



Sunshine Academy

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Parent Advisory Board Meeting Minutes Tuesday March 28, 2017 4:30PM - 5:45PM

Attendees: Emily Knapp, Ann Frechette, Zeynep Belge, Melanie Baron, Kelly Sikkema, Erin Hart, Hiu (Nathan's Mom), Julia (Anna's Mom), Karen (Jason's mom)

Food Pantry: Ann spoke about how it is the only fundraiser we do because we know it is a well-run organization and a worthy cause. Zeynep asked if the Food Pantry needs volunteers, as her employer, Liberty Mutual, does a "Serve for Liberty" campaign annually and she would like to get the food pantry on the list of organizations they assist. They normally do their service work during the first two weeks of May. She asked that we send her Rene's contact information. Liberty Mutual also does a "Give for Liberty" fundraising campaign and maybe the food pantry can be put on their list too.

Science Fair is Wednesday, April 26 from 4:30-6:00. Please feel free to volunteer to set up or assist at an activity station. Hiu volunteered to do a timed activity but also wants to spend time at the other activities with Nathan.

Early Closure for Children's Museum Training: Ann spoke about the new opportunity we have to work with the Children's Museum on our STEM training. We used to partner with the Science Museum for our STEM training but the Children's Museum has more experience with our age group so we expect it to be an even better experience. We discussed the potential problems with the parking lot if all parents arrive at 4:30 and try to pick up at the same time.

Parking: Kelly asked if spaces on the street are marked as a 15-minute parking zone, does she still have to pay the meter, and Emily explained that you do have to pay. A discussion then ensued about approaching the funeral home with a parking agreement so that we could use their spaces from 6:00-6:30 during the week and they could use our spaces on the weekends. Emily said that the 6:00-6:30 parking situation is exacerbated by parents who use the outdoor classroom in the afternoons and therefore stay in the parking spaces longer than 15 minutes. She said that the outdoor classroom is closed in the afternoons for parents who drive.

Policy Change to a 6:15 Pick-Up Time: There was some discussion about the switch in the Parent Handbook to a 6:15 pick-up time and Emily emphasized that the school closes at 6:30, which means that the teachers are expected to leave the building at 6:30. If parents are arriving at 6:30, that means the

teachers cannot leave until 6:45 or sometimes 7:00 and they are not paid to be at the school until 7:00. Julia pointed out that most other places close at 6:00, so even if we emphasize a 6:15 pick up time, that is better than elsewhere.

Solar Panels: Ann spoke about how they are now operational and we expect that they will provide for all of our electricity needs. We agreed to send information on how much power we are generating and what the cost savings are through the newsletter and on our website.

Music Shows: We discussed the change in date to Thursday, June 22.

Stepping Up Day: Last year, we had so many Pre-K children graduating that we limited the Pre-K ceremony only to graduates. This year, we will have all of Pre-K participate in the ceremony and there will be goody bags and certificates even for the children staying with us through the next year.

Preschool/Pre-K Group Assignments: Zeynep asked what the Preschool/Pre-K classroom situation will look like for next year. Emily said that we do not expect to change the current Preschool/Pre-K structure, so we will again have two preschool classrooms and one Pre-K classroom. Last year, we had an unusually high number of four and five year olds, so we had two Pre-K classrooms but that is not the situation this year. Emily explained also that the transition of children into the classrooms happens slowly, with some going in June, some in July and then a larger group in August as we learn about the summer plans of different families.

Gender Balance in Pre-K: Zeynep asked if more girls would be admitted into Pre-K and whether the gender imbalance influences curriculum. Emily said that more girls will be transitioning into Pre-K over the next few months and that we anticipate a more balanced classroom. Karen said that she noticed that the curriculum alternates among topics, with STEM followed by community followed by literacy and back to STEM. There was a lot of praise for Desmond as a model for the boys.

Parent Support Group: Erin spoke about the goals of the parent support group and asked for suggestions for spreading the news about the group. There was a suggestion that each meeting have a topic so that anyone with that concern could anticipate coming away with resources and suggestions. Topics we discussed as possibilities included limit setting, sensory integration strategies, calming techniques and sibling relationships. There was also a suggestion to advertise the next meeting in the form of an Evite, which will also provide better feedback as to who will be attending. Julia suggested convening the next meeting at Barcelona or the Fireplace and involving wine in the evening. If it also involves a social aspect, people will be more likely to attend. We also discussed the possibility of inviting outside specialists for some of the topics.

Early Intervention: One of the parents asked how Early Intervention works and whether the specialists come to the school. Emily explained that we do host specialists throughout the day for different children and that many children at Washington Square are receiving services that way. She also explained the referral process and emphasized that the services are usually provided free of cost, as everyone recognizes the importance of starting the services as early as possible. Erin spoke about her child's specialists and their relationship with the toddler two teachers. She said that she initially thought that the specialists could only work at her home and that it was great news to hear that the services could be provided in the classroom.

Preschool Specialists: Emily explained that in Brookline, once a child is of preschool age, the services switch from the federally funded Early Intervention system to the state-funded system and that in Brookline, we bring Elizabeth Preston from the public schools into our school to do child assessments. She said that she is still trying to determine who does assessments for Newton, as we have a lot of Newton-based families and Elizabeth is not responsible for anyone outside of Brookline.

Kindergarten Transitions: Ann spoke about the change from Sunshine Academy to the public schools and how difficult that can be for working parents, as the official public school day ends at 2:30 on most days and 1:40 on Friday and then there are many holidays, half days and vacation weeks throughout the year. Ann explained that the only way to approximate the number of hours we provide is to get accepted into the Extended Day programs, which are separately licensed from the public schools but all meet within the public schools so there is no need to transport the children off-site. For families who are not accepted into the Extended Day programs, Ann provided a list of other resources including the YMCA and several privately run after school programs in the Pierce and Devotion School neighborhoods. There was a question about availability of programs in Newton, which we have not researched. Emily suggested speaking with Lisa Slater, who has a child in the public schools in Newton.

Deadlines for Extended Day: Hiu reported that her husband had to run over to Pierce School today to register Nathan for the Extended Day program, as they lost track of deadlines and she learned that the application fee has to be paid to be considered for the wait list.

List of Graduates and their Primary Schools: A suggestion emerged about providing a list of the graduates and where they are going as part of the Stepping Up Day ceremony, as it could be very helpful to parents to know which Sunshine Academy classmates will be in the same school as their own child. Emily agreed to find a way to provide that information.

Passage to Primary School: Ann emphasized that parents should respond to the questionnaire, as the schools do make kindergarten classroom assignments with cohorts in mind. Sunshine Academy children are often grouped together and there are friendship groups that started in Sunshine Academy that have continued on through high school.

September Transition Days: We discussed the public school calendar and the half days for kindergarteners. The first full day of public school in Brookline is Monday, September 11th. The question emerged as to whether Sunshine Academy can accommodate graduating Pre-K children for the first two weeks of September. Emily said to ask again at the next Parent Advisory Board meeting, as it is too soon to know whether we will have space. We can accommodate only 20 children total in our Pre-K classroom.