

FRANKLIN PTO 3/24/09 GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

Executive Committee Members in Attendance:

Tracy Soehle - President
Eva Zervos - Vice- President
Deb Rooney - Treasurer
Lisa Chedekel - Secretary
Amy Kelly – Principal

Invited guests – representatives of Newton special education and student-support organizations.

Call to order at 7:10 p.m. and welcome by Tracy Soehle, who spoke of the success of recent school events, including Multicultural Night, Movie Night, the Coffeehouse and CoCo Key outing, and who thanked organizers for their hard work. Soehle outlined upcoming events, including the April 3 school auction, and thanked Franklin teachers and staff for their ongoing support of the PTO. Thanks also went to parent Carmen Pancerella for orchestrating the Original Works fundraiser.

Teacher Representative Eileen Keane introduced a number of teachers in attendance and reiterated that Multicultural Night and Movie Night were very successful. She thanked the PTO for extending invitations to all of the staff to attend the auction this year (free, with a guest).

Principal Amy Kelly introduced the invited speakers, each of whom gave brief overviews of their organizations before taking questions:

--Maura Tynes, assistant co-director of Student Services for the Newton schools, explained that Newton's philosophy regarding special education revolves around inclusion. She described the "integrated programs" in two Newton elementary schools, where regular education teachers are paired with special education teachers, and she mentioned the REACH program at Franklin, for students with learning needs. She also described the ESP program, a 45-day placement for students who need to come out of their neighborhood schools for a limited period of time in order to receive help with behavioral or other issues.

Tynes outlined several new initiatives in the proposed Newton schools budget, including an expansion of the ESP program and a partnership with Lesley University, through which masters' level students would come to Newton and study under an inclusion facilitator.

--Sandy Baird and Jo-Louise Allen of the city's Special Education Advisory Council (SPED PAC) spoke of the group's role in advising the school district on educating children with special needs. Baird said she sees the group's role as largely supporting parents and helping them navigate services. SPED-PAC has monthly meetings at which they bring in speakers on various issues. Jo-Louise Allen said the school liaisons – Michelle Weinfeld and Eileen Sandberg – are available on a confidential basis to help parents navigate the SPED process.

The group's website is: www.newtonpac.org.

--Carole Slipowitz and Joan Schulz, representing NoNAP (Network of Newton Autism Parents): Slipowitz spoke about the rise in diagnoses of autism-spectrum disorders and said the group is composed of parents who have children with diagnoses ranging from Asperger's syndrome to severe autism. The group advocates for parents and works cooperatively with teachers; has helped to write grants; and is a good way for parents to meet others, feel less alone, and brainstorm ways for NPS to better serve children with autistic disorders, she said. The group has a listserv available for parents.

-- Margaret Hannah and Marianne Cook, representing Project Interface and the Safe Schools Healthy Students Project. Hannah explained that Newton had received a \$6 million grant for Safe Schools initiatives, centered on students' health and safety and improving access to mental-health resources. She said the project includes parent-education programs and efforts to link social and behavioral health agencies with the school system. Cook, a social worker, is available to help Newton families navigate mental-health services, with a "help line" available to parents, staff members and others who need help in finding mental-health resources. The project's website is: www.projectinterface.org.

Principal Kelly invited questions from those in attendance. Parents asked a number of questions, including: what services are available to middle and high-school students, and why aren't there more integrated programs in Newton? Tynes and the other guests responded.

Principal Kelly took questions, including one about next year's proposed budget. She indicated that Franklin was not expected to lose any teachers, and that the school was preparing for four, 4th grade classrooms next year.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m. No votes were taken.

Minutes taken by: L. Chedekel