

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools

Parents' Association

January 10, 2011 Meeting

President Peri Altan called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Ms. Altan called upon the director and principals to give their updates.

David Magill announced that the search for a Lower School principal has been narrowed to four candidates, including the interim principal Sylvie Anglin, and will be down to two or three by the end of the week. The three final designs for the new Early Childhood Education Center and Arts Wing have been approved by the Board of Trustees, and the Lab+ Campaign is just shy of its \$40 million goal. Environmental abatement has been completed, and the existing buildings on the site will begin coming down in February. It will take approximately three months to tear the existing buildings down, and groundbreaking will occur in the summer. Last Thursday and Friday, collective bargaining with the teachers' union began. They are using a "modified traditional" approach, which is a form of issues-based collective bargaining.

Sylvie Anglin noted that Carla Young was absent from the meeting because she was attending a meeting with the residents at Vista Homes, which is adjacent to the new Early Childhood Education Center, regarding the Early Childhood Education Center. Ms. Anglin then thanked the PA for supporting a record number of teacher grants this year; requests this year totaled approximately \$10,000. She noted that the fourth grade participated in a project on chairs. As part of the project, Richard Wright took all of the fourth graders to his auction house for a tour. Parent-teacher conferences for grades one through four will be on January 24 and February 4. Progress reports will be available through PowerSchool toward the end of February; this is the first year that progress reports will only be available online. They will not be mailed this year. An upcoming performance for Lower School students will feature a representative from Historical Perspectives for Kids assuming the character of Helen Keller.

Amani Reed announced that grades and comments for Middle School students will be available on January 31, and parent-teacher conferences will take place on February 4. Grades and comments, as well as ERBs, will be available through PowerSchool. A principal chat with Mr. Reed is to be scheduled the third or fourth week of February. Note cards featuring art from Middle School students are now on sale.

Matt Horvat announced the Martin Luther King, Jr. program to be held at Rockefeller Chapel on Friday, January 14 at 10:00 a.m. The Senior Getaway to Galena is coming up, as is Arts Fest. Classes are cancelled on Arts Fest so that students can focus on the arts. Mr. Horvat noted that the current quarter is the shortest of the three and that February is often a tough month for High School students, and he is focused on taking steps to prepare for this challenging time. In particular, the Senior Getaway is timed to give seniors a much-needed relief from the pressures associated with preparing college applications. Meetings for parents of eighth through eleventh grade students regarding registration for next year will be taking place in the near future.

Ms. Altan then introduced Jeff Wolfsberg, the featured speaker, who spoke on "You Matter--Using Your Influence as a Parent to Raise Healthy, Safe Children." Mr. Wolfsberg is an internationally recognized expert on alcohol and drug abuse prevention who has been featured in Time magazine, on NPR and on Fox News, where he is the resident expert on teens. Mr. Wolfsberg is from Boston, where he is in his fifteenth year of private practice, focusing exclusively on independent schools and primarily on sophomores.

Mr. Wolfsberg stated that the average age of first intoxication is 12.9 years, so parents of children in seventh and eighth grade should realize that their children may be up to things. Mr. Wolfsberg referred to the memoir "Smashed" by Koren Zailckas and her description of independent school parents as willing to overlook signs of drug and alcohol abuse because of a desire for harmony. He noted four characteristics of addiction-prone children:

- they come from alcoholic families;
- they experience chronic bad feelings, including fear, anxiety, depression and shame;
- there is a gap between the child's expectations and the parents'; and
- they can't achieve satisfaction, often despite a high level of achievement and affluence.

Mr. Wolfsberg referred to a parenting developmental curve, where parents must adjust the level of responsibility they give children to the age of the children. He noted that children need more parental guidance as they get older. Nothing steals dreams of academic success and financial responsibility faster than intoxicants, and parents are the last line of defense, as our culture is no longer family-friendly. The percentage of students who have tried an illicit drug by the end of high school is 47%, and the percentage of high school seniors who have had an unsupervised drink in the last 30 days is 57%. However, it is a reasonable expectation to get through high school drug- and alcohol-free.

In response to a question, Mr. Wolfsberg noted that girls out-drink boys in eighth to tenth grades, and their reasons for drinking differ from boys'. Girls are more likely to self-medicate. Boys drink to impress boys. Girls don't drink to impress other girls but will do it to impress boys. Girls may also drink in order to access their sexuality, as they may feel that it is not socially acceptable to be sexual in the absence of drinking. Girls also reach dependency in about half the time that it takes boys to reach dependency.

Mr. Wolfsberg explained that the main sources of alcohol for teens are:

- a parent or other compliant adult,
- an older sibling,
- a "guy who never left" (person in his early '20's who hangs around with high school students) and

- stealing from parents.

In response to a question, Mr. Wolfsberg discussed new drugs that people are experimenting with. Mr. Wolfsberg explained that salvia is a smokable plant which causes a very powerful, short-acting hallucinogenic effect. It is not addictive, but it has a dissociative effect. The neurological effects are not known. Recently, some kids died from smoking methadone. There is also a new product called “Four Loko”, which is very inexpensive and contains as much alcohol as five beers and as much caffeine as five cups of coffee. He explained that colleges struggle with the economics of entertainment. He noted that flavored alcohol beverages were introduced to help adolescent females get past the “yuck factor” and begin drinking. Mr. Wolfsberg noted that private school students tend to outdrink public school students, but public school students drink earlier and more recklessly. He discussed the roles of nature and nurture in addictive behaviors and noted that there are very good parents with drug-addicted kids. Trends in addiction for 2010 include an increase in alcohol, drug and video game use. He mentioned that addictive behaviors can cause significant spiritual damage, including shame, guilt, embarrassment and damage to reputation.

Mr. Wolfsberg stated that it is best to deliver a kid to college as an abstainer; it is a myth that drinking in high school to prepare for college is a good idea.

In response to a question, Mr. Wolfsberg discussed video games and other electronic media. More screen time is associated with lower self-esteem, because many media constantly deliver a message that “you are not enough.” A behavior becomes an addiction if it interferes with quality of life. He recommended that parents limit screen time but did not recommend a specific limit.

In response to a question, Mr. Wolfsberg discussed the abuse of medications for attention deficit disorder, including Ritalin and Adderall. He said that the rate of ADD is approximately 5-6% but that 25-30% of children take medication for ADD. These drugs have become performance-enhancing drugs.

One parent in attendance commented on how prayer has helped her in her struggles with alcohol, and Mr. Wolfsberg confirmed that faith and spirituality matter when it comes to addictive behaviors.

Mr. Wolfsberg then discussed how best to support non-users. Non-users should not become enablers or caretakers of the drunks. He said that it is a terrible idea to have a club for non-users (“you can’t have a club centered around something people don’t do”). Parents should have discussions with their children about drug and alcohol use with the school health program, as “ignorance is bliss” in the early years. Programs like DARE can actually increase use.

A parent asked about the appropriate response to a question regarding the parent’s own experience with drugs and alcohol. Mr. Wolfsberg noted that experts have different opinions on this issue, but he does not recommend full disclosure. Honesty is not the same as full disclosure, and experience is not the same as wisdom. Parents should not view this question from their children as an opportunity to recover their own disowned self from adolescence.

Mr. Wolfsberg noted that maternal mental health has a big influence on whether children become drug and alcohol abusers. He also recommended that parents not put their children in the center of their world. Kids should not be continually told that they are “special.” A child with a strong value system can be helped if he or she gets into trouble with drugs and alcohol, but a child without a core value system cannot be reached.

Mr. Wolfsberg noted that Greek, Italian and Jewish cultures generally do a good job with alcohol use. Alcohol is treated like any other food, but drunkenness is heavily stigmatized.

In closing, Mr. Wolfsberg recommended the following specific actions:

- Be up when your kids come home. The longer they are allowed out, the more likely they are to drink.
- A parent, preferably the father, should show up occasionally at the location where the children tell you they will be.
- Take care of yourself and have your own identity. Place yourself first and the children second. Have an awesome marriage.
- Handle alcohol responsibly. If you go out to dinner with your kids, one adult must not drink.
- Don't let your high school-aged child visit an older sibling in college—ever.
- Encourage your children to come to you for help.

Mr. Wolfsberg's presentation concluded at approximately 8:40 p.m., and the meeting adjourned at that time.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Laethem Stern
Secretary