

Northern Highlands Regional High School Home and School Association, Inc., (HASA) Minutes of the General Meeting Held on Wednesday, September 21, 2022

In Attendance:

Katie Devitt, Anne Kay, Sonia Agarwal, Jennifer Moodie, Jess Carlin, Lisa Mundy, Lorraine Reichert, Maggie Liljegren, Lisa Comninellis, Katie Brusselback, Susan Esserman, Michael Mahle, Jeanette Stiegler, Chinita Carroll-Hudson, Deidre Dunne, Audrey Flynn, Stephanie Makhoul, Shantala Kaikini, Kristen Tsarnas, Kathy Travers, Christa Paolillo, Christy Yu, Renee Lardieri, Amanda So, Peggy Au, Lisa Kelly, Rhia Osbourne, Anita Altinbas, Mia Roewe, Lynelle Tedesco, Lynn Tullett, Karina Ferrales, Jean Weng, Angelica Degenars, Grace Perruzzi, Yunha Bang, Stacey Artale, Frank Paparozzi, Janeen Skripak, Lydia Riley, Thao Groenewald, Aly Singer, Christine Ferrarie

School Administration in Attendance:

Dr. Scot Beckerman, Joe Occhino, Dr. Jessica Verdicchio, Dr. Robin Knutelsky, Dr. Tony LaRocca, Mike Koth, Christine Wegert

HASA President - Katie Devitt

Katie welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 9:00am.

Superintendent's Report - Dr. Beckerman

Welcome back! The start of the year feels so different now that we can see everyone's faces, having a normal back to school night, the salad bar open in the cafeteria. It's amazing to feel normal again.

Update on Construction:

We always do projects over the summer. However there have been some issues with construction companies. Some of our projects are still ongoing, some have been completed, some didn't start.

- Completed projects include:
 - New sidewalk along W. Maple Avenue
 - Completely gutted and re-did the Wood Shop
 - Installed a Left-hand turn signal at the circle at the entrance to the school. Right now it's only 5 seconds. Hoping to get the county to agree to make it 10 seconds.

Referendum project:

Good news: we are on track to go out with the Request for Proposal (RFP) in Oct/early Nov for the Field House. Looking at that timing because we can't break ground until Spring. Also because prices are so high right now so we're hoping they will come down. By law, contractors only have to keep their contracted prices for 90 days and if they

can't start some contractors are bailing on the project. We can't afford to have that happen so are pushing back the RFP date.

Bad news: we need to hold off on redoing the field turf. We have to apply for an appeal from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). We won't be able to put out the RFP until Spring. The DEP is telling us we have an endangered species – the Red Shouldered Hawk - in the woods near the school. Even if it's not on school property, but within 150 feet we need to apply for a waiver, which can take up to 9 months. I applied 2 weeks ago when I found out. Now we're just waiting for an Appeal hearing to be scheduled. I'm hoping it'll be waived since there will be no trees cut down for this project.

All the interior projects will be done over next summer and we'll put out the RFPs then, as anticipated.

Transportation

Good news: The buses are much more reliable this year.

Bad news: last year our company dropped all of our routes. We had to go out to bid. We saw between a 50-200% increase in cost of transportation. But the good thing on the outcome is that the new routes and new buses are much more reliable. No issues of late buses or buses not showing up.

Staffing:

We are back to full staff on all teaching positions.

The Cafeteria is still short 3 spots, but all of the food lines are open. Faculty lines are still closed. Students should see an increase in types of food and their access to it.

Late Bus: due to dramatic price increases that hadn't been budgeted for, including benefits for staff that will be increasing by 15% in January, we had to cancel the one late bus route for USR. This was mentioned in Mr. Occhino's Back to School letter.

Dr. Beckerman then acknowledged the Board of Education members who were on the call and thanked them for attending: BOE president Mrs. Ferrarie, and trustee Mrs. Liljegren.

BOE Report - Maggie Liljegren

I'm the HASA Liaison again this year. Great to see us back to normalcy. Many thanks to HASA for the Friday Welcome Breakfast. It was such a nice way to kick-off the school year, and it was great to see the parent involvement and enthusiasm.

Principal's Report - Mr. Occhino

Just to echo the others, it was a great Welcome Breakfast. Thank you to HASA. The opening of school could not have been better. After 2 years of COVID and all the associated uncertainties, there is now such a level of enthusiasm in the building that we haven't had in a while. Thanks to the staff who worked all summer to ensure everything was in place for the start of school. We got a lot of work done over the summer and

we're very fortunate to have such a great team in place. It made for a seamless transition for the students when they came back. I'm really excited about this school year.

COVID: I don't want to say too much as we're trending in a good direction, but please know that when someone is home with it, there is no longer any remote instruction. The student will need to be in touch with teachers, check Canvas for assignments and talk with classmates. It's still a 5-day isolation, but absences will be treated like flu or surgery recovery.

PRIDE Survey results: We participated in the survey in November 2021. I'll share much more detailed information in a letter to parents in early November. We need to fully decipher the results in order to put a solid plan in place. I like to do that first before sending out the results so both can be shared at the same time. Topline results are not a surprise. Students are still using marijuana and alcohol. Our results are less than the national average. We participated in this survey in 2000, 2005, 2015 and we're seeing a slight decrease in alcohol use. I'm concerned, but not surprised. Important for parents to note that students report using alcohol, marijuana and Rx drugs in a home. It's a small percentage and below the national average. It's always a concern and we need to combat that. We're in a good place and will have a good plan in place.

My last very important point: one policy we are trying to hone in on: Student Dress Code. A letter will be going home with much more detail. Parents need to see what their students are wearing to school. Some of our students are wearing outfits that are much more suited to the beach than school. Shorts are way too short and mid-sections are exposed. It looks like some are wearing sports bras. We have to get a handle on it. I'm calling it like it is. This is an educational institution and as such students must come to school covering up more than what they are now.

Assistant Principal of Student Affairs - Dr. LaRocca

It's been a great start to school year. It's fantastic to see everyone's faces and smiles. On September 30 we'll host our Activity Fair for Freshman. Every student organization will have 2 representatives at their table to give information and encourage freshman to get involved. Encourage your freshman to get involved and sign up for many clubs so they can see which they really like. The day will end with Ambassador outreach for the last 2 periods of the day on the 30th Ambassadors will talk about the importance of getting involved and the ways in which to get involved. Freshman will get ice cream. It'll be a nice way to end a Friday and get students acclimated to what we have to offer as a high school.

We'll be putting a renewed focus on school policies and how the school ran before Covid.

Director of Guidance - Christine Wegert

It was great to meet many parents at the Breakfast on Friday. The school counseling office has been very busy over past few weeks. The schedule change deadline was last Friday, Sept 16. However, if you have students that still have concerns and feel they may be academically misplaced we have an extended deadline to Oct 28.

We hosted a presentation on Financial Aid last Tuesday night, mostly for Senior families. All the information is on the website in the Financial Aid section.

We'll be partnering with the Boomerang Project on Oct. 18 at 7pm for Freshman parents to meet their child's counselor and hear about supports offered to students and families and how we can help with the transition to high school and navigating the remainder of the year. More information to come.

We're also hosting a Test Prep presentation on Oct 25. Consultant Jake Cassal and Sue Spenser will discuss all the testing resources.

Seniors are in the midst of applying to schools. Many get applications in by Nov 1. Parents of seniors please don't hesitate to reach out with any questions. Any questions about school counseling, please reach out to me or your child's counselor.

Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment - Ms. Robin Knutelsky:

I'd like to express the same sentiments as the others: I'm feeling joyful that students and teachers are back. Thank you, HASA, for the lovely Welcome Breakfast.

Start Strong Assessment: The state of NJ started this assessment last school year to determine where students were in their previous year's work. We test in the following:

- 9th grade: Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II
- 9th and 10th: English
- 9th and 12th: Science

Testing is on last year's standards to see how well students remember last year's work so that we have a good, strong starting point for this year. It is state required. It's also "minimally invasive" to the schedule. Students take the test in their regular classroom. It's 45-60 minutes in length. Teachers have the results within 24-48 hours so they can really shape instruction moving forward to close any gaps from Covid and the hybrid learning environment.

Expanded Title I tutoring:

We've renamed and repackaged the tutoring program. It is now the Highlands Extended Learning Program – HELP Center. Rooms 125 and 126 are dedicated to tutoring and it's available to any student who needs or teacher recommends, beginning Oct 3.

It will take place during lunch on a rotating letter day basis as well as after school. We'll offer English, Math, Science and Study Skills (we've received feedback that students continue to struggle with organization, how to study for assessments, worth through projects, use Canvas, etc.).

The schedule will be as follows. It's during lunch, students can just drop-in, no appointment needed. They can even bring their lunch:

- A Day: English, writing, math
- B Day: Science
- C Day: Study skills
- D – no tutor available
- No tutor on a double letter week (not on Friday)

We will also continue to have after school tutoring. That schedule is available on the website. There is a Highlands Tutoring button on the right side. Click on it and you can see available tutors. Those sessions begin at 2:45 and are 30-60 minutes long.

Email me with any questions. For specific questions about the HELP Center contact Melissa Montegari who leads this initiative.

Assistant Principal of Athletics - Mike Koth

We've had a great start to school. We had a great Fall sports pre-season. Now the Fall season is in full swing. Many of our teams are winning.

Thanks to NH Sports Association for donating and installing a new flagpole in the stadium. We've also installed a new scoreboard on the field with a video screen. First home football game is Friday, Sept 23 at 6:15pm. It's also Senior Day

New initiatives and programs

We are continuing our relationship with the Positive Coaching Alliance. Each year we conduct workshops w the Positive Coaching Alliance to piggyback off the sportsmanship meetings we have with every program at every level. We set expectations of what we expect: Respect for your opponent, the game, the officials, and the facility.

Positive Coaching Alliance helps mentor leadership skills with underclassman. Underclassman take bring it back to their teams and pay it forward. It'll take place next week. Each coach nominates 2 players.

Our Pep Rally is on Oct 6 outside in the parking lot. The Homecoming game is on Oct 7. Winter sports sign-ups are in mid-October. Be on lookout for announcements. I'd like to give a plug for the NH Sports Association. One of its biggest fundraisers will be an Oktober Fest at The Red Barn on Oct. 1. The NHSA is a terrific parent group. Please consider joining or supporting.

Supervisor of Wellness & Equity - Jessica Verdicchio

Amazing to see so many students and their energy. Our SAC counselors started right out of the gate attending class meetings the first couple of days of school. They presented to all 1300 students and shared what the Wellness department is, why to come (anxiety, peer issues, stuff at home, among other things), where to find the

Wellness Center and how to make appointments. We already had 70 students come through, which is wonderful.

Our Wellness Website is located under “Our School” on main highlands page. Contains tons of resources: how to make appointments, articles, monthly updates, etc. You can follow us on social media: @NHRHSWellness.

Next month we’re launching the NH PASS series (Northern Highlands Parent Academy and Speaker Series). All are held on Zoom in webinar format so you can’t see who is attending. Allows anonymity but can engage via chat with panel representative or speaker.

Topics include:

- New Drug Trends – new marijuana laws, edibles, other drugs in the community
- Parenting experts – mental health of athletes and how to support at home
- JED Foundation – what skills students really need to launch into their next steps of college or career.

HASA President - Katie Devitt

First I want to take a moment to thank Jose for all he does behind the scenes.

Beginning with this meeting, we will be posting recordings of the meeting to our HASA website. That should be up and running soon.

HASA is already off to a busy start. If you have not joined yet, please find the information on our website or the upcoming newsletter. Membership is up to 279 families. We are close to hitting our goal of 300! The Directory Spot was published last night. You should have an email with directions. If you didn’t receive it, that means you did not yet join HASA. Many thanks to Linda O’Brien for stepping in when the previous Membership chair had a family emergency and could not continue. Linda has been our interim chair for the past few months and will be turning over her role to the new chair shortly.

Your membership dues allow HASA to help fund many initiatives. We hope you enjoyed the water that we provided at Back to School Night. We also just hosted the Welcome Breakfast last week. We had a great turnout! Thank you to all of the administration for attending and the parents who were able to attend. Thank you to Julie Cornacchia for organizing the event! We appreciate all she has done over the last 4 years to prepare that event for us.

Your membership dues also go to scholarships, food for teacher training, the Boomerang Project and so much more.

HASA will be hosting a Town Hall on Monday, October 17th at 6:00pm in the school auditorium. This is a great opportunity to ask questions about the school and meet Dr. Beckerman, Mr. Occhino and Ms. Ferrari. They will be speaking and taking questions.

Please feel free to email questions in advance to HASA@northernhighlands.org. They will be answered at the Town Hall.

HASA VP - Anne Kay

We're very happy to share that the HASA Holiday Raffle will be back in person this year on Thursday, Dec 1 from 11am – 1pm in the school's Cultural Arts Center.

If anyone is interested in being a Raffle sponsor or in donating to a basket, please contact me at annekay104@gmail.com. We'd also be grateful for any donations of used baskets that you may be looking to get rid of. More information about the raffle will be forthcoming via Constant Contact.

HASA Recording Secretary – Katie Devitt on behalf of Patrice Duker

I'd like to ask for primary and secondary motions to approve the June meeting minutes. Thao Groenewald motioned for approval and Kathy Travers seconded the motion.

HASA Treasurer – Thao Groenewald

As of this morning, in our Operating account we have \$18,306.32 and in our Money Market account we have \$58,118.99.

HASA Newsletter –Shantala Kaikini:

The newsletter is a great way to learn more about various parent groups, clubs and teacher information. Please submit any articles to my email.

Sports Association – Kathy Travers

The Northern Highlands Sports Association is a nonprofit organization comprised of parent representatives from the four districts. Through various fundraisers, we offer support to athletes and coaches. The past couple of years we have even helped with capital improvements, including the lights on the lower field. Other things we fund include preseason trips and training, ice hockey time, equipment, and motivational speakers. Our website lists everything.

We hope you'll join us for our Oktober Fest fundraiser on October 1. We'll be live auctioning off a Junior parking spot.

We're also trying to bring back PastaMania after 2 years of not having it. Our golf outing will be in the Spring.

MPAA – Grace Perruzzi

MPAA is the Music & Performing Arts Association. We are also a non-profit and parent run. Our goal is to aid and support the instrumental, vocal and drama staff.

We fund such programs as marching band, a cappella groups, school plays and musicals, concerts, jazz band, and a jazz night. Your membership and donations help us fund scholarships, sound systems, new instruments, attire, professional musicians

for chorus and choir concerts, professional acting seminars, and professional consultants.

Our first meeting is Thursday, Oct 6 at 7pm in the Teachers Café. After that our meetings will be monthly on the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm.

Upcoming dates:

- Friday, Sept 23 is the first football game. It will also be the first time the new marching band will perform. We have a new director this year.
- There is a marching band competition on Saturday, Sept 24 at Northern Valley Old Tappan.
- Our biggest fundraiser for Marching Band is on Oct 15 at the high school.
- The Fall play is Clue on Nov 17 – 19
- The Winter Concert is Dec 7 at 7pm
- The Spring musical is Bright Star on March 9 – 12.

We have a very strong performing arts program at the school. Please see the website for membership information and additional details.

HASA President – Katie Devitt:

Katie thanked everyone in attendance, announced our next Zoom meeting scheduled for Wednesday, October 12, 2022, then adjourned the meeting at 9:56am.