

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CLAYTON HIGH SCHOOL PTO

Wednesday, February 7, 2024

A meeting of the PTO of Clayton High School was held as scheduled pursuant to due notice on February 7, 2024, 12:00 pm CST, at Meeting Room C of the Center of Clayton and via Zoom conference.

The following members of the Board were present at the meeting: Suzy Oge, Co-President; Jena Schaumburg, Co-President; Joanna Dinsmore, Communications; John Holmes, Treasurer; Dr. Dan Gutchewsky, Principal

The following ex officio advisors and members were present: T'Shon Young, Jenny Abeles, Carolyn Blair, Jane Cai, Cara Downs, Elyse Feinstein, Tanya Hayden, Bridget McAndrew, Becky Melander, Sabrina Robb, Amy Wilson, Susan Yang, Kris Yoon
Present on Zoom: Danijela Boric, Liz Chung, Michelle Cissna, Eva Delannoy, Grace Lee, Paul Lewis, Fareda Lytle, Jing Zhao, Olga, iPhone user

I. Welcome & Introductions

Approval of previous meeting minutes: Amy Wilson motioned/John Holmes seconded.

II. Presidents' Report

We have a great student-created video showing some of the direct benefits of Funds for Excellence fundraising that funded teacher grants; more videos will follow with future grants. We are seeing some immunity to donations—a slow trickle still coming in. Discussion of donation expectations will come in April. Bridget McAndrew is the FFE Chair; met with Dr. Gutchewsky to review submitted teacher grant projects; it's great to see the extra ideas the teachers have, including some student-initiated projects.

Eighth grade curriculum night; some volunteers approached. Need to recruit 8th grade parents to have volunteers ready for the start of ninth grade year.

Robin Leonard is working with Carolyn Blair to further define what is needed from the counseling office; upcoming meeting with students class sponsors and T'Shon Young re. supplemental things needed for grade-level activities such as prom.

Monday, 2/12, is the next parent/teacher book club, discussing *Whale*.

Treasurer's report: John Holmes: \$6,000 short of fundraising goal; the Care Fund has raised \$2500.

III. Guest Speaker: Carolyn Blair, Director of Counseling Services

There have been a lot of changes in the department/staffing in the couple of decades she's been there. They count on PTO/Parent Connections! She had started holding informal connections/informational meetings about college on a grade-level basis, then Covid interrupted things, and now this process is starting again. These info sessions help grade-level counselors from being overwhelmed with calls. Carolyn will hold small focus groups with junior/senior parents to learn expectations, experiences, how to tweak what's been done before, what is needed, etc., to inform changes moving forward. The focus this year is to shore up the counseling department in general.

Q: Currently there is a grade-specific counselor who "follows" the students; what if it's not a good fit, especially socially/emotionally? A: The department works as a team; it's not taken personally, they

understand. Wouldn't formally switch counselors, but would have others talk to the student. Also note the Wellness Center as an option for making connections.

Q: What has changed re. counselors? A: Previously, each grade had a counselor stay with them, but added a college counselor junior year. Now the 11th grade counselor loops back to freshmen, and the 12th grade counselor does both college and regular counseling. This solves the issue in past of college counselors not learning relevant info due to the student's strong connection with initial counselor. Meetings with college counselors can be longer.

Q: Can we approach with particular questions that aren't getting answered? A: Yes! Sometimes there's a better connection with same-sex counselor.

Q: How do counselors adjust with so many kids to deal with, some kids with zero interactions with them, and how do they deal with overload via grade level (some grades have more kids)? Plus some kids think counselors have no time for them; not every kid has the self-sufficiency to do things themselves. A: Triage. Individual meetings are held with every family; but only the first one with parents; the rest are with students. Counselors do clear their schedules for nothing but walk-ins for seniors to work on applications, etc., and pay attention to the flow of the application process, e.g., early admissions. Some students Carolyn has to chase; some chase her—need to set some boundaries with the latter to have time for the former. They try to do as many things as possible in a group setting and to make it clear that they are available. Appointments are held with all juniors at the start of year, long individual appointments; that's the bottleneck. If a student isn't coming in, they assume they are OK or getting help elsewhere. Students should come in more!

Q: One senior wanted to meet the first couple weeks of school, but with schedule changes to deal with, the counselors had too much on their plate to handle both. Seniors have gone on college tours and want to talk early on. Let someone else do the schedule changes. A: Next year the schedule process is different, so any issues will be cleared up before the start of the year; these things are tied together. Schedule changes have been run by the college counselor and can't happen as a senior without them; now will have one counselor handling both issues for seniors.

Q: The first English assignment needs to be the personal essay. A: College essay is now part of curriculum: we appreciate that teachers take this on, but some were doing it differently. This is now rectified and all will do this first thing.

Q: The list of colleges that visited CHS changed this past year; some came fall 2022 but not 2023; why? A: Some more selective schools didn't come in fall 2023. Some schools changed their processes after Covid; can also change if, e.g., no kids show up for a meeting. The high school doesn't always have control over who chooses to visit.

Q: Do you share data of previous class's GPA, SAT scores for those who got into certain colleges? A: They can never give data on one particular class for a school, as that could reveal individual kids' data. Clayton's Profile of a Graduate has aggregate data from past 5 years, but with Covid there were no SAT scores, so that's obsolete. Clayton gave SATs, but they weren't necessarily used for college applications.

Q: Can we be given more info of what's to come regarding the college application process? A: This can be looked into. Maybe a printout, or a page on the website that can be accessed for those who want to know what's ahead. Collaboration with PTO can help with this. One parent found a connections meeting last year at the library to be helpful. Caroline is happy to hold these meetings.

Q: Parents need an overview of the process to be able to help kids, not be left in the dark. Upcoming deadlines/guideline calendar, e.g., so things don't slip through. Kids need to advocate for themselves, but have less knowledge/less power/perhaps misplaced confidence, so parents need to be informed. A: Whole process laid out would be great. There used to be a paper book form that can be housed online.

Sign up for focus groups with Carolyn! PTO will advertise these meetings. Thank you!

IV. Principal's Report: Dr. Gutchewsky

Sweeney Todd production was outstanding: kudos! Wins for both basketball teams; swim team won conference. Currently lots of hiring due to the early notification of retirement incentives; finalizing several hires. Staffing meetings coming up, about a month earlier than usual; this goes along with moving the class scheduling earlier. On pace to finish schedule by early April, with meetings before students leave for summer to work out conflicts, deal with filled classes, etc.

Parent-teacher conferences coming in next couple of weeks: March 11–15; in person day is March 13 at CHS (Wydown's is March 14).

Wellness Center furniture is installed! Grace Sullentrup is the Wellness Outreach Specialist hired. Jen McKeown, Wellness Coordinator, has been visiting math classes and kids will do tours. Feb.16, open house for staff; open 2/20 for students. Wellness Center will hold an open house during conferences on 3/13.

Q: Are there any ACT SAT prep courses? A: Not through school, but CHS partners with an organization that offers SAT courses on campus. Carolyn will send details.

Q: Can we invite back graduates to talk to seniors about the college admissions process? A: Some do come back for other options, and we can do that, too. Students can request internal info about students at a particular college to be put in touch.

Q: Where is the Wellness Center? A: End of English hallway, center of campus; it's the old book storage facility.

V. Activities Report: T'Shon Young

Junior class fundraising Trivia Night this Friday; students & parents, 7 pm. National Girls & Women in Sports Day; we acknowledge our female athletes: their accomplishments plus their challenges. Video on Grayhound page, and on Clayton Insider.

The next PTO meeting will be held on March 6, 2024, at 12:00 pm. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Joanna Dinsmore, Communications Chair