

**Syosset Council of PTAs
PTA FALL PRESS CONFERENCE
December 2014**

GENERAL:

1. Could you please clarify who is responsible for determining school bus routes? It has been challenging for parents to clarify routing changes and neighborhood overlapping bus issues. When a parent calls the District they are told to call Huntington Bus Company and when they call the Bus Company they are directed back to the District for answers. Who should a parent call if they have issues?

The school district establishes bus routes. Questions concerning bus routes should be directed to the Syosset transportation department at 516-364-5840.

2. Is there a protocol that a bus driver needs to follow when dropping off a child at the end of the day? Can you clarify the age at which a child can be dropped off to their home or at a bus stop without adult supervision?

Only kindergarten students must be met at the bus stop by a parent or guardian. Kindergarten students will not be released from the bus unless a parent or guardian/caregiver is present.

3. What is the District's policy on negative requesting a teacher? Is a principal obligated to honor such requests?

The district maintains a practice regarding negative requests, whereby each request is reviewed individually. Strong consideration is given to such requests when a sibling has been previously enrolled in the teacher's class that is being negatively requested. However, principals are not obligated to honor such requests.

4. Does the District encourage teacher input/recommendations for student placement upon promotion to the next grade/school?

Teacher input is only taken into account in the primary grades in the elementary schools. At the high school level, student placement is based on the number of credits earned and at the middle school level, placement is based on number of course/credits.

5. When a teacher is needed for a new class or leave replacement, who makes the hiring decision? Does the principal have the final say?

The district maintains an extensive recruitment process including input from building staff, administration and central office. While principals make recommendations, they do not have the final decision in hiring new or leave replacement staff.

6. As September and June have been increasingly warm months, would the District consider putting air conditioning in all classrooms to provide a healthy and comfortable learning environment?

The district's new architects are reviewing all district facilities and are working on a long-term capital improvement plan. The health and comfort of the learning environment is an important aspect of the plan along with other health and safety priorities.

7. Is it possible to have a direct link to the Parent Portal and Homework Online (Edline) that eliminates multiple steps to gain access?

We recognize the difficulty in navigating to two locations to retrieve information, but until recently, neither product was able to provide us with the tools required. All the features are now available through the Parent Portal and we are in the process of combining so you only need to go to one site to get the information you are looking for.

8. With the increase in suicide rates in teens and young adults, what are the steps that the District is taking to educate students and parents in dealing with stress and depression?

There are a variety of programs we offer to address these issues. Among them are: the Annual Parent Awareness Workshop, our Wellness program, and grade level presentations by our Peer Leaders and Guidance Department. Beyond this, our Health Department Curriculum specifically targets these issues.

9. Is it possible for the District website to be updated more often and made more user friendly? The new Athletic Director's name, for example, is not noted on any page. It appears that neighboring districts are more progressive with their website developments.

We will look into more frequent updates and ease of use for our website. The new Athletic Director's name is Drew Cronin and his contact information can be found by navigating to the following location:

District=>Contacts=>District Coordination and Support Services

10. On days when children have special dietary needs due to religious observances, can the cafeterias be adequately stocked to address the increased needs of the children during all lunch periods? i.e., Ash Wednesday/Lent – hot meal without meat.

The cafeteria is adequately stocked to address the special dietary requirements due to religious observances.

11. Can all of the school daily menus be reviewed to accommodate pure vegetarian diets? Most items have been prepared with mainly pre-cooked meat or fish gravy added to them. Is it possible for the gravies to be served separately so that vegetarians can choose the basic food options?

While we do not offer a dedicated vegetarian lunch platter, we do offer fresh fruit, salads, vegetables and salad bar items daily. We do on occasion serve cheese quesadillas as a lunch item.

12. Can you provide and post a full price list of all items sold in the cafeterias? In addition, can you clarify the specific cafeteria rules and regulations regarding what foods the children can purchase as a package or as an individual item?

Aramark is in the process of updating a full list of items sold in the cafeteria. My Plate signs are posted conspicuously throughout the cafeterias explaining food groups and individual items for sale. Staff are trained to answer and assist the children with their selections. Items are purchased either as a complete lunch or a la carte.

13. What steps have been taken to educate staff and children on life threatening allergies and how to help a child who is having an allergic reaction?

All staff have either already received or are receiving training by school nurses in the use of epi-pens. As part of the training, they also receive instruction in the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis, as well as the foods that are the likeliest to cause severe reactions.

The school nurses meet with students who self-administer the epi-pen at the beginning of the school year to ensure that each one is properly educated and to verify they know how to use the pen. They also meet with chaperones prior to trips to review students with severe allergies and re-teach and reinforce proper administration of the pen.

At the elementary level, students are repeatedly cautioned not to share their food due to the potential for allergic reactions.

14. Most, if not all other school districts, have turf fields. What plans does the District have to upgrade to a turf field?

During the last several years the district has been exploring various avenues to construct a turf field. At the present time, the district is continuing to meet with the Town of Oyster Bay to construct a turf field.

15. Over the past few years, there seems to have been a decline in the quality of cafeteria food. Is it possible to reevaluate our food vendors and food choice options?

The district went out to bid for food services last year. Two companies submitted bids and Aramark was the lowest bidder. Through the bid process the district added additional specifications to improve the quality of food. The district does reevaluate food choice options. Students participate in this process during School Nutrition meetings and Superintendent's Student Cabinet meetings.

ELEMENTARY:

1. With the increased challenges of the curriculum, would it be possible for the elementary school teachers to add additional extra help sessions?

While many teachers volunteer to provide extra help beyond the 45 minutes per week of required time, there is no plan for additional extra help services at this time.

2. How is the location of the SCOPE program evaluated? It seems as though the program has been housed at South Grove Elementary School year after year. This has resulted in non-SCOPE children being prevented from using their school playground after school.

The District consults with SCOPE personnel regarding anticipated SCOPE enrollment to determine the number of sites necessary to best meet the needs of the community. Currently, five of the seven District elementary schools house SCOPE sites. The district and building principals monitor the program on a regular basis.

3. Are there any plans to move from a FLEX (Foreign Language Experience) program to a FLES (Foreign Language Early Start) program at the elementary level? If yes, which language(s) would be considered?

A committee was formed to study our program goals and language programs in other districts. As the committee concludes its work, a report will be forthcoming.

4. Each elementary school is allotted a budget for clubs. If there are no teachers/supervisors available to run a specific club, the clubs close down. Are there any incentives to encourage staff to participate in clubs? Can the District pursue outside reps/parents to run the clubs. If so, what would the requirements be?

All teachers that participate in club advisement receive a stipend. Clubs are not done on a voluntary basis. The District has no plans to train parents or outside reps to run clubs.

5. Are there any plans to build an auditorium in the elementary schools? There are wonderful programs and it would be beneficial for students to have actual seats and a stage.

The district's new architects are engaged in a review of all district facilities toward the goal of developing a long-term capital plan.

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

1. Would the District consider rezoning the middle schools to help eliminate the splitting of elementary school children when entering the middle schools? Currently, 2 out of the 7 elementary schools split in middle school. Eliminating the split would help make the transition from elementary school to middle school much less stressful.

At this time there is no plan for rezoning attendance at the middle schools.

2. Can the timing of the sports team dismissals at the middle school and high school levels be reviewed? If a child at HBT is dismissed from sports at 5:00 PM and their sibling at the high school is also dismissed from sports at 5:00 PM, then one child is going to have to wait for a pick up. With traffic in the Syosset area at that time, it sometimes takes more than 15 minutes to get from HBT to the high school. South Woods children do not have any issues with this due to their close proximity to the high school.

Sport team dismissal times are decided by individual coaches and must be coordinated with available field and gym times and game schedules. Practice dismissal times are also coordinated with the late bus schedule.

3. Is there a policy for sports uniform disbursement between the schools? It appears that HBT always gets the older and worn-out uniforms passed down from the High School and then South Woods. In addition, HBT girls' sports are sometimes given boys uniforms to wear for the season.

In the past, uniforms were handed down from the high school to the middle schools as the Varsity and JV teams replaced their uniforms. From information gathered, it does not appear that HBT received uniforms from South Woods. We are in the process of ordering new volleyball uniforms for each middle school and will continue to replace worn out uniforms at both middle schools as the budget allowance permits.

HIGH SCHOOL:

1. At this time, several other districts have *Excused Absences* for students visiting prospective colleges. Is it possible to evaluate implementing *Excused Absences* for College Visitation to our District since students need to visit colleges when school is in session?

The policy is constantly evaluated. At this time it allows for 12 unexcused absences for a full year course and 6 unexcused absences for alternating half year courses. College visits could be a part of these unexcused absences.

2. Can the District review the option of moving the parent/teacher conferences to after the first quarter grades so that the parent has a more realistic view of where their child stands and can discuss progress more effectively?

We have evaluated the placement of Parent/Teacher Conferences and believe that there are significant benefits to having a conference prior to the end of the first marking period.

3. Since most of the Guidance Department curriculum meetings have wonderful topics and are scheduled during the day, is it possible to add webinars or post videos of the meetings to the District website? This would enable working parents to partake in all of the important information presented.

The district is currently looking into the possibility of adding webinars to our website.

4. Many singleton classes (classes which are offered only one period) are held during first period. Band students cannot take advantage of any of these classes because Band is only offered first period as well. Can the high school reevaluate the scheduling of these classes to minimize these types of conflicts?

The high school does evaluate the scheduling every year to specifically minimize these types of conflicts. Because of the vast nature of the elective program, it is impossible to eliminate all conflicts.

5. What options can be offered regarding high school bathroom access when using athletic fields that are at a far distance from school bathrooms? This is an ongoing problem for the athletes as well as spectators.

The doors next to the gymnasium are open during all practices and contests. We are exploring the option of opening the side doors at the High School as well as the possibility of opening the side doors at Thompson during games on the main field.

6. Are there plans for scoreboards to be installed at the various high school sports fields?

At the present time there are no plans to install scoreboards at the High School. We are exploring the feasibility of adding additional scoreboards. Cost and accessibility to power are both considerations when pricing outdoor scoreboard installations.

7. Are there plans for an electronic informational sign to be installed in front of the high school?

Not at this time.

8. Are there any plans for improving the acoustics as well as the overall appearance of high school auditorium?

We constantly meet with the head of Facilities to make related recommendations and plan for any necessary improvements.

SEPTA:

1. On the elementary school level, why do Special Education school services end so early (end of May/beginning of June) and start so late (end of September/mid October)? This seems to be a long stretch of time without services for the students that need them the most. Can the timing of services please be reevaluated?

Start and end dates for special education programs are the same dates as the school year. Special education related services begin approximately mid-September and end mid-June. The related services follow this schedule to provide time for student adjustment to the classroom, scheduling, assessment, and end-of-year activities. All start and end dates are listed on the student's IEP. If there are concerns relative to these dates, please contact your student's psychologist.

2. After a parent has been informed by the District that their child has been identified as having a possible learning disability, what is the process from that point forward? Does RTI (Response To Intervention) begin then? How is it determined which interventions are used? How are parents informed which approaches are being used to address the problem?

The RTI process is utilized in the elementary schools as soon as the building Instructional Support Team (IST) identifies the student as in need of support services, e.g. Learning Center, speech improvement. The IST determines which intervention is used. The student's progress – his /her response to the intervention – is monitored by the IST. Only after the RTI process has been followed, and data indicates that the student is not responding successfully to the intervention, would a referral to special education be made by the IST. It is the Committee on Special Education (CSE) that determines whether a student has a learning disability or some other educational disability. Letters are sent to parents from the building when RTI services are being provided to a student.

3. Most bullying takes place at lunch in an unstructured environment. What steps are taken to protect the Special Education student in this environment? If a bullying situation occurs, what is the procedure taken to resolve the situation? Do lunch aides have training? Are lunch aides informed of bullying situations?

All teachers and support staff are required to be proactive to address any bullying activity. Various bullying prevention programs are utilized in the district. Individual concerns regard bullying should be shared with the building-level team.

4. Does a parent of a child diagnosed with Autism have a right to ask for a meeting with his/her Autism Consultant and the educational team?

Yes, a parent can request to have a team meeting. If a behavioral consultant is assigned to the student's case, the parent can request that he/she attend the meeting. Request for team meetings should be made to the building principal.

5. Are Special Education teachers embracing the new Technology Apps being developed to assist children with learning disabilities? What are the District's future plans to move forward with this technology?

A variety of assistive technology software is available in the District to address reading, writing, math, language, and organizational issues for students. An Assistive Technology Committee meets regularly during the school year to review new software options to support student learning. Sub-committees are in place at each building to support the implementation of these learning tools.

6. Is there a specific timetable or District policy for Special Education teachers to communicate with parents? Parents understand the need to make our children more independent, but feel it would be helpful for increased communication and updates from the Special Education teachers. Waiting until the end of the marking period may make things more difficult to resolve.

Special education teachers follow the same parent communication schedule that general education teachers follow. Concerns with the frequency and/or quality of communication from the special education teacher to the parent need to be addressed at the building level. A parent should contact the building principal at the elementary level, the Assistant Principal at the Middle School level, or the Assistant PPS Director at the High School level.

7. Does the District encourage students with disabilities to join athletic clubs? What training do coaches have to include Special Education children into these programs?

Participation in clubs and activities is encouraged for all students. Staff members are aware of the special education needs of students. Parents are encouraged to discuss specific needs of the student with the club advisor.

8. How many speech therapists are at the middle and high school levels? How are the services fulfilled if a student's schedule is filled? How does a speech therapist communicate with the student and family?

There are three full-time speech therapists and a part-time therapist for the secondary schools. Each student's schedule is designed by the therapist providing the service based upon the student's need. Speech therapists communicate directly with students and families. A parent may contact the therapist with any specific concerns.