

The next Senior Class PTO meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 20, 2010.

### **Notes from the Senior Class Meeting December 8, 2009**

Dean Lande opened our meeting with an update. She noted that report cards had come out and that parents should have them.

Dean Lande also spoke about the protest surrounding the Phelps family's second visit to Brookline High School. Although they claim to be a church, it is just one family of 6 which includes children. The Phelps family targets liberals and comes to protest at various places. They hate many many things. This time the school was prepared for the protesters. The police were ready, as were the school administrators. The police separated the protesters and the counter-protesters which included students and members of the First Parish Church of Brookline. The protesters had truly hateful signs, while the students wore no hate signs. Students were told not to engage the protesters and they did not speak with them. The protest generated a beautiful conversation. The kids discussed how we define ourselves and about diversity in Brookline. The students were shocked by the inclusion of young children in such hateful protest.

Dean Lande also stated that some BHS kids are part of families or religions that have problems with the gay orientation. After the protest, the Christian Club spoke with Dr. Weintraub to express their values. The school is committed to honoring diversity and respecting all values.

Susan Ridker made several announcements. On Weds. December 9<sup>th</sup> the Conversazione with Stephen Kinzer took place.

Susan handed around PTO pledge cards. The PTO needs your help to keep up the programs and grants that it provides to the BHS. The PTO uses donations for News and Views, the Student Directory, teacher grants and much more. Teacher grants have a direct impact on our kids education. Current donations are down 26 percent. Please help the PTO by making a donation of any size. More information is on the PTO website at: <http://www.bhs-pto.org/donate.html>

Susan also mentioned the first planning meeting for the After the Prom Party. Ann Devlin, co-chair of the ATTP will be hosting the meeting on January 21<sup>st</sup>. If you are interested in helping out contact Ann at [ann\\_devlin@hotmail.com](mailto:ann_devlin@hotmail.com). Senior parents can still help out before the party, although they cannot attend. There are a number of areas that need help including the decorations committee, which is already working, the prize committee and food.

The After the Prom Party is in dire need of new co-chairs. Ann and Joan will not continue after this year. The ATTP will not continue unless parents step up to volunteer. If you have younger children consider this very worthwhile event. The new co-chairs will be able to shadow Ann and Joan and will have Joan's notebook a treasure of information about the event. This is a job that requires organization, but there are many committee chairs and volunteers who help with the work. Find a friend and help the kids!

Mary Minnott, BHS social worker was our guest speaker for the meeting. Ms. Minnott is a social worker at BHS. She sees kids and parents around high risk behaviors or stress. Ms. Minott also works with the Brookline Public Health department. Hope Schroy, her colleague is assigned to the class of 2010, but was unable to be at the meeting. Ms. Minott can be reached at 617-713-5149. Ms. Schroy's number is 617-713-5155

Also speaking was June Harris, parent of 2 BHS graduates and former BHS class rep and PTO co-president. June currently works with B-PEN, the Brookline Parent Education Network. B-PEN is working with parents at the high school and elementary school levels to provide parent education and parent networking groups. There is now a website up and running [www.b-pen.org](http://www.b-pen.org). The website includes a blog for parents. Discussions have included topics such as de-stressing, smoking in front of BHS, and where are the kids hanging out? B-PEN is reaching down to the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades in order to make parent connections. The kids make their connections and so should the parents. B-PEN also has newsletters by topics with advice, done by Karen Campbell, which are available at the BCASA website ([www.bcasa.org](http://www.bcasa.org)).

Ms. Minnott said that she wanted to check in with parents about their fears. She stated that we all want to keep the kids safe for the next 6 months before they leave for college. The kids have a high stress level because of testing and college applications. Parents are always trying to figure out how much to hover and how much to give space. For seniors huge house parties have faded. There is a lot of where are we going on between parents and kids.

Ms. Minott asked parents to express their concerns and ask questions. The rest of the meeting was discussion and interaction between the parents, speakers and dean.

There is a fine line between independence and parents doing it as deadlines approach. Leap in, don't leap in, what do parents do? If kids miss early deadlines there can be a lot of stress trying to do college applications over winter break.

Dean Lande mentioned that the school deadline is earlier, although transcripts have gone out. Some students will get messages from colleges saying that information has not been received, but it may not be logged in yet. Students can check with the downstairs guidance office.

Kids think they can do it, but parents have to check. One parent talked about trying different approaches with her student, nudging, letting go, and bribery whatever it took.

This is a high stakes process. In conversations, parents can stress how important it is to do these applications. A parent noted that there are some boundary issues such as not looking at the college essay. However the student did show the essay to a guidance counselor.

There are a lot of issues. Kids are very aware that this is the last year with their Brookline friends. Everyone is still up in the air, there are situations with boyfriend/girlfriends. There is a lot going on and the process is affecting the kids.

Kids are wondering what they are going to do with the rest of their lives. Some may not be ready for big changes. There are issues around even the idea of leaving home.

Schoolwork is part of the stress. The kids feel the pressure of getting grades. Kids have been sick which adds stress and teachers are responsive to that. For parents there is a fine line between pushing and just a conversation. Parents have to think about how to manage this. Some colleges may have later deadlines, but it isn't good to stretch out the process.

Dean Lande said many kids come in in tears. The kids sense that they are being so evaluated on school and grades. It is a really hard time. Parents feel so helpless. We can't prevent this. We just have to sit back and watch, there is nothing that we can fix. The most important qualities a parent can have are persistence, understanding and compassion.

A parent stated that he thought his son wouldn't do the college process but he did. The problem is in another direction. The kid has a job and wants to work too much. He spends all his time working and going to school. How do we balance this? The parent stated that his older child is just the opposite. The parent asked how much can you juggle? Also what about the lag time between getting over your head and realizing it?

Ms. Minott stated sometimes you will fail and learn from that failure. This too shall pass and when it does the kids are in a new stage. There is less emphasis on school in the senior spring. They may not have so much angst.

A parent stated that there is a lot of angst around college acceptances but their older student worked hard in the spring and played hard in the summer. There was still a lot of work in the freshman year of college. The older student felt the pressure and intensity freshman year with the other students, but it had all calmed down in sophomore year of college. Now many are on junior year abroad.

Ms. Minott said we see more parties in the senior spring. There is more mixing between groups and even non-social kids participate. It is the last time to hang out together and their social network expands. There is more drinking in the senior spring. There is less pressure and kids feel that they have earned it. They feel older and don't think there are the same rules. We still need to keep them safe. Parents walk the line between hovering and keeping kids safe.

Ms. Minott suggested some parent guidelines. She mentioned how hard it is to be the only parent with an early curfew especially when others don't agree. Ms. Minott stated that 12:30 is a reasonable limit for seniors. She recommended that parents hold the line. Many times parents aren't up when kids come home. A parent commented that her daughter doesn't drive and still needs to be picked up. Mom can't stay up late so they have to negotiate an earlier time. Ms. Minott said the driving piece makes a curfew easier to enforce. You don't want your child driving with a tired friend and you don't want to worry about their safety on the T. Decide on a strategy now before the challenge comes in the spring. Kids will push but you need to have good rules.

Another suggested guideline has to do with vacation homes. Kids may be invited to the Cape or NH house of a friend without the parents being present and these may be friends that you know and trust. However the combination of beaches, alcohol and vacation homes is not good. Parents need to know if the adults will be home. If you know that a party took place without the adults, Ms. Minott stated that parents should

contact the owners and the same applies to unsupervised sleepovers here in Brookline. Kids need to understand that they are not at college yet and it is still a parents job to keep them safe. Ms. Minott stated that they are older when they get to college and there is a lot of brain development that takes place before the fall. Kids may say they need to practice certain behaviors but this isn't the time. If colleges don't like student behaviors, they do have ways of getting their attention (loss of housing, academic/social probation)

A parent stated it is considered normal to want to experiment with drugs and alcohol, but I don't want a normal student. Ms. Minott stated that parents should set limits and enforce consequences, such as a meeting with Ms. Schroy or no car access. A parent commented that by the time we find out what our kids are doing, it is already excessive. Kids can be drinking alcohol but not drunk. Ms. Minott stated that it is still illegal and there are legal consequences of being under 21. Students can lose their drivers licenses, they can lose college scholarships. Research has shown that adolescent brains are more susceptible to the effects of drugs and alcohol.

A parent asked if kids are experimenting with alcohol but not in bad shape, how do we keep usage down? Students try to keep us from knowing and we try to keep the limits on it. If we find out there are consequences which include losing our trust, which is very powerful. One parent stated that they had found a bottle of alcohol in a backpack while looking for homework. Ms. Minott said that possessing alcohol is a step further. If the child was caught with the alcohol there would be more consequences.

Dean Lande stated that if a student brought alcohol to school and a teacher found it, the student would be suspended from school. So in some ways, it was better that a parent found it. Experimenting and pushing limits is adolescence. There is a hypocritical element to the issues around alcohol and the kids know that. Student athletes have strong limits which we set. Parents need to talk to kids about it. Students may think they are in control of the alcohol usage, but there is always danger if others are out of control. Do the kids know enough to get out of those situations? If they put themselves at risk they need to know that risk and know when to get out. If the police are called to a party, even kids who aren't drinking will be in trouble.

A parent asked about consequences for good Samaritan behavior, staying with an impaired friend. Students do not get a chemical health violation for helping another student. The situation is very different from an out of control party. Kids can be caught by the police even if they are outside the party.

A parent commented that the consequences are worse for performing arts students who are caught with chemical health violations. Athletes miss part of the season; those participating in the plays lose their roles. The situation negates any privacy that a student might have had. It also messes up other members of the play as the role has to be recast.

It was also noted that colleges can rescind admission based on an arrest. Also if a students grades drop they may be placed on probation by a college.

Chemical health violations can also cause destruction in a family's home. This is a good conversation to have with your kids around house parties and integrity. Parents should also talk about the issues of dating and sexual consent. There are many sexual assaults associated with drinking. Students should know about this before they go away to

college. They need to think ahead to what the consequences might be and to what might happen at college.

A parent asked what about her son who doesn't do parties but wants to do risky outdoor activities (i.e. winter hiking in the White Mountains). It is important that his activity doesn't exceed his competency. A wilderness hiker needs to know their limits and take reasonable precautions. Parents can set hoops for competency (as in other activities). Set rules and set limits for your kids. Are they prepared? Are they ready for this activity? The student is interested in NOLS (an outdoor leadership program) which would give him more skills. Another parent highly recommended the program.

All parents are feeling a sense of pending loss around the kids going off to college. They will still come with you for vacations, especially if you pay.

Parents were also advised to check their kids wallets for fake ids. It is a crime to have a false id or to use an older siblings old id. Surveys show that kids get liquor from their homes or buy it with a fake id. Using a fake id can lead to loss of their drivers license and is a felony.

Ms. Minott also mentioned that kids often don't know how to drink alcohol like vodka and mix it with fruit juices. This makes it easy to overdose on alcohol.

Last advice to parents was to think ahead and plan.