

**SYOSSET COUNCIL OF PTAs  
PTA SPRING PRESS CONFERENCE  
MAY 2016**

**General**

**1. Can the District publish the amount of money it spends on each club and team?**

**There is a perception that certain clubs/teams receive funds at the expense of other clubs/teams.**

**Providing transparency to monies allocated by the District will help correct misperceptions.**

Funding for clubs comes from a variety of sources including club fundraising, club participants and student government. The District's support is primarily in the form of stipends for club advisors or for supervision on trips or events. The Student Activity Club funds are audited each year by the District's external auditor. The extra classroom audit report is posted on the District's website. The Athletics Department allocates expenses to teams based on need, which vary from year to year.

**2. In light of the recent events in Flint and Newark regarding lead found in drinking water, can the District provide information about testing and results of the drinking water in each of our school buildings?**

While not required by law, the District is in the process of testing all potable water in the District. There is a link on the District's website where all results are posted. The information is updated as we receive results.

**3. When schools are closed for an event, such as the recent power outage, can normal transportation still be provided to private school students? Can the status of that transportation be included in the robo-call?**

When the situation allows, such as the recent power outage, the District will provide transportation to private school students. When possible this information will be communicated to parents of private school students, either in the general robo-call or in a separate robo-call to private school parents.

**4. If there is an ongoing issue with a District employee, what is the process for filing a confidential complaint and how can the complainant be assured that their report will remain confidential as to avoid retribution against themselves and/or their child(ren)? Once this complaint is filed, what investigative procedures does the District follow?**

Parents may file a DASA complaint against a staff member if they feel that the issue relates to bullying. Parents should contact their building principal regarding issues that pertain to staff. While all complaints are initially kept confidential, depending on the nature of the complaint, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. Parents may also contact the Deputy Superintendent's office to file a complaint. Once again, depending on the nature of the complaint, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The District will make every effort to ensure that complaints never affect the education of children in our schools.

**5. The bottle-filling water fountains are a wonderful beginning to the District going green. What plans does the District have to continue moving forward with this initiative and become even greener? The Town of Oyster Bay recycles paper. Will the District begin a paper recycling program in the future?**

The District is planning to increase the number of hydration stations in the schools. The District's secondary schools participate in the Town of Oyster Bay's paper recycling program. Additionally different forms of plastic, glass and can recycling programs have been implemented in the schools. The District's recycling programs have reduced the number of dumpsters required in the secondary schools.

**6. Middle school and high school staff use email to communicate with parents. Is it possible for those school's web pages to list or hyperlink the email addresses of their staff?**

While many secondary teachers utilize email to communicate with parents, it is not mandatory. As a result, there are a small number of staff who choose not to use email. Until such time that email parent communication is mandatory, the District will not be posting email addresses on school web pages.

**7. Syosset School District offers a variety of fun and educational field trips, however, the cost for these trips can be extremely high and run into the hundreds of dollars per year for families with more than one child. Is there any way to cut costs, limit the number of trips and/or offer financial assistance?**

All field trips are school and interest based experiences generated at the building level and should be discussed with the building principal.

**8. If the District has concerns over a teacher or principal who is not "working well" in their current building, and a parallel position becomes available in another building, is consideration given to transferring the employee to that building?**

Teacher and principal assignments are reviewed by Central Office on an ongoing basis. Staff assignments are made based on certification and tenure areas and a staff member's skills. Each year transfers are made between buildings based on need and consideration is given to staff in terms of parallel positions. Transfers enable schools, grade levels and departments to ensure that staff are able to meet the needs of all students at all levels.

**9. Why do students in middle school and high school need to miss core subjects for additional music lessons (band, chorus, orchestra) each quarter? This takes away from valuable class time.**

Sectional lessons are an integral part of our music program. They afford students who are part of a large performing ensemble an opportunity to work on individual problems in a small group setting. These sectionals rotate throughout the school day so that students do not miss any one particular class too often. Classroom and music teachers discuss with students strategies to help them to make up missed work during a lesson.

## **Elementary**

**1. Given that email is an efficient and effective method of communication today, will elementary school teachers be required to use email to communicate with parents at some point in the future and if so, when?**

At this time, teachers are not required to email parents.

**2. Given the recent changes made to the current school year calendar, going**

**forward, will elementary schools no longer have half days for parent teacher conferences? If that is the case, how will conference times be readjusted to accommodate the number of parents who attend conferences during those times?**

The calendar for the following school year is still in the process of being finalized and it will continue to have the 3:15 – 4 p.m. dates and times for the parent teacher conferences, as well as an evening 5 p.m. – 8 p.m. conference time built into the calendar. Starting this year, we also combined two half day conferences into one full day conference in May to accommodate parents. Additionally, teachers will continue to make themselves available by appointment to further accommodate parents interested in meeting with their child's teacher.

**3. Prior to a student beginning educationally related support services, such as speech or occupational therapy, is it possible for the therapist to provide the parents with a detailed action plan? How often should the therapist be providing progress updates and are they required to provide a written year end summary? Is there a District policy relating to this, that therapists should be adhering to?**

Educationally related support services are considered to be Tier II supports under the District's RTI plan. As indicated in the RTI plan, parent notification is required. The reason for the service as well as the frequency and duration of the service is to be provided to the parent. Progress updates are provided after approximately ten weeks of instruction. Progress is communicated to parents via notebooks, e-mails, and/or verbally.

**4. According to NYS, parents of students receiving RTI services should receive screening results from the school as well as regular updates on the child's progress. When a child begins RTI services (i.e., learning center) in the elementary school, should the learning center specialist be providing the parents with a written plan of action, as well as a copy of the screening results detailing the child's specific deficiencies? Is there a District policy on this that the teachers should be adhering to? How often should the parents be provided with updates on their child's progress? Is it possible for parents to speak directly with the tutor that their child is working with to obtain information on progress or is there a District policy prohibiting this?**

The District RTI plan indicates that written notification to the parents be sent when the student requires an intervention beyond that provided to all students in the general education classroom. The notification includes information on the amount and nature of the student's performance data, strategies for increasing the student's rate of learning, and the parents' right to request an evaluation for special education programs and/or services. Progress updates are provided after approximately ten weeks of instruction. Parents are encouraged to contact the building principal should they require further information or to schedule a team meeting which may include a tutor.

**5. When will the technology infrastructure in the elementary schools be updated and when will more technology be brought into the elementary schools?**

Over the last several years the District has made significant investments in upgrading its technology infrastructure. This includes the upgrade of Wi-Fi in all schools and installation of centrally monitored battery backups in all our wiring closets to ensure redundancy in our network and communications systems. The District upgraded its core switch, responsible for all data and voice communication. We have doubled our internet bandwidth to accommodate increases in internet content access and installed redundant paths for our data/communications wiring to be fault tolerant in case there is an outage, thus providing an alternate route and maximizing up time and instruction time. We have also upgraded our

communication speeds to the endpoint, including 10G between buildings and 1G access to the end user. These upgrades have enabled us to launch technology pilot programs in the current year, including several which were implemented in the elementary schools. These projects include: 1:1 classroom devices, in which each student is provided their own device for use in the classroom; project based learning, where students use CAD (Computer Assisted Design) software to design projects and then print them on 3-D printers and Makerspaces, which are instructional spaces designed to foster creativity and exploration using high tech and low tech materials. We are in the process of reviewing additional pilot programs for the elementary schools for next year. The results and feedback from all of these projects will help to refine the implementation for all schools.

Elementary students currently interact with technology on a variety of levels. Students use computers in the classroom to access online textbooks, interactive instruction in mathematics and a variety of education software applications. Students also visit the computer labs weekly during library instruction. Our elementary students are exposed to computer coding through Scratch and use Lego, a popular building program.

## **Middle School**

**1. Can you provide an update as to the changes in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade science offerings? It seems that each middle school had different choices this year and there is confusion about what will be offered in the future. If only earth science is to be offered, how will the needs of those who would have chosen a less intensive course be addressed?**

Both middle schools have the same offerings in science for grade 8. These choices are reflected in our joint Middle School Curriculum Guide, which is posted on each school's website and in the course selection forms filled out by each 7<sup>th</sup> grade student. The options until the 2016-2017 school year have been Environmental Science and Regents Earth Science. In order to meet the goals of the Next Generation Science Standards, Environmental Science will be replaced in the 2016-2017 school year with a new Science 8 course currently in development. As articulated in the Curriculum Guide, the science options available to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students for the 2016-2017 school year include Science 8 or The Physical Setting/Earth Science.

**2. Would the District consider adding early buses for the middle schools? Many students need to go in early for extra help or club activities that are required (i.e., extra chorus or band rehearsals). This can be particularly challenging for working parents or parents with elementary school age children at home.**

The short window between the start times of the high school and middle schools does not allow for additional bus runs with our existing buses.

**3. Could the dates of Parent-Teacher Conferences be adjusted? Having Fall Parent-Teacher Conferences after the distribution of report cards would allow more time to discuss the child and less time to discuss the grades that will be seen on the forthcoming report card. Having Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences further into the third quarter would give any new teachers for half year classes more time to know the students.**

The District Calendar Committee, composed of administrators, teachers and PTA representatives, meets to develop the calendar for the entire year and we will raise the possibility of planning the future conferences with this in mind.

**4. With the understanding that this was the first time using an online signup system for Parent-Teacher Conferences at the middle schools, is it possible to allocate more time for 6<sup>th</sup> grade team conferences? The same five minute session allocated for one teacher for one subject, is not enough time to meet with multiple teachers regarding multiple subjects.**

Middle School administrators have been working with our IT Services department to review the system implemented this year and are seeking additional flexibility in scheduling conferences for parents and middle school teachers. We have received positive feedback and suggestions to improve the service, and we are in the process of reviewing and incorporating this feedback ahead of the fall 2016 conferences.

## **High School**

**1. Participation in club events (i.e., competitions, trips) often involves payment well in advance of the actual event. When a student pays a fee to participate in a club event, but then must withdraw due to another school commitment, is there an option for the student to receive a refund? If so, what is the procedure for requesting a refund and what is the time frame for that refund to be provided?**

Most trips and competitions have a “no refund” policy. Clubs get commitments from the participants early in the process to determine billing and split costs. Once the commitment is made the registration for events is processed. Once funds are collected from the students, all payments are sent out. When a student has a conflicting obligation arise, the advisor has to work with the event or competition coordinators to arrange for any possible refunds. Sometimes, this is possible. Sometimes, it is not. It depends on the event itself. If the event is a qualifying one, only the student who has qualified can go. If the event is more inclusive, the student is often encouraged to find a replacement, in which case, complete refunds are usually possible. The other consideration is the impact on cost to the other participants. Shared expenses (rooms, transportation) are based on the number of students attending. A decrease in participants increases the costs for those who are fulfilling their commitment. For these reasons, refunds are difficult at best. Sometimes, the advisors will work to adjust costs and get refunds from the organization running the event. In those cases, partial or full repayment may be possible. This process can take a long time.

**2. There is a great deal of ongoing concern over the high cost of the senior prom. When does the current contract with Cipriani's expire? On average, in the past, how many venues has the student government considered before contracting with Cipriani's? What parameters, if any, are given to the student government when they look at/consider places at which to hold the prom? Can they be encouraged to explore/consider more economically feasible venues and be reminded of the total financial burden of this event? Can they also be reminded that the high cost causes exclusion of a portion of the senior class and the goal should be inclusion, not exclusion?**

The current contract expires in June 2017. Each contract spans three years in order to lock in pricing. During the third year of a contract, the Student Government, under the guidance of their teacher advisors, research and visit various venues. It is important to note that the ticket price includes the flowers and DJ

in addition to the venue. Prior to entering into a new contract, the student government considers many venues in NYC and Long Island with the understanding that they must be able to accommodate a minimum of 600 guests. That particular room size, along with price (same or lower than in prior years) and location (New York City and Long Island) are the main concerns of the prom committee. The goal of the prom like all student activities, is to maximize participation. The student government is acutely aware of the financial burden of the prom ticket. To this end, the students implement prom fundraisers in all four years of high school. These fundraisers have been integral to holding the price of a prom ticket stagnant while the cost of the venue has risen. In addition, the student government works with students and their families with proven financial hardship to help them get to the prom.

**3. Can you explain the different diploma options available at Syosset High School and what their impact is on post-secondary education and employment opportunities?**

There are three diploma types available to Syosset High School students, plus the alternate pathway to graduation known as CDOS (Career Development and Occupational Studies). The specific options for each student will vary based upon the number of Regents exams the student takes and passes, as well as, whether the student is classified through the Special Education Department with either an I.E.P. or a 504 Accommodation Plan. The options include the following:

- Regents Diploma
- Advanced Regents Diploma
- Local Diploma
- CDOS

New York State Education Department provides a detailed summary of all diploma requirements and the varying diplomas. Please note the link below:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/gradreq/CurrentDiplomaCredentialSummary.pdf>

**4. Currently, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students must complete a swimming unit as part of general physical education. Many students get excused from this requirement for a variety of reasons and spend the period doing written work. Additionally, for students grappling with body image or gender/sexual identity issues, swimming at school may be emotionally difficult. Therefore, will the District consider removing this requirement?**

In an attempt to keep the students active we have purchased exercise machines which will be placed in the pool area. The students using these machines will be responsible for achieving certain benchmarks during the class period in order to receive credit for the class. Students who are physically unable to participate will continue with written work as their doctor's note would preclude them from any physical exercise.

**5. The high school puts on wonderful musicals each year, yet, the sound system is so poor. While it is wonderful to have a live orchestra, often the students cannot be heard over the orchestra because of the poor quality of the sound system. Can the sound system be upgraded to match the quality of the student's amazing performances?**

There are plans in place to upgrade the current sound system in the high school auditorium.

**6. The high school orientation for incoming freshman and their parents has so much to offer. However, the evening is very crowded and can be very overwhelming, especially for students with special needs. Is it possible in the future to split the evening into two sessions,**

**having one group in the auditorium and one group in the gym, and then having them switch? Additionally, is it possible at some point before the start of 9<sup>th</sup> grade to offer a tour of the building for parents?**

Yes, the split model will be used for the orientation session beginning with the 2016-2017 school year. Requests for building tours should be directed to the Guidance Office.

## **SEPTA**

### **1. What percentage of the special education budget is spent on exploring new and advanced/modern teaching techniques for our students?**

Each year instructional initiatives are determined and appropriate budget allocations are allotted to fund anticipated staff development, materials, conference attendance, etc. Therefore, the percentage of the total special education budget allocated toward instructional initiatives varies from year to year. Prior instructional initiatives have included the following research-based programs: Wilson Reading System, Just Words, Quick Reads, Visualizing and Verbalizing, Corrective Reading, On Cloud 9 Math, Touch Math, Positive Behavior Supports and Crisis Prevention Institute.

### **2. How many of the District aides are trained in working with students with an autism spectrum diagnosis?**

Summer training is available each year for aides interested in learning effective techniques to use with students on the autism spectrum. To date, thirty-six (36) aides have been trained. Those aides assigned to work directly with students on the autism spectrum receive ongoing, building level training in appropriate instructional and behavioral techniques to use with students.

### **3. What is the rationale for not having a collaborative teaching approach at the elementary and high school levels?**

Direct consultant teacher services provide a collaborative teaching approach and are available at all of the elementary schools and at the high school. The direct consultant teacher model provides special education support in the general education classroom. The flexibility of the direct consultant teacher model makes it the best choice for the elementary and high school programs.

### **4. Are modifications in homework, testing, etc. eliminated after the completion of 6<sup>th</sup> grade due to higher expectations?**

All supplemental supports and/or accommodations provided to a student on his/her IEP are reviewed each year. The committee would make recommendations for the continuation or removal after reviewing the student's needs and ability to access the general education curriculum.

### **5. When elementary school students matriculate to middle school, is it possible to provide student schedules and arrange a meeting with the team before September in order to prepare our children and their teachers?**

Much work is done in preparing students and parents for the transition to the middle school by both the elementary and middle school staff. Transition activities include the following: team meetings, orientation visits, staff communications, CSE attendance, performance articulation meetings. Parents are encouraged to speak with the middle school staff if questions remain.

**6. Recently, Dr. Rogers stated that the District has not made any changes to instruction based on the results of the ELA or State Math assessments. Does that hold true for students in special education as well?**

Yes, however, the results of the State assessments are considered by the building level Instructional Support Team (IST) as part of the RTI model to determine need and level of intervention services for a student. The weight these tests are given is determined by the presenting level of need of the student under review. Clearly, the State tests do not yield a diagnostic profile specific enough that the IST would rely solely on those results in making intervention determinations for students.

**7. Statewide, students with disabilities in grades 3-8 perform significantly lower than their peers without disabilities on state exams. Do the students in Syosset follow the state statistics? If so, what strategies is the District employing to close these gaps?**

According to the 2014-15 SED report cards, Syosset students with disabilities perform significantly better in both ELA and math than statewide statistics for this group would suggest (ELA- 26% vs. 6%, Math- 37% vs. 10%). Nevertheless, given the impact that a disability has on a student's performance, it is no surprise that disabled students perform lower than their non-disabled peers on SED tests. The District's RTI model is in place to address these performance gaps.

**8. Data shows that students with disabilities are far less likely to go to a four year college. A recent report showed that in NYS students that went to a two year college had lower college graduation rates overall and low transfer rates to four year colleges. This can have a significant impact on future opportunities. What is the percentage of Syosset students with disabilities that attend a four year college after graduation? Is there a strategy in place to increase that number?**

According to the 2014-15 SED report card, seventy-one percent (71%) of Syosset graduates with disabilities go on to a 4-year college vs. sixteen percent (16%) statewide. Fourteen percent (14%) of Syosset graduates with disabilities go on to a 2-year college vs. thirty-six percent (36%) statewide. The District remains committed to encouraging and to supporting all students to pursue an appropriate post-secondary education.