



## **Bigelow PTO Winter Meeting Minutes**

### **January 11, 2018, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**

**Attendees:** Jennifer Weber (Co-President), Una Simmons (VP of Fundraising), Michelle Welford (Co-Treasurer), Joana Canedo (Secretary), Todd Harrison (Bigelow Principal), Bridget Ray-Canada (Newton School Committee), David Fleishman (NPS Superintendent), Homa Homayoni, Beth Hicks, Sally Brickell (Newton North PTSO), Tim Davis, Ruth Goldman (Newton School Committee), Monika Sawicka

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#### **1. Welcome and Introduction**

Todd Harrison thanked everyone for coming. Participants introduced themselves.

#### **2. Just Think**

Sally Brickell introduces the event "[Just Think: Teens Making Smart Choices](#)" sponsored by the Newton North PTSO. It will take place on Thursday, 01/18, at Newton North. 25 local non-profits who educate teens about healthy behaviors and support families. Issues like: gender, depression, safety, e-cigarettes, helping kids with mental illness; etc. It's a big volunteer effort. Sally invites parents to come with their teens; shared experience is important.

#### **3. Big Night**

Una Simmons introduces the fundraiser. The PTO is working on getting donations for the auction – 20 donations per grade. All the information is on the PTO website: <http://bigelowpto.org/bignight>. Event on March 24th at the Cambridge Boat Club. Everyone is invited.

#### **4. What's going on at Bigelow**

Todd Harrison talks about the school:

- Before the December break there was a wonderful ballroom dancing performance by the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade, lots of parents came.



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- Geography Bee qualifying rounds were in December. 50 students are going to the semi-finals on January 12, when 15 students will be selected for championship round on January 30th. Guest moderator is going to be Mark Springer, Mason-Rice Elementary School former principal.
- Music teacher Greg Livingston is going to retire this year. He is an amazing teacher, who has been at NPS for 40 years. Hard shoes to fill.
- Students took a connectivity survey last year in June and this year in December. It's a Bigelow school survey for the use of the school. The questions were designed to help measure social and emotional learning, in particular how kids are connecting with teachers, after school programs, classmates, etc. The results from December are not ready yet. Results from June are interesting and show that after Bigelow started morning advisory (2 years ago) things seem to be changing, students seem more connected, but there are still gaps.

### 5. School Committee and NPS

Bridget Ray-Canada (newly elected member) introduces the Committee:

The School committee is responsible for budget and district-wide policies, Superintendent hiring and evaluation, community liaison. It works collaboratively with superintendent and team, who work the day to day operations.

The Committee meets every other Monday, and everyone is welcome to attend the meetings.

Ruth Goldman (School Committee Chair)

NPS completed 2 new elementary schools – Angiers and Zervas. Cabot is currently under construction for 2 years. Lincoln Eliot is the next one. School plan is part of the capital improvement of the city, there's [a list of priorities](#) on the school committee website. This should be updated with the new mayor.

NPS is in the planning phase of full day kindergarten.

High school start time changes are still being discussed. It is a very complicated process, and it will start with evaluating the daily schedules for the high schools.

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### David Fleishman (Superintendent)

NPS is making shifts in curriculum in middle school, especially regarding social and emotional development.

An advisory program started at Brown and was followed by Bigelow 2 years ago. It is an extended homebase time focused on building connections and social and emotional development. It deals with bullying, bias, etc.

A Peer Leaders program has been in place for 2 years at Bigelow too ([ADL, supported by the Newton School Foundation](#)). After going through the program, Peer Leaders visit with younger students to make presentations on bullying, cyber bullying and anti-bias behaviors to build social responsibility and a more inclusive and respectful school community.

Teachers are being trained on responsive classroom.

NPS is discussing issues of race. Microaggression training for kids and adults. Faculty and leadership work being done. Newton families ([FORJ](#)) are working with NPS.

NPS observes that students feel more connected to the school today than 5 years ago thanks to all these programs. Educators be able to work with all kids, even different.

There was for example a 7<sup>th</sup> grade issue about race and respect after an incident at Bigelow in December. There was a positive discussion, and the school will follow up later this month.

Una Simmons asked about fees for after school activities – This makes more difficult for some kids to get involved in activities which enhance that connectivity.

Ruth Goldman answered: NPS tries to make it easy not to have to pay the fees when they can't. But there's a balance to achieve between what can be offered and the budget costs.

Joana Canedo asked about middle school recess, as an important health issue that can improve productivity and academic results. The example of the successful pilot program [Laps at Lunch](#) at Bigelow last year shows how some outside and active time is beneficial for kids. Is this discussion taking place at the NPS?



David Fleishman answered that it's an important discussion, that can take place within the School Committee. But MA Laws require that schools must ensure that students are scheduled to receive a minimum of 990 hours of structured learning time per school year for secondary school students – and it's complicated to add recess time with this schedule.

### **6. Social Media Research**

Tim Davis criticized the research promoted by Wellesley about Social Media. There were inappropriate questions for 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The purpose of the research might be noble, but the way the research was conducted doesn't consider the well-being and the needs of the students, but the agenda of the researchers. If it were to be made, it should be opt in and not opt out. He reached out to Wellesley.

Monika Sawicka wasn't comfortable either with the parent part of the survey and having to give personal information. She called Wellesley to talk about it.

Todd Harrison answered: Bigelow gave permission for this research partly because the school wanted to have the feedback from the researchers in order to understand this important issue of social media use, to see the findings and conclusions. We agree the researchers were not well organized and didn't show the questions before. The school is going to be more careful in the future. Thank you for the feedback.

### **7. Additional**

Homa Homayoni thanked Bigelow for being a welcoming school, where her 6<sup>th</sup> grader is very happy and thriving.

More about FORJ:

"Diversity Chat on Race for Parents", Feb 9<sup>th</sup> at Burr, very successful.

[01/24 at the Newton Library](#): "The Many Faces of Newton: Our Students Speak Out About Race and Racism".

[02/28 in Boston](#): "Talking to Children about Race: Why and How?"