

Town Meeting

1-8-15

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Precursors

- SAB - meeting tonight
- Staff meeting- Frank said he had recognized the efforts of both staff and students to get to school during Tuesday's weather. He also read a text from Earnest Gant, thanking the HB community for its help and saying that his wife is still receiving therapy and in need of his help at home. Also discussed were: the course request forms going out 2/5, the Program of Study being published online, HB's anticipated size increase, Junetime, the BLPC, a new program idea Jennifer Goen is developing, and the choice of Eleanor Reed as Teacher of the Year. Round of applause for Eleanor!!

Announcements

- Architectural team chosen to design the new HBW Wilson site will give a presentation here in the auditorium on January 29.
- Course request forms go out on Feb. 5.
- 2 HBW students were among winners of the APS Martin Luther King essay contest: 6th grader Josephine Walyus and 8th grader Clare McElhaney.

Consent Items

- James presented a request to form a Castle Combat Club. Jeff Fishbein will sponsor, and they will meet after school on Thursday. PASSED.
- Tom requested \$750 outside teacher funds to help pay judges for the 3rd annual county wide film festival. They have already received \$1500 from the Arlington Community Foundation but need more to pay the 9 - 10 judges who put in 20-30 hours of work, each, judging, teaching and mentoring. PASSED.

Motions

- Bill proposed changing the delayed opening schedule which is currently "wonky." As it is now, the first block has 41 minutes while all others have 30, with no transition time between B and C. He proposed making A block 11:24 - 12:00, B block 12:05 - 12:35, and the rest of the schedule remaining as is, except for a small change to equalize the lunch break.
 - o Tom suggested keeping normal schedule and just skipping blocks.
 - o Eleanor suggested making all classes 30 minutes every day (!).
 - o Dave questioned origin of current late opening schedule.
 - o Frank said it had come from Ray's era.

Motion PASSED

Discussions

- Frank introduced the theme of Protest. Feb 2 will mark the 56th anniversary of integration in Arlington schools, and HB is honoring that event by naming and dedicating our "new" auditorium to the memory of the four students who made that integration happen. To further honor the event, we will be celebrating the theme of protest: social studies classes will discuss the issue and show the film "It's Just Me," Siobhan will lead a protest walk, and all students will be encouraged to make protest signs to put up on the walls. Anyone with more ideas should see Frank, Casey or Graham.
- Frank spoke about the anticipated increase in HB's student population. A 10% increase (approx. 65 students) was NOT part of the official announcement made by the school board in December but is none the less expected. Meg Tucillo and Cynthia Johnson, who have worked with the superintendent on these issues, will meet with HB administrators tomorrow to discuss the issue. Staff discussed it on Wednesday but now TM input is important.
 - o Dave Soles spoke about ideas he had put down in a staff email (see text below), including the possibility of dealing with the increase by creating a 5th grade. Doing so would preserve high school allocations but might

also change the nature of the students opting to try for HB. It would make parents and students think harder about a decision which would disrupt their normal elementary pattern, and might increase the community spirit within the new class (by increasing their longevity at HB), while not injudiciously increasing the size of upper classes. It would “increase community without decreasing the sense of community.”

- o Niles (6th) asked if 5th graders would be able to handle the responsibility and wouldn't it be a problem to have to hire new teachers.
- o Dave answered that the responsibility question was, as always, unknown, and that new teachers would have to be hired anyway.
- o Elly (12th) said that from personal experience, she knew that moving to another school as a 5th grader was terrible. She also said that the tests and curriculum needed for 5th grade wouldn't fit well with HB and that the change would be a disservice to those hoping to come in 6th grade.
- o Dan said that elementary teachers are required to have different endorsements, and therefore the faculty couldn't integrate as easily into HB.
- o Tom also spoke about the differences between elementary and secondary teachers, and said that while he knew that he, Stefan, and a few others, had experience, many others did not. He also talked about how 5th graders think of themselves as “seniors” in elementary school and have unique experiences that we would be depriving them of should they come to HB in 5th grade.
- o Amanda (12th) agreed with Tom and said that coming to HB during a regular transitional time was the right way to do it as it didn't force kids to separate from friends ahead of time.
- o Rachel (6th) said she would personally have liked the idea of coming in 5th grade, but that she didn't think overall that it was a good idea. She also asked if the “muffin” status would then change.
- o Michelle pointed out that adding a 5th grade would essentially force 9-year-olds to make a decision concerning the next 8 years of their lives - a lot of pressure at that age.
- o Bill V.E. said he liked the idea in that it would preserve the current class sizes and therefore not further disrupt the sense of community, but he wondered if such a thing would even be possible.
- o Frank answered that he doubted the idea was even on the school board's radar and said that it would never be an easy change, even if it were taken seriously.
- o Niles (6th) said it was already a hard decision for kids to come here, and it would be harder having to separate from friends earlier.
- o Hannah (9th) talked about important milestones in 5th grade such as specific tests and field trips that wouldn't fit well at HB.
- o Casey said that while Dave's suggestion was worth consideration, given today's time constraints it might be better to leave time for other ideas as well.
- o Carol suggested expanding the 8th grade since it was already a transitional year.
- o Dave suggested that maybe changing the entry stage at any point (eliminating 6th and possible 7th grade?) would change the nature of the applicant pool and might decrease the huge waiting list that seemed to bother the school board. HB has always been a good home for students who don't fit well elsewhere, so perhaps making it always be out of step with normal transitions would ensure that only kids who really should be here would apply.
- o Carl proposed frontloading the population increase now so that more kids could experience this HB before the move.
- o Liz said that the proposed population increase threatened the possibility of close relationships between students and teachers - one of the most important aspects of life at HB, and that therefore, making the applicant pool more self-selective might decrease the perceived need to grow. Changing the entry times might also help fight the characterization of HB students as elitists.
- o Anne asked a direct question: if we added 10% in a year, what would happen to allocations? Answer: staff would increase by 10%.
- o Elly (12th) asked if adding a new program (like HILT or Stratford) could be used to satisfy the population increase requirement. Frank said probably not, since the main goal was to help the middle school overpopulation and to mitigate the huge waiting list.
- o Miranda (6th) said that transitioning at a different time from other middle schoolers would be too difficult for many.
- o Eleanor suggested adding every year to the 6th grade and increasing incrementally. It would preserve the

sense of community for the upper grades.

- o Dave said that adding 60 kids into our current building would be a challenge. Could we split the addition and do 30 now and 30 upon moving?
- o Frank pointed out that there was not yet any final decision on numbers or time, and said that he would remind Meg and Cyntia tomorrow that HB is already the MOST overcrowded school (percentage wise) in the district.

Motion made and passed to close the speakers' list.

- o Dave said that perhaps it might be best to add 16 or 17 members to the high school classes.
- o Amanda (12th) said that adding population to the high school classes would make the decision more student driven and less parent driven.
- o Anne asked if increasing high school class size would satisfy the board. Frank answered that he wasn't sure, as the main concern has been to diminish middle school overcrowding.
- o Tom added that politically speaking, the desire in the greater Arlington community is to address the middle school overpopulation. The upside to bringing in more students now, in this building, would "allow more earthlings to carry our culture to the new planet." We don't want to bring 65 new kids into a new building with no experience of what HB is.
- o Frank said that realistically there was little chance to either add 5th grade or eliminate 6th grade. He will get back to us next week after the discussions on Friday.

Motion made and passed to adjourn, so the following two discussion topics were tabled until next week:

- BLPC planning
- Street safety during winter

Chair: Margaret Gorman

Co-Chair: Adam Sherinian

Secretary: Amanda Hayes

Text of Dave Sole's email to staff:

Before TM today I thought I would just send out some ideas that I am going to drop at TM, so you maybe have a chance to glance them over.

Like most of my ideas I doubt they will come to fruition, but I think it will help our kids have an interesting conversation, and just maybe move us forward.

- 1) Add a 5th grade.

Pro: It works well with the idea of community. Having kids in the program even longer reinforces the tight knit feeling of a grade, the sense the faculty have of watching the incredible transformation from child to adult.

Pro 2: It forces a choice. One of the biggest problems we have, the thing that creates our pressure to grow is the long waiting list, the many families who sign their kids up but do not get in. Right now it is relatively easy to sign up, there is no cost, no disruption to doing so.

Everyone is changing schools after 5th grade anyway, why not try for a spot at the "better" school. If we started our program in 5th grade parents would be given a reason to pause. If their kid was fitting in well, if they were being well served by their elementary school, then they might not want to apply.

This might cut our number of applicants significantly. And if so, it would probably leave us with the fraction that really wants HB, that really reflects on what we are about and buys into that philosophy. I predict we would see the proportion of younger siblings rise and the number of non-related applicants decrease. Again I think this would have positive repercussions for our sense of trust and community.

Allocation: Adding students here would have minimal impact on our current allocation balance. High school courses would be untouched, most middle school teachers too. Perhaps some 6th grade teachers could pick up a few more sections. The main effect would be to generate additional students for the elective departments who tend to want more anyway.

Con: It works against the idea of student directed decisions because the choice to come to HB would be made when the family was in 4th grade instead of 5th. It is even less likely that the student would be seriously involved in the decision.

- 2) Add 16 kids to the high school grades.

Pro: Often kids who come to us in 9th grade appreciate HB's freedom and community a lot more. They have known what it's like to attend those other schools and they really relish the opportunity to be here. Generally they were more involved in the choice to come here than their peers who started in 6th grade.

Pro 2: It does not disrupt the current middle school experience.

Allocation: If we take kids into every grade that's 9 - 10 more kids, not quite enough for another class, so some subject might gain a class while others would become large. How we make that decision would be divisive and challenging. If we add the students only to the 4 high school grades we are adding 16 kids per grade. That is clearly enough for one more section of the basic core classes.

There would be no disruption to the middle school allocation balance and again the elective teacher pick up the few more kids to each class that would help their numbers.

Con: Every kid more is a little less community feeling. Adding 16 to the high school grades instead of adding 10 means 6 more kids to try to integrate. Plus an even longer graduation.

3) When we move, we eliminate the 6th grade and add 21 kids to all the other grades.

Pro: It would be a choice. Families and kids would have started at their neighborhood middle school. Many families would learn that these are good schools, not so scary after all, and would not bother to apply for a choice school. It would reduce our applicant pool, the pressure to expand.

Pro 2: The families would be older so the kid would be more involved in the decision process. The families would know what sort of learner the kid is better, have a clearer picture if HB would be for them.

Pro 3: Having been to a normal middle school the kids coming in would all appreciate HB better, as our transfer students often do.

Pro 4: Our philosophy has always been stretched a little bit to accommodate a 6th grade. No off-campus privileges, mandatory TA time putting pressure on those MS teacher to come up with a bi-weekly activity. The 6th graders are often cited as a reason to curtail the freedoms and range of expression of the seniors on the first day of school and otherwise. Perhaps it would allow us to more narrowly tailor our mission if we focused in on fewer grades.

Allocation: It would be disruptive, no doubt about it, but the size increase in the other grades would be manageable. Again instead of adding 10 kids, enough to make all the other sections a little more crowded but not enough for a new class, we add a chunk that clearly justifies one new section of all the basic core classes.

Con: We would have to do some major reshuffling to make sure that all our 6th grade team members could find a spot in the school that meets their teaching credentials and interests. It might be too challenging to do, but this does not mean we should not take a look at the option.

Whatever we do I feel like we should offer to do half of the change in advance, while we are here and then expect the central office to move the 2nd half of the change in gradually. So if we are to take 65 more kids let's take 33 of them into this building over 3 years, over crowd our gym and auditorium all the more, but then when we move not get the remaining 32 in that first year, but continue to spread them out over the next 3 years.