

Town Meeting

3-12-15

TOWN MEETING

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Precursors - none

Announcements

- The YULA (Frisbee) Invite will take place March 21 - 22 at Longbridge Park. Over 36 teams from as far away as Wisconsin will be coming to play more than 100 games. Come out and support HB!
- The Middle School District Choral Assessments will be held here at HB tomorrow. 27 school groups will be attending starting at 9:45, and they will be using the auditorium, the chorus room and the drama room. Bill will be limiting access to the auditorium lobby and asking anyone with classes downstairs to use the staircase at the end of the middle school hallway.

Consent Items

- Erin and Christine (both 10th) requested consent for a Cabaret to be held on Friday, March 20 at 7pm in the auditorium lobby. Erin is the president of Tri-M (a music honor society), and money raised will be donated to She's the First and Tri-M. All students are welcome to participate. **Passed.**

Motions

- The Class of 2016 made a motion to host a Middle School Dance on Friday, March 27 from 7 - 9pm. They have all the necessary chaperones, despite it occurring on the "first night" of spring break! **Motion passed.** Casey then mentioned that Middle School dances in the past did better when held from 6 - 8 pm, so organizers said they would consider changing the time.

Discussions

- Bennett (12th) said he wanted to start a discussion about something he had been thinking about for a while and discussing with friends: the current H-B Woodlawn and how it compares to earlier times. He has been reading the Students' Underground Handbook from 2000 and sees many differences between now and then. He said that while he knows change is inevitable, and many more changes will no doubt happen due to HB's move, he thinks that we have maybe strayed too far from some of our original principles. In particular he sees three areas that stand out:
 - o The leash between students and teachers has tightened dramatically. For example, it was stated in the 2000 Handbook that teachers would not penalize students for not doing homework as long as the student knew the material.
 - o The extremely high number of students taking multiple AP courses has led to more stressful environment where students are not interested in what they can learn in a course but care only about test scores.
 - o Free time seems much more limited. There seems to be little encouragement for creative learning and little interaction between the middle school and high school.
- Mark Dodge said he thought that Town Meeting was too open and large a forum to begin a discussion like this. He suggested something like a book club to discuss the handbook - saying that if a dozen or so students committed themselves to going through the book and trying to reinstate some of the older ideas, it could happen. He said that he has noticed many changes over his 23 years here, but in particular, students seem more individualistic and less interested in organizing into groups. He said we would be astonished by how much could happen if a group of 12 or so committed themselves to working together.
- Bennett said that Ray Anderson had said much the same thing when he had approached him prior to coming to Town Meeting.
- Eliza (11th) said she thought there had once been a big brother/big sister pairing between middle school and high school.
- Dave and Casey both said that such a program had existed at various times with varying degrees of success. Casey said it had gradually faded out as the commitment (mostly from the seniors) decreased over time.
- Dave suggested that an ideal match would be between a 9th grader and a 6th grader, allowing the relationship to grow over time so that when the younger one reached 9th grade, he or she would be the ideal

“older” sibling and the senior would then be there for both of them.

- Aidan (10th) thanked Bennett for being a scholar and a gentleman and asked if there had been any updates to the Handbook since 2000.
- Bennett answered that he had heard there might have been, but he hadn’t seen any and would keep checking.
- Tom said that HB of years ago had not been subject to the societal forces present today and that America as a whole had changed a lot since then. Ray had not had to deal with the enrollment crisis now happening or with parents who are desperate to get their kids into a private-like school in terms of size and college enrollment records. These parents don’t care about HB’s philosophy. He said Ray and now Frank have been trying to insulate the school against outside pressures, including the pressure to offer, and have kids enroll in, as many AP classes as possible. He said that most staff come here because of the philosophy but then have to adjust to the realities. Were we to rewrite and update the Handbook in accordance with the original principles, it would be in diametric opposition to current societal trends.
- Amanda (12th) said that she, too, had been thinking about these things a lot and believes that the focus on AP classes limits HB’s ability to offer more “HB-like” classes. She said she now wishes she had taken at least two fewer AP classes in favor of independent study. She wondered if TAs could be more influential in discouraging AP classes but says that all students are worried about getting into college, even though college admission offices supposedly “know” that HB is different.
- Bennett went back to Tom’s comment about size and said that even in 2000, people at HB believed it had already grown far more than it ought to as an ideal alternative program. He added that the focus on APs is a regional obsession, and that nationally, the average high school student takes only one AP class. He said that he would prefer to take an AP class to learn what he could from that class and not to bother taking the test at all.
- Casey said that she believed discussions like this were useful and helped raise awareness, but she, too, thought it might be a good idea for students to get together and then bring specific proposals to TM as actual motions would be more effective. One example might be limiting the number of AP classes that HB students were allowed to take during their time here.
- Jeff Fishbein then suggested a “post graduate” year for HB students who felt they hadn’t taken enough courses while here, allowing them to further burnish their resumé
- Francisca then suggested we try to come up with new “HB” type ideas such as student run electives, including electives teaching the principles of the handbook which would be taught by high school students to classes of middle school students.
- Lizzie (12th) said she was very happy Bennett had raised these ideas and echoed the need for group collaboration to bring about change.
- Meghan said that as early as her first year here, she had been uncomfortable with the idea of teaching sections of “advanced” biology, but when she raised objections, she had been told that she couldn’t “push back rigor.” She doesn’t think her non-intensive classes are lacking in rigor, and she doesn’t think it right or in line with HB principles to make such differentiations in 9th grade.
- Dave said he had the idea that many students don’t experience anything of what life at HB should be until they are seniors and the pressure lets up a little. He said he thought Junetime would be a good time to offer electives on HB philosophy but added that we are what we are now because we have responded to what people who are here want. He said that other alternative schools had been started around the same time as HB and no longer existed because they had been unable to change with the times. That said, though, he thought it was important to remind students that college admissions could only evaluate which AP courses students took in relation to what courses were offered, and the key for admissions was that students took the most demanding courses available. Alternatively, students could always take AP tests without taking the course; his sister did that when she was in high school and got a 5 on the test. He remembered that when he was a student here, kids would take an AP class because they wanted to learn the material and then not bother with the test. He said a cultural shift had taken place over the years with students and parents believing that AP tests were vital for college admission. He wanted all the students in the room to know that they would ALL get into college, just on the basis of being the type of student who attends Town Meeting. He reminded them that the most selective colleges were not necessarily the best and said that Randy often encourages kids to pick smaller, less competitive colleges where they can be a big fish in a small pond.
- Amanda (12th) said she liked the idea of student led electives, but she said even that idea cycled back to approval at Town Meeting, and she has felt all year that the overall school’s attitude toward Town Meeting is disappointing. There aren’t enough people who want to take an active part in running it, and such a large chunk of the school never attends. She said that coming to HB gives students a lot of privileges but often doesn’t get much in return, asking, “How can we maintain a philosophy if only a small group of us are having this conversation? And how can we make Town Meeting more a responsibility than a free block?” She said that there has been a lot of staff turnover in the last few years, and she gets the idea from both students and staff that going to TM means too much of a time sacrifice.
- Olivia (12th) said she agreed with Amanda and feels there needs to be some kind of a cultural shift so

that Town Meeting is not just another free block. She said it would have to take a concerted effort to fight against the Northern Virginia culture of achievement regarding AP class enrollment. She said it would be good if students could take AP classes because they were interested in the course material and could focus on learning for learning's sake.

- Michelle said she wanted to speak from a math perspective because she has been disappointed in the limits of what math teachers can offer due to the compulsion to follow a track leading directly to calculus. She said that there were interesting courses such as probability and statistics and discrete math that they were never able to offer, and that it makes her sad that kids have to have their entire math trajectory plotted out by the end of 6th grade.

- Eleanor said she has always been committed to NOT teaching AP classes and was therefore surprised when she recently heard of an AP geography class that sounded very interesting. She briefly thought about trying to offer it but then decided against it because she knows that kids would sign up for it for AP credit, not because they were interested in geography. She thinks an ideal "AP" class would be a class of "awesome projects," and wants students to remember that "they are not a product to be purchased by a university!" She said her brother had pushed hard while in high school and had gotten into a super competitive military academy, while she had attended a much less competitive school, but in the end, they were both happy and successful people - he no more than she.

Several names remained on the speaker list, but many students had to leave to start an already scheduled SOL test, so a motion was made and passed to preserve the speakers' list and table the discussion until next week.

Chair: Jacob Hall

Co-Chair: Margaret Gorman

Secretary: Amanda Hayes