

Junior Parent PTO Meeting Minutes - Dec 19, 2011

Announcements: Don't forget the PTO as you prepare your charitable donations for the end of the year. This year donations are behind last year. The PTO can really use your help!

TOPIC: Fostering and Nurturing your Child's Independence

SPEAKERS: Malcolm Cawthorne, history teacher BHS, Mary Burchenal, department chair English BHS, Robert Grant, history teacher BHS

FORMAT: Preset questions to panelists moderated by Dean Mims

Question: Please provide an overview of what you see as the key elements of a parent's role in fostering an independent young adult during the high school years.

Robert Grant

Independence should be structured differently for freshmen than seniors. Different kids are ready for independence at different times. Allow them to choose their own path towards independence.

Malcom Cawthorne

Trust BHS staff to help guide them toward independence. Hopefully they make the tight decisions for themselves. Parents should get in the way as little as possible as they try to become independent

Mary Burchenal

Send signals to your child that show you expect independence. For example, never answer questions for your child. Teach them to advocate for themselves. Try not to take over for them.

Robert Grant

Independence is different for boys and girls. For boys, frontal lobe development doesn't complete until age 25. Boys often have issues with impulse control, setting priorities and delayed gratification. Be patient with boys. If you set them up to succeed and they eventually will.

Question: How do you view boundary setting during the high school years, the line between what we do and what we leave up to them, thereby teaching your child to take increasing levels of responsibility for their lives while (slowly) lowering/lessening the parental safety net. (e.g. getting up in the morning or letting them be responsible, without reminders, for studying for a test, keeping track of their own appointments and obligations, etc.)?

Malcolm Cawthorne

My daughters have two jobs: go to school and work as hard as they can. It is important to know your child. Setting boundaries depends on the kid and when they are ready for boundaries to be changed. Sometimes pushing boundaries is the right thing for the child but is uncomfortable for the parents.

Robert Grant

My method is to make activities dependent on grades. Early on, parents set boundaries but later negotiate the boundaries together with the children. When your kid screws up there are many people at BHS who will help you pick up the pieces.

Mary Burchenal

My daughter is not a risk taker and did not need a lot of boundaries.

Question: What is your view on letting kids fail? In such a high stakes situation (i.e. the college admissions/preparation process), what is your view on letting kids take the reins and potentially fail when it feels like it could have very significant, impactful consequences?

Robert Grant

This is different for boys and for girls. Safety issues are different. You can't let them screw up college applications but let them screw up other stuff. They learn lessons by screwing up and making mistakes.

Mary Burchenal

It is a good thing for kids to have obstacles in their path but there are times when the stakes are high and intervention is necessary. If you interfere too frequently the kid will rebel.

Malcolm Cawthorne

It is important to make sure mistakes don't hurt them for life but sometimes some pain makes you a stronger person. The ATM is a good lesson (i.e. running out of money and there is nothing left). Kids need to learn fiscal responsibility. Sometimes going to an outsider is helpful since they may listen better and be less emotional.

Question: Regarding teaching life skills, what is your perspective on when and/or how to help your child to learn and achieve practical life skills; e.g. managing money (bank account, credit cards, etc.), cooking, laundry, making doctors appointments, etc.?

Malcolm Cawthorne

My older daughter takes on these tasks. She is curious and wants to try. My younger daughter wants everything done for her. My older daughter is more willing to experience things and try things and sometimes needs to be reigned in. My younger one would be asking for breakfast to be made while the older one will make it herself. Cooking classes at BHS are an excellent way to reduce phobias around cooking, similarly the World of Money class is useful for kid to learn about managing money etc.

Mary Burchenal

There are certain tasks kids are interested in and others they are not (e.g. driving and car related chores versus laundry or dishes).

Robert Grant

He talks to his kids about ambivalence. What does it mean? Kids try to have things both ways. We give kids a lot of support which they take when they need it but then insist on being left alone when they want to feel independent. They can't easily have it both ways or at least they should recognize it for what it is.

Question: Influencing decisions - Considering the financial burden that college represents for many families and students, how much influence do you think parents should have on selecting the college and/or the field of study their child pursues?

Malcolm Cawthorne

It is important to give them freedom to think through their decisions and listen to their thoughts/reasoning. I had them apply to one girls school, one historically black college, one off-the-grid/beaten path school. It forces them to do research and figure out what they want. My daughter decided on the small school that she researched and found herself. That's where she ended up and she's very happy.

Mary Burchenal

Choices for college can depend on family resources. They should understand their choices and how much schools cost.

Robert Grant

My son is studying Italian in college but I worry about what he will do next? I tell him you better get good grades because you will need to go to graduate school. I try to makes him think about what his decisions will mean in the future. My daughter was asking about getting arrested at Occupy Boston. I talked to her about what that meant, what to do in case she was arrested. She came home that night.