

A newsletter

from the Lawrence School Parent-Teacher Organization

Calendar

12 March (Thursday)

- PTO Poetry Night
7 pm Library
- EARLY DISMISSAL
12:30 pm Grades K-6
After-school movie

19 March (Thursday)

EARLY DISMISSAL
12:30 pm Grades K-6

20 March (Friday)

Bingo Night

24 March (Tuesday)

Principal's Forum
7:45 am Library

26 March (Thursday)

EARLY DISMISSAL
12:30 pm Grades K-6

30 March (Monday)

- MCAS testing period begins
Grades 3-8
- Eighth Grade Family BHS
Orientation, Part 3:
Life at BHS
7 pm at BHS

1 April (Wednesday)

Evening Parent-Teacher
Conferences

Volunteer Opportunity



Can you help on March 12 during the Early Release Movie? If so, please contact *Jonas Bromberg (jonas.benji@gmail.com)*.

PTO Meeting Update

In case you couldn't make it to the last PTO gathering, here are the highlights:

- The PTO hopes to bring in a police officer for the April PTO meeting to talk to parents about **internet safety** and **B-CASA** (Brookline Coalition Against Substance Abuse).
- Families are asked to please respond, online or on paper by March 20, to the recently distributed **communications survey**, which will help assess and improve the school's communication strategies. Find extra copies in the office, or take the survey online at <http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/survey-intro.zgi?p=WEB228UWFKDHR3>.
- The public hearing on the proposed **school budget** will be held on March 19.
- All families will receive a survey from the town regarding the **special education** program, which is in Phase 1 of a review.
- Nancy Turnbull reported on the good state of the **PTO funds**. Family Fun Night proved

a great source of income. She commented that our increased enrollment benefits the budget, since we have more families participating in the PTO's various fundraising activities. Discussions of next year's PTO budget will begin in April.

- Suzie Talukdar, Brookline's METCO director, and Cathy Tang, METCO Public Affairs Director, discussed how the current financial crisis has affected METCO. The program needs the support of suburban parents. They encourage people to contact their elected representatives and to show up at the State House on METCO Lobby Day, March 18. For information contact METCO at 617-427-1545 (ext. 11) or MPLC@metcoinc.org.
- The proposed amendments to the **PTO By-Laws** and **School Council election** timing and procedures were discussed, voted on, and passed unanimously.

Gracias to All!

International Night was a great success. The event came to life through the hard work and leadership of co-chairs Mariana Merida and Teresa Martinez, plus countless other Lawrence parents who brought delicious traditional dishes and offered their volunteer support in so many ways. Mariana and Teresa extend a special thanks to PTO presidents Amy Luster and Kate Shea; Jamie Lee; Kirsten Alper, whose incredible computer skills made the international passport possible; Karlyn Grimes and Delia Barrientos for their international flags; Ivany Schettino and Tina Manuel, who made wall decorations; Bill Saturno, who handled logistics; Wendy MacMillan for her raffle help; and Nick and David Vos for the sound and lights effects. Additional gratitude goes to Dominique Ferdinand, Jose Merida, and the many students who pitched in to make the night a wonderful time for all!

S.A.D.D. Meeting

The Grade 8 S.A.D.D. meeting will be held on March 18 at 6:30 p.m. at Brookline High School, Room 385A. Come join in for pizza and meet with BHS Peer Leaders! Save the dates of April 29 and May 20 for the remaining SADD meetings. For more information, contact *Hope Schroy* at 617-713-5149 or Hope_Schroy@brookline.k12.ma.us.

Understanding Class Placement



I recently engaged the faculty in a review of classroom placement practices at Lawrence. The faculty takes this process very seriously, devoting many hours to careful and thoughtful assignments to next year's classes. As principal, I play an active role in the process. The purpose of the review was to articulate clear goals, create more consistent practices across grade levels, and identify ways to group students so that we can provide support services more effectively.

We aim to create balanced, heterogeneous classes that provide the optimal learning environment for both the individual child and the group of children as a whole. We'll also look to provide workable groups for teachers and make it possible to offer the most effective support services, as well as take care that children aren't isolated academically, socially, or racially/ethnically.

What's new in the process?

- **Clusters with balance.** A cluster is a group of students placed together to facilitate instruction or prevent isolation while maintaining balanced classes. For instance, each class will have strong students, but also a group of students who can spark each other, have common interests, or work well together. Each class will have students with learning issues, but students with special needs will be clustered to facilitate service delivery. Also, given sufficient numbers, students will not be isolated in terms of racial or ethnic group.

- **Reduced emphasis on friendships.** We'll still consider friendships, but our primary focus will be to provide appropriate learning peers for each student, understanding that each year brings new opportunities for friendships.

- **More clearly defined role for student services staff.** This

includes Special Education, ELL, Literacy, Math, and ECS. We'll also emphasize administrative facilitation of all meetings.

What's the same?

Teachers and guidance counselors will continue to give the same thoughtful attention to each student as they construct next year's classes. Draft lists will be reviewed and follow-up meetings held as many times as necessary. I will make the final decision on all class placements. Families will receive class lists by mail in July.

What's the parent role?

In April, parents will have the opportunity to provide information (in writing to me) for consideration. We ask that you make us aware of any unusual circumstance or information that you think we may not have. But don't feel you have to write to be a "good parent"; most parents leave the process to the school. We will seriously consider written information as part of the process, but cannot guarantee any particular placement. Also, requests for specific teachers will not be considered.

We respect parents' role to advocate for their child. Please remember that:

- + the school needs to advocate for all children
- + children may present differently in school than at home
- + parents know their children over time
- + teachers know how children are doing within what is typical/expected for the age group.

Placement forms will be sent home at the end of March and will be due by April 15.

—Rick Rogers, Principal

MCAS History Testing Suspended

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Second Education announced last week that all History and Social Science MCAS testing (Grades 5, 7, and 10) will be suspended for at least two years. Media coverage focused on the postponement of a new graduation requirement to pass the history test in Grade 10, but testing for Grades 5 and 7 is on hold as well. The reasons for this action included possible difficulty funding the tests at the state level, as well as concerns about asking districts to meet an additional requirement in a time of fiscal challenges. As a result, students in Grades 5 and 7 grade will now have two fewer days of MCAS testing in May.

Math News

Attend the Grade 6–8 Mathematics Parent Forum on Monday, March 23 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. and find out about the revisions to the Brookline Learning Expectations for Grades 7 and 8. Come to Town Hall's School Committee Room to meet facilitators Dr. Angela F. Allen, K–8 Mathematics Curriculum Coordinator, and Dr. Julie Hackett, Deputy Superintendent of Teaching and Learning.

Arts

PALS Children's Chorus

The ninth annual VOICES concert starts at 8 p.m. on Friday, March 13 at the Longy School of Music in Cambridge. The concert (recommended for ages 10 and up) will feature the New England premiere of Benjamin Britten's Children's Crusade, op. 82, as well as other works. Half of all ticket sales will be donated to Save the Children. For tickets and info, call the *PALS office* at 617-264-7257.

An Evening of A Capella Music at BHS

On March 14 from 7 to 9 p.m., Brookline High School's A capella groups *Perfect Pitch* and the *Testostones* will open for the professional A capella group *Ball in the House* in a benefit for Spaulding Rehab Hospital (through the Boston Marathon's Team McManus). Tickets are \$10 in advance or \$12 at the door. To order tickets online and to find out more about Team McManus, go to www.firstgiving.com/ball-inthehouse or contact *Mary McManus* at 617-277-6261.