

## **Notes for 11/10/2020 Open Board Meeting Via Zoom**

Present: 37 members of the Thurston Community including Principal Mike Redmon, Vice Principal Matt Kuklantz, guest speaker Jaelithe Brodeur, the Exec Board (Pam Schnatterly, Hongmei Xu, Alana Marino, Rebecca Wasynczuk), the Beyond the Board Committee leaders (Stacey Theofilou, Karen McCaskill, Dawnmarie Shu, Mary Mulkeen), and parents and teachers.

### **Co-Chairs: Hongmei Xu and Pam Schnatterly**

The co-chairs opened the meeting by introducing the Executive Board, the Beyond the Board committee leaders, and our special guests Jaelithe Brodeur (sixth grade guidance counselor), Mike Redmon, and Mike Kuklantz.

### **Guest speakers: Jaelithe Brodeur, Mike Redmon, and Matt Kuklantz**

As a guidance counselor to the sixth grade, **Jaelithe** joined our meeting to speak about what the school leadership is seeing from students socially and emotionally so far this year. Jaelithe is overall very impressed with the resilience and adapting she sees in this year's students, even more so than in previous years. She also sees growth in the stamina of the students as they rise to the occasion of longer classes periods. She notes the challenge for students to sit through longer (and remote) classes and she sees students getting tired. It has taken longer this year for students to get into the daily learning rhythm. Jaelithe notices that students are eager to connect socially and they are using their "mask breaks" at school to engage in games and other interaction. Students are spending more time connecting with friends on their phones, and given the limitations of pandemic socializing, rules for phone use are less rigid in families. This year, Jaelithe will be partnering with health teacher, Ms. Wombolt, to define healthy vs. unhealthy coping skills. She will teach the importance of acknowledging feelings (such as stress or isolation) in order to reach for a healthy coping skill.

**Matt Kuklantz** added that faculty is mindful of the importance of fostering the social piece of school because students are not having the casual interaction (at lockers or in the hallway) that they have in the past. Mike talked about a new curriculum for social emotional learning called "Second Step" that Thurston has purchased and will be implementing in the coming weeks for the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. He discussed the "Panorama Screener" which is a screen to determine what social/emotional skills students are missing by individual student and by grade so that the school can address skill areas that need shoring up. In addition, whole class academic screenings are underway to discern academic progress in this unusual learning year.

**Mike Redmon** shared that he is very proud of the students and staff and the relationships they are forming. Quite frequently this year, Mike and Matt receive emails from students who express appreciation for teachers. Mike said the year has been good thus far, and there is a lot of experimenting with new formats, and staff is watching how the students are doing with the longer classes. Mike notes many silver linings in the new teaching format: longer classes allow for more in-depth discussion particularly in science and ELA, three blocks a day makes students feel like they have less homework, three blocks a day gives students and teachers a break from each other and that can improve student/teacher relationships, and more tightly defined

teaching teams allow teachers to get to know students better. Because of the covid-forced changes, staff is learning more for the future about what works in education. Mike continued to praise the students in regards to their cooperation and carefulness in following covid protocol. He reiterated that he feels very optimistic about the school year.

**Questions** were addressed. Hongmei asked if Thurston had a plan in place to return students to school full time since there is hope that a vaccination will be available in the near future. Mike replied that the decision to return to school for learning in-person would rest with the school committee. Mike is eager for in-person learning to resume if it is safe. He is pleased with how the school is making the best of the current situation. Hongmei also asked about classroom windows remaining open as the fall and winter become colder. Mike confirmed that windows would remain open wherever possible and so students should be sure to dress for colder classrooms.

**Treasurer: Alana Marino**

Alana gave the following update.

\$11,500= income so far this year from dues and donations.

\$5200= expenses so far this year

\$25,000= expected annual expenses.

We need to raise money through PTO dues, and the apparel sale. Currently 258 out of 630 Thurston families (or 41%) have paid dues. We hope for 100% participation. Dues support PTO expenses such as: enrichment for all grades, teacher appreciation, METCO initiatives, SEPAC donation, accountant, and insurance. The PTO would like to honor the life of Travis Roy, who was a regular Thurston Middle School speaker with a donation.

April H asked if there were plans for any other fundraisers and if there is a current need for volunteers. Pam answered that she is always open to fundraiser suggestions and offers of volunteer help.

Pam concluded the meeting with a brief summary of recent committee activity.

**METCO** – Welcome bags to new students have been distributed. 35 families have volunteered to be Welcome Buddies to new families. The Welcome Club has been launched and has a virtual game night planned for 11/20 at 7-8:00 PM. The METCO committee got feedback that Jewish families have conflicts on Friday nights due to Shabbat, and all committees should be mindful of this for future events.

**SEPAC** – On November 18, SEPAC is hosting “Strategies for Behavior Support During Remote Learning”. Details are in the AtoZconnect backpack.

**Social Media Kick off** – Jamie and Jackie will put together a social media presence for Thurston Middle School.

**Spontaneous Teacher Appreciation Lunch-** The PTO reached out to provide an unexpected Panera Lunch and accompanying gift to our teachers for our deep appreciation of how they have worked so hard this year!

**Thurston Apparel Sale** – Tonight is the last night to buy, buy, buy!

