to specifically identified families inviting them to take advantage of an event.

With respect to the college timeline that was previously mentioned, Jackie Gelb mention the need to perhaps have an earlier orientation meeting for incoming families to NNHS outlining the entire process and providing confidence that NNHS has a system for advising them along this pathway in a timely fashion. Such a meeting could help to alleviate family concerns and questions, which might free up the counseling department to concentrate on those other families who will need more support.

Back to School night was identified as being an excellent opportunity to access families, especially in the homeroom portion of the evening. While it was suggested that material could be mailed to any families identified as not attending Back To School Night, it was also acknowledged that many of these families would probably not read any such materials.

Another suggestion was to have a school event that is specifically targeted at families for whom their NNHS student would be the first to attend college and also for families for whom English is not the first language.

Margaret Albright identified that Codman Academy, a school for at risk students, do several things for their students that NNHS might consider replicating. One is a career evening event where they have speakers talking about what they actually do in their career to provide specific examples to students as they consider their options and to help cement the relevancy of subjects and materials currently being studied at school. Another is they take students on college visit as many of their families are unable to do so, either because of financial constraints or because the parents have multiple jobs and cannot take the time off.

Sonya Jampel mentioned that the traditional NNHS sophomore Washington DC trip could be re-interpreted to become a college tour trip. Others then suggested making use of the many colleges in the area by having NNHS organize visits to local colleges accessible through NNHS family connections and also of having NNHS alumni giving the college tour. Irene Golden thought that students could benefit from being able to go on college visits with their peers and not parents.

The Dover scholars program at NNHS was mentioned as a potentially useful focus group who might be able to assess any ideas or programs the School Council might develop.

Sarah Hoffman illustrated the early development of an informal parent group in partnership with the guidance office and the PTSO to help students deemed to have least access to the college process. They are debating the best means to gain access to these students and how best to partner with them to improve their college accessibility. One idea was a buddy system, which could pair a student with a family in the community who had already gone through the college process.

In conclusion, out of the discussion emerged various elements that seemed to be viewed as important in developing a systematic and programmable approach. These elements were identified as:

* Get information out earlier to parents who do not have access to the internet
* Provide an overview of the college timeline earlier to all families emphasizing the programs NNHS has in place for timely guidance and help
* Help families better understand the basics of testing
* Help families better understand the basics of money and college costs
* Career exploration aspect
* College visits
* Naviance as a resources umbrella
* Utilise NNHS alumni for college visits, career aspect, being ready for college etc,.
* Utilise NNHS parent to arrange college access for visits, career evenings etc,.
* Utilise NNHS parent alumni for institutional knowledge about the college process etc,.
* Address whether students are ready for college readiness.

The School Council also asked that Beth & Sarah take a look at the article circulated ahead of the meeting produced by College Board Advocacy which identified the top 10 Effective School Counselling Activities and to comment whether they feel NNHS addresses all of these effectively enough, and whether the program to be developed needs to specifically address any of these aspects.

6. AOB and Date of Next Meeting

There was no further business.

The date of the next School Council meeting is December 3rd, 2012 at 7pm in Room 103.