

Notes from the junior class meeting of September 17, 2008

Welcome back junior parents. Susan Ridker handed out a schedule of meeting dates and topics which is also available on the PTO website: <http://www.bhs-pto.org/2010.htm>  
Paper copies will also be available at our next meeting on October 22 in the MLK room.

Lisa Martin co-president of the PTO and 2010 parent, welcomed parents back. Lisa also asked parents to donate to the PTO. The PTO only asks for donations once a year and most of the funds raised are used for faculty grants that directly benefit students. Please help us support BHS in whatever amount you can. Lisa also told us that “News and Views” is available on the PTO website: <http://www.bhs-pto.org/NewsandViews.htm>

Lisa also spoke about the Conversazione which will be held in the fall this year. News and Views had the following information: “On Monday evening, October 6, Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and Stanford University professor David M. Kennedy will be the honored guest at the BHS PTO’s annual Conversazione. Professor Kennedy’s topic will be “Our National Character: Who Are We in October 2008?” followed by small-group discussions. Kennedy will be in residence.” The Conversazione is free but reservations are required.

Sarah Kianovsky from FOPA asked parents with kids interested in the performing arts to sign up for the FOPA list serve. If you thought you had signed up and didn’t receive an e-mail from FOPA, please sign up again at <http://www.bhs-pto.org/email.htm>

Dr. Weintraub also welcomed the 2010 parents. He offered BHS stickers for a donation to the BHS PTO. He also mentioned that students were being asked to cover textbooks to protect the school’s investment.

Dr. Weintraub told parents that Boston Magazine had ranked BHS as the #1 high school in academics. Dr. Weintraub stated that BHS had achieved that ranking by transforming the culture around MCAS and raising MCAS scores while lowering costs. He stated that the gaps between our kids had narrowed. He said the kids are proud and that kids teachers and parents have created a unique culture of trust and respect. It doesn’t work perfectly but it works. Kids have freedom, but responsibility. Dr. Weintraub, Dean Lande and additional staff will be presenting at the National College Board Forum. Their session is titled High Schools for Real Teenagers. He stated that he will talk about the bywords that he uses at BHS: “Hard work over time.” “Freedom and Responsibility; Liberty and Duty.” Dr. Weintraub stated that BHS responds to the true needs of students. BHS creates a culture that 98% of the students can handle and that some schools do the reverse. We do it by telling the kids what we are doing. We communicate it to them repeatedly. Dr. Weintraub also talked about the National Honor Society, where a student some years ago told him if he had only known that he needed a 3.3 GPA he would have worked harder. Ten years ago 13% of the senior class was inducted; this year 43% (190) kids will be inducted.

The change in the MCAS attitude was done by asking for change and for kids to have more pride in their school. Dr. Weintraub asked the kids to do better and stressed that kids could get a scholarship to state schools. He asked for parent help and asked the faculty to look at the test and adjust the preparations they did in the 2 weeks before the test. He also offered an ice cream party to the kids if they equaled or beat Newton North scores. Dr. Weintraub said we have to say thanks to the kids for their hard work. He also stated that redemption is also a big theme at BHS, giving kids another chance to succeed. Thanks also go to parents for their support.

Dean Lande introduced herself as class dean for 2010. She covers half the students and Associate Dean Anthony Meyer covers the other half.

Dean Lande spoke about the hype of junior year and how stressful and tense this makes students and parents. She handed out a guide to junior year (in its preliminary form – comments welcome). (Additional copies will be available at our next meeting).

Dean Lande stated that kids should enjoy high school. It's about having healthy balanced kids. We want our kids to develop an attachment to learning and some aspect of life activities. Parents need to keep a balance, we lose track.

Dean Lande stated that the most important indicator of college acceptance is grades. It is important to have activities but not a ridiculous number. Kids should have something they care about. They should have friends and be happy. Kids should care about their learning, or they won't know what college is for and how to do it. They should be successful and happy where they end up. There are 3,000 colleges, many beyond the New England nexus. Your child's guidance counselor will help find colleges. More information will be available at meetings and on the BHS website and there will be more handouts.

A parent asked what about career interests? What do kids need to know about it now? This should be done with the guidance counselors – but let the kids' interest unfold.

PSATs will be given in October. Sign-ups begin September 22 and end on October 10. There was a guidance handout to the kids (and it is on line). Kids should sign up in the Guidance office on the first floor. The test fee is \$27 and no cash is accepted. The PSAT is the first step for juniors thinking of attending college. It is their first feedback on standardized tests. The students will get their test results from their guidance counselors in December in one on one meeting.

February 4 is Junior (parent) Guidance Night in the auditorium. February is time enough to start this process. Dean Lande asked parents to calm down until then. Parents will start out in the auditorium and then will divide up into groups with their child's guidance counselor.

The PSAT is predictive of SAT performance. After the results come in, it is time to think of SAT prep. Some prep courses are done in groups, some one on one. Practice tests are

the best means to increase scores – if your kid will do them (on their own). Parents need to decide what works for their child, a course or adult ed or on their own.

In March kids will have guidance seminars. After that, it is time for students and parents to meet together with their student's guidance counselor. In the spring, it is a good time to visit some schools. Kids should look at different types and different size schools e.g. large urban, suburban, large rural). Try looking at different types even if your kid is not interested in them. Kids need to see the different types of schools so they can see if they can picture themselves there. It is a way to begin narrowing the choices for colleges. Junior year is a good time to do this – it is not too late.

The guidance department now has the Naviance system in place. It is a computer system that let students look at college acceptances for BHS graduates. The system will show a scatter plot for a specific school showing GPAs and SAT scores – although it will not show other variables. Parents can have access to the system, as well as the students. Each kid has an access code, which is needed. The guidance counselors have the kids' codes. Dean Lande suggested going into Naviance with your child. The kids need to own the college process.

Most juniors take the SAT or ACT by the end of junior year. There is a handout comparing the SAT and ACT on-line in the BHS handbook. Some kids take both exams. Each test has a different emphasis and tests different things. Test dates are available on the PTO website <http://www.bhs-pto.org/2010.htm>

A parent asked about sending all score results to colleges. There may again be the option to send only some test results, however all the scores from the basic SAT will be sent (verbal, math and writing) and cannot be split. Check the College Board site for further information. <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/sat-reasoning/scores/policy>

Dean Lande commented that colleges may calculate the viability of a candidate based on that student's best scores from each sitting of the test.

A parent asked: If grades are the best predictor of college acceptance should a student stay in AP or Honors classes where they may get lower grades especially in light of BHS's 4.0 grading system. Dr. Weintraub answered that by far the best predictor is the quality and level of the courses and the grades. Colleges take all of a student's information and redo it. Students should take the most challenging course they can manage. About one-third of BHS students can get into top tier schools (about 35-40 schools), but there are 3,000 good colleges. Students should do the best they can and take what interests them. A "B" in an AP class is fine. About 90% of our kids in AP score 3, 4 and 5 on the AP exams. Colleges like to see it. Don't worry about weighted grades.

Dean Lande continued. If kids love it (AP) and want the challenge don't tell them not to take it because of the outcome. If they don't love it, take honors.

If this year and last year are indicators, next year there will be an AP “feeding frenzy” with kids signing up for huge numbers of AP courses. Then kids re-adjust to what is real and an appropriate challenge. Honors classes are in some ways more wonderful than AP classes which are driven by the tests. Let your student love what they are taking.

A parent asked it feels like students must take an SAT prep course, the materials make them feel like “extortionists.” Can you over-prepare for the SATs, getting into a school that is too hard? Getting in is the hardest part, don’t worry.

Guidance Counselor Nicole Lavangie Bent spoke to the juniors and read off the names of the colleges that the presidential candidates attended. There were a number that many had never heard of. There are many colleges for our kids.

Kids with passions have an edge in college admissions. Passions make our life rich. Colleges look at the whole student not just the GPA and SATs. This is a very competitive time for college admissions because of the larger population of kids and the fact that there aren’t many new college slots. Dr. Weintraub commented that BHS is a very respected school when he speaks to college admissions reps. The college reps know our courses and some of our teachers. Some of the college admission officers ask about specific teachers and know that if a student comes out of their classes that they will be well prepared for college.

Dean Lande said that many colleges visit BHS during the year. Students should go to some of these meetings. The college visits are often done by the college admissions officers who will be reading your child’s application. You can find the schedule on-line. Students can ask their guidance counselors to help them choose a few schools to meet with. There is a sign-up sheet at the Career Center. Students will have to miss class to meet with college reps and will get a pass from Janet Gottesman in the Career Center. The schools which are visiting are listing on the board in the atrium and in the Daily Announcements on the website.

Should parents start visiting schools during February vacation? Everything about this process is so hyped, parents need to balance it out. April vacation is a good time to start looking. Parents need to hold themselves back. You can always call your child’s guidance counselor for support in this process.

Although we speak so much about college, about 8% of students don’t do college. The school is committed to a “dignified next step” for every kid. Dr. Weintraub said we care about these placements deeply, some kids are placed in work settings.

A parent asked: Do the guidance counselors know which schools work better with learning disabled kids. Janet Gottesman in the Career Center can work with kids to find schools that are good choices. She is a good source for sorting out the beginning of the college search and coordinating with career interests.

Dean Lande again stated that it is important that we communicate to our kids the need to be happy and have a balanced life, to keep the hype down. Our guidance counselors visit colleges across the country, to be better informed and they can do some calming down too. Dean Lande stressed that parents shouldn't just focus on this, don't talk only about college. You will just hype yourself and your kids up.

One strategy is to arrange a time ahead to talk to your child and to tell them that you won't make every conversation about college. Agree on a way to handle the process. Decide what you will do and what your child will do.

Is it too early for SAT prep? Dean Lande stated it is better to wait until the PSAT results are in. You don't know what is needed until then. Then think about who your kid is, and what can you afford? Later you can see what the schools require.

What is the impact of not taking the SAT or ACT if schools don't require it? Most kids send their scores anyway. Colleges pay attention to grades and the essays. They look at the kids' transcripts and try to get a portrait of their academic life.

Is there a difference between going to a meeting with a college rep and looking at the college on its website? You can ask questions during a meeting and the folks who come to BHS are the ones making the decisions about our kids, so a good impression is important.

Dean Lande ended by saying this was the first junior meeting that she had done like this. Was it too much or not enough? She is looking for feedback. You can e-mail her at: [Diane\\_Lande@brookline.k12.ma.us](mailto:Diane_Lande@brookline.k12.ma.us)