**NEWTON NORTH SCHOOL COUNCIL MEETING - MINUTES**

1ST meeting October 1st, 2012

Room 103

**School Council (SC) Members Present:**

Jen Price, NNHS Principal & Co-Chair

Jo Doherty, Parent Representative & Co-Chair

Andrea Steenstrup, Parent Representative

Bev Spencer- Community Representative

Sonya Jampel, Student Representative

Irene Golden, Student Representative

Chris Alberg, Teacher Representative

Margaret Albright, Parent Representative

Jackie Gelb, Parent Representative

Lynne LeBlanc PTSO

Sally Brickell PTSO

**Apologises:**

Ellen Gibson, Parent Representative

**1. Review of Opening Day Presentation Jen Price**

Principal Jen Price gave the School Council an overview of what has become her traditional opening day ‘State of the School’ presentation she gives the Newton North High School faculty at the beginning of each academic school year. The presentation, “A Tradition of Excellence”, identifies the prevailing academic trends of Newton North students which have improved steadily since 2006, sufficient for Newton North to be identified as a Category 1 school defined by the Massachusetts Department of Education as having met or exceeded all goals set by the State. An important part of this success Jen believes is the network of study and tutoring resources available for all students which she started putting in place when she began as Principal in 2006, such as work study groups, x-blocks, peer tutoring etc,.

She emphasized that of particular concern to her as the Principal of Newton North is the academic trajectory of disenfranchised groups, such as Black, low-income or Latino students. Generally these groups of students are found to be disadvantaged in their academic outcomes when compared with their more affluent student counterparts. Jen gave the SC some insights into her doctoral dissertation for which she conducted an intervention at Newton North for this group of students, the hypothesis of which was to positively affect student academic outcomes. She shared that her intervention resulted in a statistically significant increase in academic outcomes for her targeted group. Her radically simple yet extremely effective intervention was to inform teachers which students in their classes received free or reduced lunches in order for the teachers to be able to direct those students, if struggling, to the available study and tutoring resources already provided at Newton North.

Jen reported that the High School is making great progress in reducing both the MCAS failure rates of 10th grade black & low-income students as well an improvement in increased MCAS scoring. In 2006 8% of 10th grade low-income students failed math and 13% of these students failed English Language Arts. In 2012 the failure rates had been significantly reduced to 1% and 0% respectively. In 2006 16.7% of black students failed math and 16% failed English Language Arts whereas in 2012 there were zero failures in either subject. A similar trend has also been seen for improved scoring rates above a pass for these students. For example, in 2006, 50% of such students recorded a score of Advanced or Proficient whereas in 2012 that had increased to 90%. A similar upward trend has been seen in the MCAS scoring of Latino students at Newton North. It should be noted that these improvements have not been at the expense of any other student groups. Rather the trend for academic improvement can be empirically supported as occurring across all student groups at NNHS.

While very encouraging that Black & Latino students have experienced advancement of their 10th Grade MCAS results it appears that there is considerably less movement for this group from a Proficient to an Advanced score during this time period.

An example of one reason why perhaps this upward trend is occurring is the close co-ordination taking place between the public feeder middle schools & Newton North. A Newton North transition specialist works with those families who have an 8th grade student identified as being in need of academic support services. The NNHS transition specialist works with each family during the students 8th grade year so that by the time the student becomes a 9th grader both the family & student are well aware of all the support services offered by Newton North. For example, these incoming 9th graders will have support resources like the after school program already included as part of their schedules as if it is a mandated course requirement. Although not technically required, Newton North works really hard with the family & student to make it a commitment that is hard to withdraw from and to encourage a true family-school-student partnership.

Jen also spoke of a program that has been instigated this year at Newton North called the Dover Legacy Scholars Program; a partnership between NNHS and the Myrtle Baptist Church of Newton to enhance and expand the academic experience and achievement of black students.  The program currently has 34 sophomore, junior & senior students enrolled who are encouraged to achieve intellectual growth, personal development, and community service to forge a strong bond among themselves as young, gifted Black people and also between themselves and the living legacy of African-American struggle present in the Newton community. Brookline Public Schools operates a similar model upon which NNHS has based theirs.

**2. School Council Projects**

**2.1 Recent History of School Council Projects**

Jen Price explained that School Councils, as mandated by the State of Massachusetts, advise the school Principal on the School Improvement Plan (SIP) & help develop any projects arising out of the SIP that the Principal identifies as beneficial to the successful functioning & development of the school. Examples of past projects undertaken and completed by the School Council are:

- Development and publication of a College timeline that runs from freshman through senior year;

- Instigation of EdEx – an Educational Excellence fund-raising campaign that has contributed more than $100,000 to NNHS;

- Development & Implementation of a range of events to mark the symbolic transfer from the old to the new NNHS building in the fall of 2010;

- In 2006, when Jen Price became Principal of Newton North, she surveyed parents, faculty and students to identify the strengths and needs of the school. In 2011/12 the SC conducted another survey to reassess where Newton North stands five years later and to determine our current strengths and needs. The information is being compiled and will be published this fall.

**2.2 Possible Projects for School Council this year**

Jen talked about her concerns regarding the difficulties experienced by disenfranchised groups of students such as low-income, black and English language learners (ELL) and their ability to apply successfully to colleges, secure a place, then attend college and subsequently graduate. Such difficulties arise for a variety of reasons from the lack of information or knowledge about the college application process, to the inability to accurately match school choice with a family’s financial capability & the school’s capability or willingness to offer sufficient financial aid. This is a concern that is gaining in significance as these groups at Newton North become increasingly more academically successful. Jen talked about wanting to utilize and leverage existing institutional knowledge of the college process that many Newton families have and find a means of transferring this knowledge to families for whom the college process is unfamiliar and perhaps daunting.

Andrea Steenstrup asked whether Jen needed assistance with development of the Parent Portal system that Newton North is now using to provide parents with information relating to their child’s school progress. Jen indicated that she feels both she and the school are adequately dealing with this at present.

After some discussion SC 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.

Bev Spencer suggested the SC could use Newton North alumni as an informational source – role models to engender inspiration & belief in aspiring and current Newton North students. It was also suggested that the Dover Legacy Scholars could serve an important role as a focus group helping the SC to identify potential knowledge gaps of students and their families regarding the college process.

Jen Price identified that the school has just bought a computer package, which will enable her to look at college completion and post college success data of alumni. She also mentioned that seniors have to complete and turn in a leaving survey in order to graduate, which might prove a useful source of information for this project and indicated the possibility of adding to or adapting the survey.

**Summary of Actions Allocated at Meeting Responsibility of By**

Investigate the program at Codman Academy with respect to the Margaret Albright 11/05/12

advancement of African American students and how Codman

navigates college accessibility for them.

Follow up with Sarah Hoffman, NNHS College & Career Sally Brickell & 11/05/12

Counselor, as to how the parent support group she Lynne LeBlanc

runs functions. This group, started last year, works to bring

first generation college families together with families that

have more experience around the college process.

Ascertain the status of the School Council’s 2011-12 project Sally Brickell & ASAP

- the communications survey Lynne LeBlanc

Review the schedule of meetings for the school year & Jen Price ~~ASAP~~

confirm meeting dates & times – see attached calendar

Document current & existing School Council procedures Jo Doherty 11/05/1

in accordance with State regulations

Elevate public visibility & accessibility of School Council by

re-designing the SC sitemap on the PTSO & NNHS website Jo Doherty 11/5/12

All School Council members were asked by Jen Price to ALL SCHOOL 11/05/12

brainstorm any ideas pertinent to this years SC project MEMBERS

as well as initially investigate any promising avenues or best

practices at similar programs run by other educational

establishments. SC Members should be ready to report back

their findings at the next SC meeting.