

Bigelow PTO Meeting Minutes

December 3, 2013

Meeting came to order

We had a quick business meeting before the presentation about online and social media use among our kids. Here are the highlights:

Big Night Help: The adults-only event — a silent auction, food, booze and lots of schmooze— is the PTOs biggest fundraiser. We're depending on it to add \$10,000 to the PTO coffers, but co-chairs Laurie Halloran and Liz Haas need help with everything from advertising to donation solicitation to set up and clean up and more. Give Laurie a shout if you can help. Contact her at lhalloran@hallorancg.com.

PTO budget in a nutshell, according to Treasurer Ted Everett:

We raise and spend between \$25-35K a year.

The revenues break down as follows:

- Big Night: \$10k
- Donations (don't forget to read our annual appeal letter and respond): \$6K
- Soup Stroll: \$3-4
- Other activities: you do the math

Some of the major things the PTO funds are:

- Creative Arts and Sciences: \$10K
- Technology: \$5K
- Teachers: \$1,500
- 8th Grade Activities: \$1,500
- PTO administrative and business costs: \$2K

This year we're spending money on the following things:

- Technology accessory purchases like headphones
- \$2K for an art display case in main hallway
- \$1K for performing arts needs (new curtain for rear of theatre, new chairs)

The budget passed unanimously.

The rest of the meeting was a presentation by school psychologist Jordana L'Esperance-Chouinard and Boston Area Rape Crisis Center staffer Lee Doyle about our children's social media and online activities.

Principal Todd Harrison first spoke about the emphasis the school places on social-emotional learning, and particularly in the aftermath of the two suicides of Newton High School students. He summarized the efforts at Bigelow in this area:

- The school works hard to find a balance between social-emotional learning and academic expectations. Part of the school's mission is to create strong social connections between adults and kids. The school wants the kids to understand their own emotions and how to handle them, to ask for help when they need it, etc. Bigelow is constantly generating new ideas and programs in this area of learning.
- This year they started the Connections Project to identify which students may lack strong connections with staff and to address this
- Health and Wellness class: e.g. they recently had great discussions about empathy
- Community Block: meets every couple of weeks and works on this area
- One Book/One School: the activities surrounding Flipped have addressed many social-emotional issues
- Physical Education class: activities that involved problem-solving and encourage kids to take safe risks. Teachers' debriefing focuses on interpersonal skills, leadership and group dynamics
- Grade 6 Developmental Guidance: in fall of sixth grade, all sixth grade students meet in small groups of 10-12 with their guidance counselor to talk about topics such as friendship, empathy, peer communication, etc.
- Parent and staff trainings on issues like student anxiety and tonight's training on social media.

What followed was a very interactive discussion of our kids' relationship with technology, our fears about these relationships and ways to find a healthy balance between the two.

Attendees described their kids' relationship with technology as follows:

Use it a lot

Integral to lives

Not afraid of it

Addictive

Peer pressure

Applications evolving more quickly than we can keep up with

Accessibility

Corrosive

What attendees think computers and social media are doing to their kids:

Changing kids' brains
Changing socialization skills– can't relate to adults
Job security if you have these skills
Poor judgment: everyone does dumb things on it

The facts, according to the Pew Research Center:

95 % of teens on line
78% have cell phone. Half have smart phones
80% teens use social media sites. Most teens are kind to each other on them.

Jordana L'Esperance-Chouinard: talking to your kids about social media should not be "one lecture, but rather an ongoing conversation."

How Parents Can Guide Positively:

Have clear values: respect, sharing information, respecting yourself and others, importance of family time, setting standards. Tell them if they wouldn't say it to their friend's face, they shouldn't say it in text.

Engage: redirect kids away from technology, talk to the kids about social media-related issues such as what privacy means to them, what do they like about their favorite online activities, etc. How do you meet them "where they're at?" Maybe do some online things together, such as watch a movie.

Listen: Have dinner together. Sometimes they're not ready to talk so pick your times strategically. As adults, we often monopolize conversations. Help them understand that what they think matters.

Plan ahead for ways to have a constructive conversation about technology: Invite them to share their superior knowledge about things like cool new apps. Show them you're eager to learn from them. Could provide springboard for sharing info about the power and risks associated with online activity in nonjudgmental, collaborative way.