

**SYOSSET COUNCIL OF PTAs  
PTA FALL PRESS CONFERENCE  
DECEMBER 2015**

**General**

- 1. Has the District considered looking into the STEM program PTLW-Project Lead the Way? PLTW is progressive and prepares students to be divergent thinkers, creative problem solvers and promotes 21st century skills.**

The District has not yet considered the PTLW – Project. The District offers AP Physics courses, AP Math courses, opportunities within the Technology courses, and Robotics to allow students to be prepared for future engineering/STEM programs. We have added a part-time STEM teacher to the elementary program who is working with our Science Curriculum.

- 2. Recently, a district-wide social worker has been hired. Does this District have a policy for informing the parents what they are working on with the children, allowing for a home to school connection?**

The District practice of informing parents of all services, accommodations, and supports provided to their students applies to the social worker. This home to school connection is critical to ensuring that the social worker is effectively meeting the needs of students and families in the District.

- 3. Does the District traditionally notify parents when a teacher or guidance counselor will be out for an extended time? It seems as though there have been times when a staff member was out and parents were unaware that there was a long-term substitute in place. If this currently is not common practice, is it possible for the District to consider putting this into practice on a regular basis?**

The District will notify parents when elementary classroom teachers are out for extended times. At the secondary level, this has not been the practice.

- 4. With the growing cultural diversity in Syosset, would the District consider accommodating all religious holidays on the calendar? Other school districts now recognize many religious holidays from different cultures, and schools are closed on those days (i.e., Lunar New Year, Eid, etc.). What is the District's position on this?**

A diverse listing of religious holidays is recognized in the district calendar, on the last page, such as on page 53 this year. Students are excused from classwork and/or homework on the days they are observing their religious holidays. Parents are asked to inform the school if students are absent for religious observance, so that they may receive an ABR code which is designated as an excused absence. Therefore, no other religious holidays are being added for school closures at this time, especially in light of the fact that the district needs to have a certain number of instructional days as dictated by State Regulations.

- 5. Recently, a film was released entitled, "Beyond Measures," which discusses a different model of teaching. What alternative, novel forms of education has the District studied, as we know that one size doesn't fit all student learning capabilities?**

Many teachers are implementing new instructional practices that include flipped classrooms, blended learning, Pear-Deck, Kahoot and other novel ideas to have students empowered to become more engaged in their own learning. Many teachers are also utilizing Google Apps for Education and our students are working with many online resources to allow for greater differentiation to meet their needs. Our Technology workgroup has also been working to create several formal pilot projects including: 1:1 devices, Makerspaces, etc. to allow the different student learning capabilities. In courses like Performing Arts, Research, and other electives, students are provided opportunities to have differentiated project-based learning outcomes.

6. **What is the District's policy on notifying parents if a student has been involved in an act of bullying? Are parents notified if their child has been accused of anything inappropriate, so that the parents can follow up and discuss the issues with their child at home?**

Consistent with the Dignity for All Students Act, the District is responsible for investigating all complaints of bullying, and making a determination whether the incident was verified. If the incident is verified to have occurred, it is handled in accordance with the Code of Conduct (and also in compliance with NYS Law). Parents should be notified if their child has been found to have been involved in a bullying incident. As accusations may run a large gamut of circumstances, a parent may not be notified in some instances.

7. **The Olweus bullying prevention program is a program that was designed to help the relationship amongst children, and to make the learning atmosphere safer and a more positive one for children to study and learn. Would the District consider evaluating this program for implementation?**

Olweus can be evaluated for implementation along with other anti-bullying programs. The District currently conducts numerous programs in bullying prevention, including: Make Your Mark, UNITY Day, Character Education (emphasizing the pillars of character), "Mix-it Up" Day, Peer Mediation, "Amazing Wall," PTA-Bully Frog, Mindfulness and Kindness, and Ryan's Story.

8. **What types of safe guards has the District been able to implement to successfully protect our children from cyberbullying and inappropriate social networking within the schools?**

Consistent with the Dignity for All Students Act, all professional and nonprofessional staff receive training each year to detect, manage and report incidents of bullying. The Code of Conduct, along with the Dignity for All Students Act, is provided to everyone in the school community and in each building there are Dignity Act Coordinators whose names and responsibilities are promoted both in the school and outside, through mailings and on the District website. The District filters internet access in all schools to prevent inappropriate use of social networking sites. However, it has been our experience that the vast majority of cyberbullying occurs outside of the school day.

9. **Does the District have a forum through which parents can submit evaluations anonymously on how effective they feel their teachers, principals or other building staff members have been?**

There is no formal procedure in place to provide parental feedback regarding teachers' and principals' performance. However, as in the past, parents can contact Central Office Administration, including the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent, to convey their concerns.

10. **Who is responsible for evaluating the principals, and what is the principal's evaluation comprised of? Is there a component that measures the principal's interpersonal skills with students and parents? If so, how is this determined? Is the principal's "score" made available to the parents or just their "effectiveness" rating?**

The Deputy Superintendent is responsible for evaluating building principals. The evaluation is in compliance with the New York State Education Department's APPR requirements. Evaluation criteria is based on a scoring rubric which has been both approved by the SED and agreed upon by the District and the Syosset Principals' Association. A total score and rating is available by submitting a written request to the Deputy Superintendent.

11. **Has the District considered purchasing iPads for use in the classrooms?**

Currently the district's technology workgroup is piloting the use of several different devices for both 1:1 initiatives in the classroom and student support services. Most of the pilots are using Chromebooks, but

other tablets and iPads are also being used. The results from these pilot programs will help inform the district's decisions on technology purchases. (*Information on all the pilot programs can be found on the district website.*)

**12. Are there any plans within the District to unify classroom curriculum amongst same subject teachers?**

Curricular pathways in each subject are aligned by the district's Curricular Committees and the Central Office. However, instructional strategies and planning for daily lessons are left up to individual teachers, so as to allow for flexibility to meet the needs of the students in their classes. This flexibility to exercise professional judgment is important to allow teachers to be creative and unique.

**13. Studies have shown that there is no relationship between the amount of homework and a child's school success. Some teachers give hours of homework and others barely give any. Does the District have any plans to unify school homework requirements?**

Most grade level or subject area teachers meet to discuss their coursework which includes discussing both classwork and homework. However, there is no plan to unify homework requirements; these are left up to the professional judgment of individual teachers.

**14. Since there are new helmet regulations to help prevent concussions, what are the District's plans to provide new helmets to all sports teams?**

Football

The District has sufficient five star helmets for all students.

Lacrosse

Players at all levels are provided a helmet that is NOCSAE certified and equipped with the latest safety technology.

Baseball & Softball

New helmets are purchased each year and meet the NOCSAE safety standards for players at all levels.

**15. What is the inspection and subsequent repair processes for the outside infrastructure of the schools (i.e., sidewalks, curbs, etc.)?**

Inspections of sidewalks, curbs, parking lots, and driveways is an ongoing process. The District attempts to perform as much work as possible when school is not in session, especially during the summer, but will perform repairs during the school year as needed. This includes repair of site damage which occurred as a result of winter conditions. With the exception of repairing minor potholes, site-work is generally performed by outside contractors through the use of municipal or cooperative bids. In addition, the District continuously identifies areas for upgrading throughout the year.

**16. Can the District change to an online registration for Saturday swim lessons? With the current system, parents wait in a long line that stretches outside the high school.**

The swimming registration is face-to face because of safety concerns related to varying ability levels of each child. When a student signs up for the first time they are assessed by an interview with the parent who will declare their child's swimming ability based on a checklist provided by the instructor. They will then be assigned a class and given a card which is then kept in an effort to chart their progress. When they register for the next class the card is pulled and a determination is made where to assign the child for the next session. These cards follow the students' progress over a number of years and are critical in determining what level to assign the child. Online registration would prevent the face-to face discussion that takes place with each registrant and would leave room for a child to be placed into a higher level

class than he or she is capable of participating in. This could lead to safety concerns that are avoided when the child is evaluated and tracked by the instructional staff. We will be reconfiguring the waiting area to ensure that all parents who are registering for the program will have an indoor waiting space.

**17. What is the District's policy on the number of coaches that a team sport can have? The ratio of team players to coaches varies from 21:1 to 30:5 to 17:3. If there is no policy in place, would the District consider implementing one?**

Staffing for athletics is determined by the Athletic Director. There is no set policy regarding the player coach ratios. Generally the number of coaches is determined by safety factors as well as position specialization, routine difficulty and supervision of athletes. Historically, the number of coaches is evaluated each season and adjustments are made enabling the Athletic Director flexibility to meet student needs.

### **Elementary School**

**1. Is there a district-wide policy on having a peanut/tree nut free table that all children, with or without allergies, can utilize during lunch so that a child with allergies does not feel excluded and can enjoy lunch in a safe yet social way or does this differ from school to school?**

The District formed a Food Allergy Committee last spring. Since that time, it has received the input of many members of the school community and has resulted in a new draft Student Health Services Policy, which includes food allergies. Upon the adoption of the Food Allergy Policy, the District will establish regulations to standardize procedures in all buildings.

**2. Why did some elementary schools transition from 3 to 2 periods of lunch? By doing so, this now combines many ages of students and a higher number of overall students are trying to utilize the same resources for indoor and outdoor activities.**

Syosset has a very short elementary school day, and fills it with a number of enrichment opportunities including FLEX, etc. The building principals concluded that additional instructional time could be recovered without disrupting the building schedule by reducing the number of lunch periods. In most schools, this has resulted in additional reading and extra help time.

**3. Why do lunch policies differ for each elementary school? Some schools allow students to sit by grade whereas others must sit by class?**

In the current school year, most elementary schools have moved to a single lunch period to allow for more instructional time. This change, coupled with the physical differences in lunch areas in the schools and the individual health and safety needs of the students in each school, lead to variations in the organization of the lunch processes in the schools.

**4. With an increased focus on technology, how is technology being implemented in the elementary schools?**

Elementary students 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. Several technology pilot programs are being implemented in the elementary schools this year. 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. The results and feedback from all of these projects will help to refine the direction for the district.

**5. What is the District's policy on utilizing the gym during recess in the winter months or days with inclement weather to avoid having the children sit in their classrooms?**

Gyms have not been used for recess in the past. We will discuss the issue with building principals to explore their availability and feasibility.

**6. Why do pickup procedures differ from school to school (i.e., waiting inside the building vs. waiting outside)? Can the District create one policy to apply to all schools?**

Pick-up procedures have been developed by building principals in conjunction with their staff. Procedures differ due to building size, security concerns and physical plant. At this time, there is no plan to create one procedure.

**7. Would the District consider eliminating Visitation Day during American Education Week? It is a difficult day for working parents, as well as challenging for those children who do not have a visitor. Additionally, the day poses a fire safety hazard and allows strangers within the schools, which are safety concern for the District and parents.**

This year the Superintendent and Central Office Administrators established new procedures to help with any safety concerns by providing increased security, sign in tables and tickets that were issued to families to help keep the day well organized. The District is continuing to review the implementation of these new procedures.

### **Middle School**

**1. Can you provide us with an update on the plans being developed to alleviate the congestion that occurs on South Woods Road, particularly in inclement weather, to prevent adverse effects on middle school busing?**

The district has been working with our architects and engineers on several designs to facilitate the traffic flow of buses and cars. We have also been working with the Town of Oyster Bay to explore traffic control measures on South Woods Road to help alleviate the congestion.

**2. In the past, elementary to middle school rezoning questions have been raised. Will the District consider looking into rezoning the two elementary schools (Robbins Lane and South Grove) that are split for middle school so that one school is zoned for South Woods, and one school is zoned for HBT?**

At this time, there is no plan to rezone the two elementary schools that are split for middle schools.

### **High School**

**1. In the past, when asked about the availability of financial assistance to offset the high cost of some activities (i.e., prom, out of state competitions), it was suggested that "fundraising activities were organized to offset the cost". However, often it is often the students involved in the activity themselves and their family who participates in the fundraiser. This, therefore, in reality, does little to alleviate the financial burden of the activity itself. Are there any other options that can be explored by the high school to limit costs?**

The senior prom is run by the Senior Class. For four years, the class is engaged in activities which are designed, when successful, to lower the cost of the event. The fundraisers are class-wide and not necessarily confined to the families of the participants. The class officers are constantly on the lookout for fundraising opportunities and try to offset costs as much as possible. As for trips which are competitive in nature, the clubs that organize the events may also engage in fundraisers. They also apply to student government for grants to offset their costs. The school district already helps these types of trips by subsidizing transportation and registration fees. The participants pay for their room and food.

2. **Many booster clubs utilize fundraising as a means of financial subsidy. However, in many cases, the funds raised are used, in large part, to support Varsity level participation in out of town events (i.e., competition, training). Is the District aware of this and are there any legal guidelines that booster clubs should be following regarding the use or distribution of funds raised amongst all levels of the sports?**

Booster Clubs are organized by parents to support specific athletic teams. Their fundraising is used to support team efforts. They are voluntary parent-led organizations that operate independently of the school district.

3. **Can you please update us on the progress that has been made regarding alternatives to the “running car” situation for the security guard at the high school?**

We are continuing to explore options and believe that a solution will be implemented shortly.

4. **How are clubs managed and evaluated, from an advisor point of view? Some of the clubs appear to be running very well, while others do not seem to accomplish much throughout the year. How are club advisors selected and are replacements ever sought?**

Clubs are chartered each year by the school district. The advisors must complete the charter, along with the student leadership and building administration to ensure that the goals of the organization are in compliance with our school wide goals. Clubs are evaluated each year by the building administration and when an opening becomes available a new advisor is sought out from among the professional staff.

5. **Is it possible for the library to open at 7:00 am for students to study before classes?**

Currently the library is open from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. At this time, we have not found a need to open prior to first period.

6. **Would it be possible for guidance counselors to have more flexible schedules to accommodate meetings with students and parents before and after school?**

Guidance counselors currently provide three evening meetings in addition to their hours during the school day. During the summer months, guidance counselors are available five days during July and August.

7. **Why do students in some SUPA or AP courses receive homework over the summer, while actual college level courses begin and end with the semester?**

SUPA and AP courses are designed to provide an opportunity for high school students to perform successfully at the college level. It has become more commonplace for professors at the college level to provide work prior to the beginning of the semester. We find that this facilitates student success in the course which is why some SUPA and AP courses require work to be completed over the summer.

8. **Does the High School provide guidance and assistance for students taking the SAT and ACT so that they have the information needed to take these standardized tests successfully?**

Information regarding the SAT/ACT administration is distributed through the Guidance Department via emails and newsletters. Guidance Counselors provide direct assistance to students through evening programs and individual counseling sessions.

9. **Could a more simplified and less stressful process be developed to help with obtaining teacher recommendations for seniors? It becomes uncomfortable for students when they need to ask teachers multiple times to submit recommendations in time for their college applications to be completed.**

College recommendations should be requested of teachers who have a unique knowledge of the student. Requesting teacher recommendations is an important part of the college process. Students are encouraged to ask teachers for their recommendations as early as possible in the process as many teachers are asked to write multiple letters. Seeing the process to conclusion is the responsibility of the student.

10. **What was the rationale behind beginning Parent Teacher Conferences at 5:00 pm this year? This presents a time constraint for working parents who may not be able to arrive early, and, therefore, would not allow them enough time to see all of their child's/children's teachers.**

The High School has three evening parent conferences. There are two in the Fall from 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM and one in the Spring from 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM. The change came about as a result of parent feedback requesting an earlier start time and an agreement with the teachers as part of their collective bargaining agreement.

11. **What criteria are used to determine the qualifications of a sports coach when assigning him/her to a specific level of the sport (i.e., Varsity vs. JV or middle school)?**

The criteria used to hire a coach at the high school and middle school level include proper certification, prior coaching experience, reference checks and a philosophy that is in line with that of the District. Prior playing experience is also considered. High school coaches generally have some prior experience and therefore have worked towards moving up. Middle school coaches are hired in the same way but might not have the same experience as a high school coach because of their lack of experience in coaching.

## **SEPTA**

1. **What is the percentage of special education students in Syosset that have met state standards?**

The 2014-15 graduating class included fifty-one (51) students with disabilities. Forty-six (46) of those students graduated with either a Regents or Local Diploma. The remaining five (5) students earned a Skill and Achievement Credential.

The 2014-15 SED report card for students with disabilities indicates the following:

37% of graduates earned an Advanced Regents Diploma

89% of graduates earned a Regents Diploma

11% of graduates earned a Local Diploma

2. **Does the District advocate with the state for increased accommodations during state tests for special education students?**

All testing accommodations for students with disabilities are determined by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) based on the documented learning needs of the student.

3. **What training do general education teachers receive regarding special education implementation?**

In the beginning of the school year, each general education teacher participates in a meeting to review his/her students' IEPs. The building meetings are conducted by the psychologist and special education teacher(s) assigned to the student. All IEP responsibilities of the general education teacher are reviewed

and discussed in detail at those meetings. Training continues during the school year to address any modifications made to a student's IEP.

**4. What is the difference between RTI and Special Education?**

RTI is a general education service. It is a multi-tiered intervention strategy. It builds upon the information gathered on a student's performance. Depending on the performance data, a student is moved along to more intensive intervention levels or tiers. The student's progress is closely monitored at each tier to ensure that the intervention provided is effective. Special education services are specially designed instruction that is provided to a student only after the Committee on Special Education (CSE) has determined that the student has a disability and requires such services.

**5. What steps does a parent need to take to get their child evaluated if they notice that their child is struggling in school?**

The parent should speak with the building level team to ensure that all general education services have been considered for the student as per the RTI model. Should the parent desire to have the student evaluated by the Committee on Special Education (CSE), a written request for an evaluation is to be sent to the building principal/psychologist or the PPS office.