

Notes from the Junior Class meeting of October 22, 2008

The meeting opened with an announcement from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund. Parents and students are invited to Studio 21 Forum on November 15<sup>th</sup> 1-2:30, fee \$10. Twenty-first Century Fund Honorees will be speaking on “pursuing your passion.” Additional information can be found on the fund’s website <http://www.bhs21stcenturyfund.org/>

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fund is also sponsoring the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual Walk/Run, a 5K race which raises money for any sports team, charity or school that the participants designate. The Walk/Run is on November 20<sup>th</sup> and there is a \$10 fee to enter. Additional information can be found at <http://www.bhs21stcenturyfund.org/21st-century-fund-walk-run.html>

FOPA, Friends of Performing Arts, have set a goal of higher attendance at concerts and other events. Parents and friends are encouraged to attend. The arts schedule is on-line at <http://bhs.brookline.k12.ma.us/Performing+Arts/>. FOPA is selling ads in their program book, which is used at 3 different performances over multiple evenings. The next concert is on November 12 – featuring the BHS orchestra and Camerata Choir.

The PTO is in the process of giving teacher grants for this school year. The PTO has not raised enough money to fund all the grants requested. Please make a donation to the PTO and help us, help teachers. Donations of any amount are welcomed with our thanks!

Next fall our class will be responsible for organizing the Senior Essay Workshop. If anyone is interested in co-chairing the event with Randy Kaston, please let us know. BHS teachers and parent volunteers work with students on their college essays. This year 270 seniors participated. Please consider volunteering to help with this event in September 2009.

Dean Lande introduced the topic of our meeting. Instead of talking about college preparations, the meeting focused on our kids in other ways outside of their roles as students and outside the college issues. Dean Lande asked guidance counselors and teachers about their thoughts about what is important for our kids to grow and mature.

Dean Lande introduced Susan Ridker, a 2010 parent representative and lawyer who is retraining to be a teacher of French. Susan had researched a paper during her studies which cited the important factors to look at in our kids so they can achieve healthy and balanced lives. Susan mentioned that none of us are experts, even the experts. Adolescence is a very confounding time. Susan stated that she had prepared focus points from her research to help frame our conversation and that parents would participate and share together.

Susan stated that this meeting would focus on the whole child and how to support other areas than those dealing with college. Susan mentioned the book “Doing School: How we are creating a generation of stressed out, materialistic and miseducated students” by Denise Clark Pope, which sparked her interest. There is much that we can do to nurture our students. What have we been overlooking during the focus on college admissions?

Often we do not look beyond the acceptance, but students need to know what to do in college. We need to create good people. In junior year our kids are developing, transitioning from adolescents to emerging young adults. At the emerging young adult stage, our kids at college age are partially at home, partially not. We, as parents need to ask how we can support this transition.

Susan noted a University of Washington study that gives 8 indicators for positive development of teens.

1. Physical Health
2. Psychological Wellbeing
3. Life Skills
4. Ethical Behavior
5. Healthy Family and Social Relationships
6. Educational Attainment
7. Constructive Engagement
8. Civic Engagement

The last 3 topic areas students will achieve at Brookline High School. At this point in the meeting parents divided into 5 groups, each discussing one of the first 5 topics. Parents were asked to write (on a poster sheet) what we can offer each other (in terms of successful ideas in each area) and what we worry about. The intention is for parents to support one another as we transition with our kids. Parents spent some time in discussion and then the group came together to share the individual topic discussions. One or two parents presented the group's ideas. Parents also added suggestions or worries at the end of the presentations.

#### Group 1: Physical Health

The main question was: How do you promote physical health?

Parents discussed sleep habits, getting enough sleep. Suggestions to encourage more sleep included: putting a timer on your child's computer, setting and sticking to bedtimes. A parent stated that sometimes kids don't register it's bedtime because they are working on the computer and miss any other external cues.

Parents all set curfew between 11:30-12:30 pm.

In discussing substance abuse ideas included: stay in touch with your kids. Know if the parents of the kids in your house know where they are. Be aware of substance abuse and how kids hide drinking (vodka in water bottles etc.). A parent suggested planning an interesting activity in your home, so it brings kids to your house, in a safe environment. The group didn't talk about physical activity, but felt that kids needed some form of exercise. It was suggested that parents model activity for the kids. Also parents noted that stress can cause physical symptoms in kids and that physical activity can provide some relief.

## Group 2: Psychological Wellbeing

Parents have to promote setting limits, while trying to leave space for our kids to try things even if they fail.. Kids need to figure it out for themselves.

Keep open communications with your child. Kids are not always ready to talk when we want them to. When they are ready, we need to listen. Try scheduling a time for a tough talk; it may be less stressful that way. Keep things in perspective, parents need to keep their stress levels down too.

Stress is a big concern. Academic achievement is a big part of that stress for kids, and some parents feed that jump in academics (taking more honors and AP courses). Some parents feel that grading is too harsh and that there are too many tests. Parents noted the piling on of stresses on the kids.

Question: How do we read our kids? They can cover or fake it to us. How do I not impose my wishes on my child, while trying to get them to try new things?

Try to get them to connect with a group at BHS, although it might or might not happen. Support and encourage them.

Parents of Group 2 noted that there were mostly concerns and not many solutions. One suggestion was to spend more time together as a family. Try doing activities together (family game night).

One parent stated that around the issue of academic stress she had spoken to the head of SWS and noted the difference in the environment. She was struck by the higher amount of teacher contact the SWS kids have and suggested that higher contact may help with the academic stress.

A parent asked about symptoms of risky behaviors for kids, stating that most of us wouldn't know what to look for. Regarding "cutting" if your child always has their sleeves down and you never see their arms even in hot weather that could be an indicator. Cutting can be very secretive or blatant.

Regarding eating disorders: weight loss, a change in eating patterns, if your child does not eat in front of you, these may be indicators. Dean Lande stated that she asks if a student has friends and can be woken easily as a quick indicator to a student's state of being. Parents should be aware of changes in friends, changes in interest and changes in sleeping habits.

A parent suggested that even in high stress times, parents set aside half an hour with their child to do something not relating to school or academics, take an ice cream break and just leave it aside for a bit.

Some students may benefit from a community service project outside of BHS which can give them a sense of well-being and helping others.

If you sense that your child is “off” then say so and see how they respond. Try backing off the academic pressure; it is not the most important thing. Be more concerned about their personal mental and physical state. It is not just parents who create stress. We can back off, but it is part of their culture, going beyond our own high school. We should try not to pressure our kids about grades. The greatest gift we can give our children is our time. We should also celebrate any improvements in their work/life. A parent suggested promoting mediocrity as an answer, to take the pressure off. They have their whole lives ahead to achieve goals, not just high school and college. Trying and failing at something creates resilience and enables them to withstand disappointment and try again. If parents can let them, we should allow our children to fail.

### Group 3: Life Skills

The group came up with a list of skills for our students:

Time management: Set a clock, be punctual, just show up!

Interpersonal skills: Accept fault, get along with roommates, learn to get along with your boss and co-workers.

Independence: Have the ability to be independent and handle your daily problems. Take care of yourself. Do your own laundry, navigate the “T”, cook.

Responsibility to self and others: manage a budget, get and keep a job.

Goal Attaining: Taking risks, planning and following through and completing tasks. Rebound from failure.

A parent suggested adding negotiation skills, adding that some deadlines are negotiable (although some are not).

The reality today is that life is stressful for our kids and it is real stress. Our kids need to know when to ask for help. There is a great deal of pressure and expectations on our kids; some may need to take a break from college. Kids need to own their own lives and also their learning and their goals.

A parent commented that we are all doing too much and we should share how we deal with the challenges we face, how we prioritize. Share with the kids that we may break down our work into chunks to deal with it. We and our kids should enjoy their victories.

Kids need to ask for help, but they may not realize it. We should tell them that adults ask for help when we need it.

#### Group 4: Ethical Behavior

The group felt our kids need to tell the truth, demonstrate care and concern for others and avoid crime. Kids need to understand that there are logical consequences when there is a problem. (breaking or losing sports equipment or the car...)Parents need to be open and available to their child.

Parents should model appropriate behavior in their own lives and lead by example. One of the questions raised was how do we give our kids opportunities to show that they can be trusted? Parents said never lie to your kids.

Parents asked how do we create empathy in our kids? We can talk about the ethical challenges we face to start a discussion.

One of the issues raised was the dilemma of not lying to your kids. Part of this issue is when your kid tells you about behavior you do not condone. The suggestion was to acknowledge the information. Parents need to encourage truth telling without approving of the behavior. Parents need to keep the discussion going. Listen.

We are trying to create independent thinkers. We need to encourage and acknowledge good behaviors (reaching out to a friend or standing up for what is right).

One problem is when our kids tell us information about a friend and don't want us to pass it on. Kids have their own code of ethical behavior – no snitching, or there may be a fear factor.

Dean Lande said if kids tell you things; please have them talk to me. Dean Lande tells kids that they will not be named. She can ask about others who witnessed the incident and speak to them as well and build information that doesn't implicate one child. Dean Lande stated that there is a no snitching culture, but our kids also want safety. Parents should call Dean Lande, even if "the information can't come from me." Dean Lande will preserve confidentiality. She will address all disputes. It is important to keep a safe environment.

#### Group 5: Promote Healthy Family and Social Relationships

Parents would like to help but don't know how. What is our role? Our kids sometimes have relationships in school, but not on the weekends, what should we do? One of the suggestions was to encourage participation in clubs, but not just to build a college resume. Find something they are interested in.

Sometimes there is competition in relationships between girls that can lead to an inauthenticity. Sometimes kids keep their elementary school friends and sometimes they have all new friends in high school. How do we keep our kids open to friendships? It can be hard to break into new groups. A parent noted that there are not a lot of student

activities (involving the whole school). It makes it harder for shy kids to mix, it is harder to find a place.

As parents our relationships with our children can be based mainly on homework and exams. We need to have our relationships be more.

A parent asked why there aren't any dances? Dean Lande responded that there are the junior semi-formal and the senior prom, and the Fall Fest dance. The school has tried other dances, but they haven't been well attended, partially because tickets need to be purchased in advance and the kids want to decide at the last minute. Kids have said they want dances, but then they don't come. Dean Lande noted that Paul Epstein is working on a Teen Center which would provide more for kids.

A parent suggested dances run by the Boston Area Gay/Lesbian organization. She stated that the dances are well attended by all types of kids (not just gay) and are well-chaperoned.