

**New Canaan High School Parent Faculty Association**

**PFA General Meeting Minutes**

Wednesday, November 13, 2019 at 9:30 a.m.

Wagner Room, New Canaan High School

Approximately 25 people were in attendance.

Jody O’Donnell welcomed everyone and highlighted upcoming events: tomorrow is the 10th grade networking meeting to explain GPA and Naviance, next Tuesday 11/19 is the senior networking session on the college decision-making process and the senior internship program, 12/5 is the freshman networking meeting about midterm preparation, and also on 12/5 is the “ Your happiness has been hacked” presentation, which will address strategies for dealing with technology in our children’s lives.

Jody asked for motion to approve the PFA General Meeting minutes from October. All approved and the motion carried.

Jody turned the meeting over to Bill Egan who introduced the assistant principals: Kristi Carriero who is working with 9th and 12th grade, Larry Sullivan who works with 11th grade and Ari Rothman, who is working with this year’s 10th grade (principals move up with grade level).

**Q&A for Principals:**

**When should parents reach out to the grade-level administrator vs. the guidance counselor?**

Bill answered saying that if it’s an academic concern the student or parent should start with the teacher and if not resolved then go to counselor. But if it is regarding a disciplinary measure go directly to the grade-level administrator. Larry added that if it is an emotional or physical safety concern reach out to the administration.

**What are the guidelines regarding tests and homework?**

Bill said the administration has tried to limit homework to 25 minutes per subject per night but the challenge is fighting the battle with kids and phones. Students should have no than two tests per night per child. A student can ask the teacher “out” of a test and the administration can help if teachers don’t honor that. Ari added that more direct communication between the student and teacher is ideal. Regarding homework, kids need to speak up if it’s taking longer than 25-30 minutes – the teaching and learning process is a two-way street. He also encouraged parents to feel free to reach out to teachers.

**Is there a student exchange program?**According to Larry the high school does not have the liberty to start one but has hosted international students. Bill added that there are many laws around exchange programs and the high school doesn’t want to risk sending kids into unfamiliar environments.

**What is the update on Schoology?**

According to Bill the teachers had a development day on 11/5 when they were trained in Schoology. The expectation is that by the end of the semester at least one course must be loaded into Schoology. Bill added that it might be a year before everyone is using the same platform for all work and assignments.

**What is the status of school start times?**

Bill stated that this is in the Board of Education’s hands – they will determine this budget season what they intend to do and are considering several different alternatives.

**What are the challenges to a block schedule and kids sitting still for that long?**

Bill reported that every school he has visited and every student he has talked to that has moved to a block schedule said they would never go back. Lecturing for 85 minutes is not an option – teachers need to provide a dynamic experience for students.

Jody added that she attended the block scheduling session in Wilton with a dozen of our faculty. The Wilton students explained how their day has changed for the better and they love it. The students reported reduced stress and a more relaxed school environment that is conducive to more sleep. Wilton parents agreed that it’s been for the best. And they are only two months into the block scheduling change.

Bill reiterated that if we moved to a block schedule it would change for the 2021-22 school year. And Ari added that before we change we need to find a strong model that works and that a pilot program will be created where they spend a good solid year preparing for it. There is significant professional learning and development that needs to go into it.

**Where is the decision coming from to move to block? BOE? Or the high school?**Ari answered that it is a high school discussion in an attempt to lower the number of classes the kids have to reduce their stress. Ari added that they are using well established research to guide the initiative but that school start times are a separate initiative being considered by the BOE. Importantly a change in start times and a move to block scheduling won’t coincide in the same year.

**What is being done to minimize stress around midterms?**

Larry said that after the December break teachers will give review packets for midterms. Kristi highlighted the wellness activities that will take place in between midterms to reduce stress including therapy dogs, yoga and meditation. Midterms start January 17.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:11am.