

Notes from the 2010 Class PTO meeting January 20, 2010

Susan Ridker opened the meeting and reminded parents that the PTO still needs their donations. Donations are down overall and our class does not have a high percentage of participation. Money donated to the PTO is used for teacher grants which have a direct impact on our students, for the student directory and the senior essay workshop and much more. Please help and make a donation in any amount on the PTO website <http://www.bhs-pto.org/donate.html>

Herb Hough, senior parent, spoke on behalf of FOPA. The BHS musical will be February 3-6. The musical is Blood Brothers which has been running for many years in London. For parents of students taking dance (and others) Progressions will be May 13-15. Herb prepares the program book for FOPA performances and reminded parents that this is their last chance to get a greeting in.

Dean Lande gave an update before our speakers. Our students final set of mid-terms is the week of January 25th on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The kids are very stressed because these grades really matter for college. Transcripts will be sent out to all the colleges after this marking period. This is real stress for the kids! Hopefully all have finished their applications by now.

Friday, January 29th will be Intersession Day at BHS. The theme is BHS 2.0 Your School an Upgrade. This is a time to think deeply about what is real learning. There is too much just get it done learning. Students, faculty and staff will be asked to think about this topic, which includes the issue of homework. Dean Lande stated that some kids are so engaged in school and not learning and others are not so engaged in school and are also not learning. Kids will be able to comment on what can help and what gets in the way of real learning such as the college rat race and APs. Dean Lande said the administration and faculty are thinking about how they contribute to this stress. Dean Lande stressed that it is important for kids to attend the Intersession Day and attendance will be taken. The topic and discussion should be engaging to the kids and the day will be shortened some. The administration really wants to listen to the kids.

After midterms the senior slide is precipitous. If there was a small decline, it would be possible to be understanding. But a big decline can jeopardize their college admissions. This is a real threat and happened to Dean Lande's daughter. Be aware and tell your students.

Our speakers were BHS school psychologists Dr. June Bowman and Dr. Suzanne Donnellan addressing changing dynamics in the family. Both Dr. Bowman and Dr. Donnellan have been through these transitions with their own children.

Dr. Bowman opened. We have to realize that our students are passing through another development stage and transition. This is another life development, the transition to adulthood. Young adulthood is classified as between the ages of 19-29.

Some of the issues of this transition are:

1. Identity Crisis: Students say I am a college student trying on the identity. There is much more affirmation of a sense of self. There is some small movement from

narcissism to wanting to change the world. They have a lot of idealism as they go on. This is a definite stage of development that we pass through.

2. The Need to Move Out: The impulsivity of adolescence is now changing. They are now beginning to think and plan. They think that they can control things by planning. They are moving away from impulsivity. However this doesn't mean that they have good judgment yet.

3. Need to Develop Responsibility: Adolescents are more dependant on their peer group and the structure of school. Now they are starting to question their status as a group member or family member. Your kids will push back at our plans. They are separating and becoming autonomous. There are also times of regression during this time.

4. Changes in Relationships - Peer and Parental: There is a major change in the parent and child relationship. It is no longer a vertical relationship with the parent as the sole authority. The parent/child relationship moves to a more horizontal relationship. The vertical relationship never completely goes away and this can lead to conflict. Peer relationships have to happen. They need to partner up and this leads to issues around sexuality and intimacy. Our kids need to figure out how to be in an intimate relationship.

There are tips for the transition to college on the College Board website <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/plan/college-success/index.html>

Our students will have more independence and more responsibility. They will form new relationships. We will have conflicts with our kids and it will be both good and bad.

Dr. Donnellan continued. With distance, this whole experience doesn't seem too bad. It is a time for launching our children and moving on ourselves. It is a different emotional program for each family. The transition makes a big difference. It is a time for our kids to formulate their own goals and become an independent self. The adults at BHS really nurture the students; they are well cared for by staff and teachers.

Dr. Donnellan asked her kids about their transitions. Her son had aspirations of being a rock star but never knew that there were alternatives to college. We may expect forward vision that our kids don't have yet. This shows when they have to choose a major. Some may already know and others don't have a clue.

Dr. Bowman commented that the economic situation is now pushing our kids to think about a job (sooner); although college should be for exploring. But that is expensive.

Dr. Donnellan continued by citing information contained in the book *I'll Miss You Too* by Margo Woodacre. The book is a dialogue of what is in the parents head and what is in the students head. We are in different places than our children. Woodacre lists the 10 biggest fears about going off to college for parents and students. This is a big transition, a real feeling of one door closing and another opening. Now our students can have real mood swings. They can really cling to friends to the exclusion of parents. They may try new behaviors that have never appealed before. Dr. Donnellan and Dr. Bowman see many second semester seniors who are acting out.

The 10 biggest fears for students are:

- Not being happy at the school I choose
- Disliking my roommate
- That my parents won't trust me on my own
- Missing my high school friends
- Homesickness
- That college won't be what I expect
- Choosing a major
- That I will not meet the schools academic standards
- Constant contact from my parents
- Financial problems

The 10 biggest fears for parents are:

- Overall safety for my child
- Losing communication with my child
- Developing a new relationship with my child
- My child making poor judgments
- The dangers of drugs and alcohol
- My child's inability to handle new found freedom
- My inability to let go
- Dealing with the new empty nest at home
- My changed role as a parent
- My changed relationship with my spouse at home and the effects on the rest of my family

A parent asked what if your kid doesn't want to go to school? What if there is a divorce situation and the parents don't agree? What if a kid says I want to do it my way?

Dr. Bowman responded. Kids can take time off. The colleges recognize that kids may need time off. It can be a great year, working. It is helpful for kids to grow up a bit and it takes maturity and responsibility and interest in learning to get the most out of college. If they are not there yet, it may just take some time.

Dr. Donnellan said we encourage kids to put together a college packet even if they don't want it yet. Just get it done even if they are not going to college. It is good to have the packet all put together, ready and there if needed.

Dr. Bowman mentioned that there are a number of different programs available to students who want to take some time off. Dynamy in Worcester is an organization that arranges internships for students. They can make arrangements for kids to live together and provide a transitional experience. Parents have to be aware also of kids asserting themselves in ways that might not be good for them.

A parent mentioned City Year as another gap year program. Ms. Gottesman in the Career and College Center at BHS has information on many programs.

Dr. Donnellan stated that many colleges accept kids that want or need a year off. The number of kids who go to college and don't return to college is relatively high.

A parent mentioned that gap year sounds terrible and is hard for kids who aren't going on to college.

Dr. Donnellan stated that there are wonderful things for kids to do (after high school) but that kids need an anchor. They need to do something.

A parent asked about tensions around rules at home and the students being on their own at college. What about the tension around curfew and in a few months I'll be making my own decisions?

Dr. Donnellan stated that we need to be aware of our kids independent attitude. They need to understand the rules at home haven't changed. We still have expectations and kids need to understand those expectations. There is also the issue of bringing college friends home and the awkwardness around the expectations and rules.

Dr. Bowman commented that our students are now beginning to be more altruistic and less narcissistic. The kids have to understand our viewpoint. Take the approach can you understand we need to work this out. Parents need to use less authority and more negotiation. Young adults should be able to understand, but some teenagers don't get it.

Dr. Donnellan continued saying that the hours at college are very different. Some schools are beginning classes at 10:30 am.

Dr. Bowman stated that parents should know what services are available at the college to be prepared for issues that arise. Drinking is the biggest problem on college campuses. Be prepared. Students need to understand that upperclassmen may not be helping them. They need to negotiate for themselves. Their first vacation back and summer can be tough. They have a different lifestyle. Curfew is also a dilemma. What about drinking and driving? You may need to have your kids stay at a friend's house so

that they aren't driving while drunk. Drinking is a big part of the college culture. Parents need to decide whether they will allow it or not. Many colleges would like to change the drinking age to 18.

A parent commented that the older drinking age has driven drinking behind closed doors. There is no socialization around drinking, no restraints or models for responsible drinking.

Dr. Bowman continued that at BHS the rules are clear. Dr. Weintraub has breathalyzers and the kids know the rules and the limits. At college the rules are very amorphous.

Dr. Donnellan commented that she has seen model students suddenly decide (during senior year) to do all the things they haven't done. If kids are caught drinking at the prom, they will not march at graduation. The rules are very clear and strict. Sometimes it is just kids trying something different but they will not participate in graduation.

Dr. Bowman stated that when college students come home for the summer it can be hard. Also it is important for parents to know the college policy on alcohol. Some schools won't call parents; others make the kids do it.

Dr. Donnellan referred to the educational privacy act (like HIPPA in medical treatment). Kids have the decision whether parents get to see their grades and whether the college will speak to parents about academic matters.

Dr. Bowman mentioned that colleges have permission to contact parents about tuition but don't send the forms for academic sharing. It is an issue of independence which the kids want but they still require our financial support. It is good to let the kids handle their own academics but it would be nice to know. Parents also need to negotiate communication with their college student. Colleges have different policies and may or may not contact parents over student issues. Parents should ask for the form for access to academic information. Both parents and students need to sign the form.

Dr. Donnellan went on to state that families don't always agree on what happens next (as their students transition from high school to college). What happens if there are multiple opinions around rules? That dynamic can be very stressful.

A parent commented the single parent dynamic changes more. Our household will change. I'll have a different life and she'll have to adjust.

Dr. Donnellan urged parents not just to do the parent thing but to develop other aspects of your own life. Kids can be sensitive to changes so it is better to wait until after the first visit home to create the home office or change their room.

Kids will often call from college and you get the drama on the phone and want to rescue them. They recover but you hang on. The student just needs to vent.

For parents Gail Sheehy referred to this time of life as replenishment. The empty nest can bring a sense of freedom. It is also important not to burden your student with your sadness at the changes. Parents can be sad but not that sad that their child has their own life.

Dr. Bowman added that kids need the separation even if it is not physically far in miles. They are struggling to establish themselves and we struggle to let go. Parents need to step back and realize what is happening. There will be some push back while kids step out on their own. Eighteen is just a number, many may not be ready to be completely independent, but they still do not need parents hovering.

Dr. Donnellan said our job (as parents) is to hold on but also to let go while sticking around. Eighteen is different in every family and with every kid. Parents need to adjust their response.

A parent commented that an 18 year old has different needs and doesn't want to be subject to rules but household rules are still needed if there are younger children in the home. Another parent insisted that 18 year olds can be independent and take on their own responsibilities without parents involved. A third parent noted that schools now provide much more support for students and have responded to student needs with writing centers and tutors.

Dr. Donnellan stated that BHS staff engineer things so that students will get support, but at college the student has to take advantage of what is offered. Students need to self-advocate.

Dr. Donnellan also suggested if students are living away from home that parents find the RA (resident advisor) and introduce themselves. It is another way to communicate with the college. It is sometimes helpful to have someone to call if your kid is having a tough time.

Dr. Bowman and Dr. Donnellan are both available for parents and students who wish to discuss issues. Dr. Donnellan also recommended the book *The Naked Roommate* for insight for students around issues that arise in the first year of college.