



Upper School Parents' Association

Meeting Minutes

September 25, 2018

Upper School Parents' Association Executive Committee Members Present:

- Leah Goldberg
- Libby Albright

Community Service Announcement:

Andrea Geyling-Moore, Director, Upper School Community Engagement

Featured speakers:

Murielle St. Paul, Assistant Director of Academic Support
David Ball, Upper School Principal

- President's Welcome - Leah Goldberg
Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

I. Andrea Geyling-Moore, Director, Upper School Community Engagement

Andrea discussed the recent “shoparound” fair where 200 students signed up for weekly commitments to Milton public schools, Boston schools, elder centers, etc. Parent volunteers are always needed as drivers to help students meet these community obligations. Additional events to get involved in later in the year include the Special Olympics and a local blood drive; please see the Milton website under Community Engagement for more details. Andrea also announced that during Parents’ Weekend there will be an informational meeting about two off-campus service trips: New Orleans in March (first week of spring vacation) and New Mexico in June (the week following graduation). The deadline to register for these trips is November 1st and they will be first come, first serve. Any interest or questions can be emailed to: **community_engagement@milton.edu**.

II. Murielle St. Paul, Assistant Director of Academic Support

Murielle has been at Milton for three years and worked in this realm of education for 10 years. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Leadership in Education, and acting as interim director of academic support while Katie Collins is on sabbatical.

The Academic Skills Center (ASC) provides many kinds of academic support for all students:

- Murielle supports students in math and science, deals with extended time and accommodations for SATs and ACTs, and handles referrals for testing. She also works to create individualized learning guides (ILGs) for students as needed.
- Leslie Morgan holds a master's degree in English and serves as a writing specialist.
- Assistance is provided with planning, time management, and building study schedules.
- Peer tutors are available to help students with specific subjects. These are Class I and II students who have applied and been approved by their teacher and the department.
- Appointments may be scheduled or are available on a walk-in basis.

The ASC staff works to destigmatize the need for support and emphasizes the availability of resources for ALL students, not just those with learning differences. They introduce the skills center to students in Class IV at the beginning of the year, and again at the Academic Assembly later in September. More kids are now seeking help on their own, not necessarily just on the recommendation of a teacher.

III. David Ball, Upper School Principal

David shared objectives for the school year and gave a sense of the tasks, challenges, and opportunities that he sees. While some of these objectives will take longer than nine months, they indicate the overall thinking and goals of the administration to improve the experience of all students. David provided some background information on the Upper School strategic plan, then described progress made and continued work in specific areas:

1. Teachers and Teaching

- Compensation improved for existing faculty and the school also gained a greater capacity to hire new teachers.
- Indu Singh was hired as Dean of Teaching and Learning, which enabled her to work on building infrastructure and professional development in order to achieve sustained improvement in teaching.

2. Curriculum Assessment

The curriculum committee produced a report with recommendations focused more broadly on the Class IV year. Implementation began last year and will continue over the next nine months.

- The recommendation to change Class IV **grading** was agreed upon and is now in effect.
- A closer focus on **homework** suggested that the research is not definitive, but clearly more homework does not advance learning and can distract from it. The committee has asked two departments to look at how they assign homework for Class IV in an attempt to reduce time spent, provide clarity of purpose, and ensure that students are prepared to approach assignments effectively.
- The topic of **assessment** was identified, particularly January exams. Assessments should inform teachers effectively and the variety of assessment tools available need to be considered. The committee has asked departments to design assessments this year that depart from the model.
- The issue of **time** was addressed and different groups have been assigned to consider exercises, courses, and activities that take a lot of time and could be reinvented or embedded for greater efficiency. How can the valuable elements of our program work more effectively together? One group is currently focused on the Class IV talk and its sequence with the Class III current events and public speaking course, while another group considers Project Adventure, P.E., and Health. The approach to the arts requirement is also under review.

3. Community Programming

The community programming committee articulated that the existing program for social-emotional learning has built up over time, resulting in a lack of deep coherence between assemblies, advisories,

the boarding chapel program, affective education, etc. The lack of coordination means more time spent but less impact than might be possible, so recommendations have been made.

- Steps could be taken to structure Class IV **assemblies** to be more intentional about ideas and intrapersonal/interpersonal competencies (i.e. strength, understanding perspective, leadership, and collaboration). Advisors would then be provided with resources to advance these topics in advisor meetings.
- The **chapel program for boarders** has value for the entire student body, so this could be moved to a time and space that includes all students. The existing Sunday evening program may be restructured to reduce chapel meetings, but create more space for reflection and interaction within the boarding community.

4. Opening of School

David emphasized that the examination of opening of school activities needs to happen now. The opening of school includes welcoming of new students, setting norms, building community, and establishing a vision for our community of students and adults. The timeline for planning the 2019-2020 opening of school and adding new courses is prior to January 1, 2019. In addition, program adjustments like those proposed above (class IV assessments, the arts program, Project Adventure, Class IV talks, etc.) need to be made by February 1, 2019 at the latest.

In sum, the projects of curriculum assessment, community programming, and opening of school all share a common basis and timeline. This work shows attention to these foundational elements of the upper school experience.

Professional Development

David returned to the topic of professional development being spearheaded by Indu Singh. Three areas were identified for faculty to consider in their summer reading and school year work:

1. Homework
2. Grading
3. Inclusivity

Faculty members read a specific book on the topic of their choice and met in groups to discuss. By giving people choice, they were able to make a conscious decision about their preferred area of focus for the year. The task is now to define ways to further explore their chosen topic (for example, through the use of instructional rounds) and to take action steps. This professional development model builds on past models requiring action and accountability to peers, while allowing for choice. It will also echo work being done in other areas.

Schedule Evaluation

A scheduling committee has been convened to look at the school schedule. Underlying the current schedule is a set of assumptions about how kids learn, and schedule constraints are often due to programmatic choices made. Therefore, as elements of curriculum and community programs such as exams, homework, and time allocation are studied, the schedule may develop and improve.

Questions and Comments

David responded to a question about retention rates of students of color. Milton experienced an anomaly in the attrition rate this past year. This has led to questions about the Class IV to Class III transition, as well as the allocation of attention on the first three weeks of school. The administration needs to consider what is working powerfully in the transitions program, opening of school, and early

classes, and what is NOT working well in January and beyond that may impact a decision to return. Sequence in the first year is important, and also ensuring that programs have sustained impact. One identified weakness in the opening of school programming is the involvement of only a portion of the faculty. This means that students encounter teachers later that have not been part of this foundational experience. This programming is being evaluated to include the entire upper school faculty in order to strengthen all adult and mentor relationships with students.

David addressed concerns about the pressure of a compressed exam schedule. He responded to a question about whether exams could be spaced out to include some exams before vacation and others after. Nothing will change this year, but the curriculum committee is considering whether exams should be the dominant mode of assessment for all classes or only some. The committee is also rethinking the timing of the end of the first semester and how that may positively impact an exam schedule.

IV. Information, Reports and Announcements - USPA Volunteers

1. Introductions of new board members

2. Review of annual calendar and PA events

- Four welcome receptions took place in August for new students from Massachusetts.

Thursday
- The PA hosted a coffee on orientation day for parents and students.
- Events on Parents' Weekend will include socials for Classes I, III, and IV on night and a reception for all parents on Friday afternoon. Class II will have college events and a dinner over the weekend.
- During games on Parents' Weekend there will be a PA hospitality table at the ACC.

7. Student Activities Liaisons – Meredith Hall and Jen Jordan

- Donut Days occur 4-5 times per year.
- Barn Babies and penny candy take place during exam week.
- A hot chocolate night may be a new event this year.

8. Parents' Independent School Network – Virginia Putnam and Susanne Chiang

- "PIN" is a forum for independent schools to share information.
- Six meetings take place during the school year at different schools.
- Milton will host a meeting on November 30th.

9. Open Discussion

- Volunteers are needed for future events such as Spring Fling and the Faculty Appreciation Lunch.

Leah Goldberg asked if anyone had any more questions. With no questions forthcoming, the meeting was adjourned at 8:38 p.m.

In Attendance: Leah Goldberg, Libby Albright, Maria Fawcett, Amy Torrey, Virginia Putnam, Kate Paiz, Meredith Hall, Michelle Fallon, Diana Perry, Gain Sealy, Ann Jenness, Nicole Lippa, Blaise Lippa, Jennifer Jordan.