

University of Chicago Laboratory Schools
Parents Association Meeting
01/13/2014

UCLS Administrators and Staff Present: Susan Devetski, Primary School Principal, Sylvie Anglin, Lower School Principal, Carla Young, Nursery/Kindergarten Principal, Carol Swainson, Middle School Principal, Chris Jones, Director of Finance and Operations, Ana Campos, High School Dean of Students, Ken James, Director of Student Services, Jason Lopez, Director of Educational Program, Fountain Walker, Director of Safety and Security

PA Members Present: Lynn Sasamoto, Tracy Coe, Cheryl Rudbeck, Triste Lieteau Smith, Tina Louis, Debra Beinstein, Laura Lichter, Patty Jones, Sari Weichbrodt, Sara Skelly, Christine Sterkel, Peter Rogers, Cindy Marchessault, Lisa Curci, Susan Ataman

Lynn welcomed everyone and suggested the formal agenda and format be tabled to allow for an informal exchange between school officials and parents due to the low turnout of parents who were not part of the PA. Chairs were arranged in a circle and attendees all introduced themselves.

Lynn then opened up the floor for questions and answers. After an initial silence, it was suggested we just get updates from each of the principals and then proceed with questions and answers.

Nursery/Kindergarten

Carla Young opened with a description of 32 benches that had just been completed for ESH. Handmade benches were completed in order to conform to fire code. All the classrooms with an exception of 4 now have benches outside their doors. The carpenter/builder also made 2 large replicas of the Woodlawn houses that used to hold the Woodlawn nursery school classrooms. They are on display in the lobby of ESH and very intricate in detail.

Primary School

Susan Devetski spoke a little about technology in the classroom. Two teachers attended a technology conference in St. Louis: Lisa Harrison and Amy Landry. They contributed to a presentation on using Ipads as tools for reflections completed by primary school students and learning how to add voice and video. She also updated the group on continued work with a literacy specialist. She is working with all the teachers, after-school staff and librarians and will return in the spring with specific literature groups. The group focuses on teaching about a responsive classroom, respectful communities, conflict resolution and so forth. This summer, Lab may host a site for teacher training with the possibility of opening it up beyond the Lab Community.

Carla interjected that related training – mindfulness- is also being undertaken at ESH. Anne Marie Chereso, a Lab parent, will be assisting teachers with mindfulness training. Teachers are learning to help students learn techniques to calm the body, mind, focus on breathing and locate equilibrium as methods for maintaining control.

Lower School

Sylvie remarked she attended the ISAACS conference in St. Louis where Lisa Harrison and Amy Landry presented their Technology in the classroom work. She added that attendees of Lisa and Amy's workshop were very impressed by the depth and thoughtfulness of the presentations given and the methods used. The workshop drew a large crowd that, unlike many of the other sessions, lingered in the room after the session had ended.

Sylvie then gave an update to LS preparations for the move from west to east side of Blaine as the renovations are completed on the east side. So far, the process is on schedule. With all the logistical pieces of the move starting in the fall, students and staff are starting to get excited about the new space and the next phase, the gradual move-in of the classrooms. Nicole Powers will be among the first teachers to move and has integrated the move into all sorts of classroom activities. Kids are measuring and using floor plans to plan configurations of classroom. Excitement among the kids is building. On the weekend of February 14, barrier walls blocking off the east side of Blaine are scheduled to come down. Beginning that weekend and continuing up through spring break, classrooms on one floor at a time will be moved, starting with the 4th floor. The west side of the 4th floor will be closed off the same weekend and the process will move to the 3rd floor the following weekend. The weekend of March 7 the first floor will move and finally, the 2nd floor will be moved last to result in least disruption to the library and library services. The entire lower school will have moved over before spring break, with walls going up blocking off the west side as soon as the move to the east is accomplished, one floor at a time. Once all renovations are done, all the fifth graders will be welcomed over. An open house will be given for the first week after walls come down before anyone moves in (with exception 4 classrooms)

Incorporated into the move will be classroom activities related to packing and moving parties which will involve the kids in many ways. Once the entire move is completed within Blaine, a new playground for the Lower School will be built on the site of the old Lab Logs. In answer to a question, Sylvie summarized that the first floor of Blaine will be all third graders, to maintain the general current positioning of the youngest grade on the first floor.

The fifth grade will occupy classrooms on the 3rd and 4th floor on the east side, sort of stacked closely to one another. And the west side of Blaine will similarly stack the 4th graders on the 3rd and 4th floors. The library will be expanded to its west and remain on the 2nd floor. Counseling and learning suites will also occupy the 2nd floor to the east. The library will be compromised for about 10 weeks. They will continue to operate, but many of the stacks will be inaccessible for some time.

Finally, Sylvie mentioned that the administration is engaged in really great changes to progress reports and functions of the homerooms, etc. These changes in the Lower School are leading to heavy conversations on homework in Lower School.

Middle School

Carol talked about the construction being a fun experience, with developments occurring every day. Students have weathered it well. She also noted that Middle School counselors in Blaine now will be moved. The first set of Middle School grades came out. Eighth graders for the first time have letter

grades in an effort to get them ready for high school transcripts and to ease some of the transition from middle school to high school. Growth mind set is a new topic and there is a new focus on the habits and practices that lead one to get good grades. Also new to the MS is a new service learning coordinator, Hannah Evans, who will be coordinating service learning for grades 6-12. The MS engaged in a hunger banquet in December. Despite some glitches and some delay in the food being served (which a number of parents thought was an added benefit for the children to experience), it was very educational. A meal was put on by Oxfam where different groups of people received different degrees of food. Lots of emotions were involved in this exercise, which was part of the lesson. In addition to the Hunger Banquet, food justice issues were under discussion in advisories. Carol also touched on the fact that we sometimes forget about the amount of time faculty invest in helping to set the emotional intelligence of the students.

As far as technology, the MS is moving away from Icart to one-to-one devices like I pads and they are in the process of thinking about implications of that, such as vis a vis the issue of executive functioning. On a final note, the MS is looking forward to Diversity Day which is coming up soon.

Learning and Counseling

Ken James started off by saying that Lab is starting to see a payoff in adding new staff and the smoothing of services across schools.

The Department is excited about the executive functioning initiative which addresses skills we need in order to execute tasks: organizing time and space, setting priorities and deferring gratification, among others. These are all issues being addressed. Ken gave the example that everyone will be disoriented when we begin to work with room numbers in the newly renovated Blaine spaces. We will all need to rely on our executive functioning skills to get around once there is a logical layout of room numbers (which, Ken joked, he had never been able to figure out given the layout of old Blaine room numbers).

High School

Ana Campos was representing Scott Fech at the meeting. Scott will be hosting the next principal chat January 30 with a focus on Challenge Success, a program based out of Stanford about how we evaluate and define success. Healthy child development should be our aim as parents and educators. Parents will be taken into small groups to examine definitions of success. Freshmen advisors are getting executive functioning training. In addition, a guest speaker, Alex Lickerman, a Lab School parent and physician, will be talking to them about resiliency in an upcoming assembly.

Registration for next year's courses will begin at the high school on February 3 and continue through the 16th. Advisors are available to help students with course choices.

Lauren Polite asked about strengthening executive functioning skills in students. There was some discussion on the daily planners which are meant to help students with their functioning skills, not always successfully. Ana Campos mentioned that the high school planner will be changed next year to bigger size, similar to the middle school; the smaller planner did not have the space to write in all daily assignments for the high school student. A survey on executive functioning collected information on how time was being spent so it could be plotted out and adjustments made. Ken cautioned about

treating executive functioning as a subject. He likened it to breathing or swallowing. . Ken used his hands to show that if our fingers on one hand are held perpendicular to the floor to indicate the subject matters we learn, then executive functioning skills would be a series of skills required (shown as fingers on the other hand parallel to the floor) that need to be interspersed with those subject matters in order for effective learning of that information to take place. He stressed we shouldn't pathologize it: many of us perform executive functions continually and we need to allow students to see it infused in everything they do all the time.

Some discussion ensued after Debra Beinstein asked how in a technological world, executive functioning fits in. If kids can find out what they need at click of button, doesn't that negate or lessen the need for the types of skills such as keeping a daily planner?

Carol offered that we all need to get into a routine of growth mindset praise, particularly at the middle school level. That is, praising the small things that require effort, such as turning something in, writing down an assignment, checking off that something is completed. When these efforts are made and praised, it encourages continued growth in those kinds of practices that will be required in some form in the future, hopefully to the point that parents won't need to ask if there is anything else that needs doing.

Sylvie also added building in the practice and habits of getting something written down is beginning in primary school. Once they have written down an assignment, for example, they learn to internalize it and perform fewer distracting behaviors like flipping through pages.

Chris Jones

Chris Jones provided some construction updates. So far all construction is on schedule and within budget. As renovations conclude on the east side of Blaine, the focus will move to the west side. The canopy and scaffolding on east side of Blaine hall will be moved to west side. Jersey barriers (the moveable barriers limiting traffic flow) will also be moved to the west, improving the line of sight at the front door of Blaine. Street parking will still be lost during this time. In addition, the CTA stop at Kimbark will move across Kimbark (to the Ida Noyes side). The crane will move to the west side of Blaine and be positioned over the roof and into courtyard. Most or all of the orange curbed parking on Kimbark will probably be gone. Access to Kimbark may be impacted. In spite of delays, we're on schedule, on budget.

The Arts Building construction is scheduled to continue through the 2014-15 school year. It has been running into challenges. Moving the equipment and positioning 85 cassettes in frozen ground has resulted in lots of vibrations felt throughout the school.

As the ground has thawed, the situation has improved. The last of the cassette work is expected to be done tomorrow. Twenty-five percent of the Arts building will have a basement, to be used for theater storage, etc. Starting next week, the shoring panels for the basement will be pushed into the ground by an innovative Japanese technique. All are excited about it. As we move forward, the work for the Arts hall will continue until August 2015. Over the summer, work will expand to the Middle School,

including, sprinklers, PA systems, security controls (termed life safety work). The balance of the work will be completed by August 2016.

How much Kimbark will be impacted is not fully known at this point. Moving the canopy to the west side of Blaine, will hopefully shift drop off/pickup area to the front of Blaine. Access to the building will remain as is.

The issue of mold that was discovered in Mr. Matsikis's 4th floor classroom was discussed. Regular monitoring continues, as does additional monitoring that is part of the construction protocol. Sylvie attested to the swiftness of the monitoring and the quick response. Chris explained that a leak was discovered in a water line and it had caused mold to grow in the wall. A vent was opened resulting in lots of dust. In erring on the side of caution, the areas, including the Library were closed off to students until it was deemed safe. Sylvie added that the decision has been made to always err on side of keeping safe. She said the construction crew was very responsive and very quick.

Sylvie added some comments on the Kenwood Mall areas. The Kindergarten space remains on hold for outdoor classroom space (it is used as play space while Lab Logs is closed off for construction). They hope the outdoor space will serve all of ESH and the Historic campus as well. The use for the Courtyard is still under consideration, with lots of proposals out there, including making part of it a farm, garden, beehives coordinated by science teachers, etc. The Courtyard had mainly been used as nursery play space. With Scammons gone, we will be losing a big green area, but there is also a landscape plan for the area around the Arts wing. Carol is looking at the Courtyard as a space that can connect all the campuses and provide science experiences through the 9th grade. The Midway, to the surprise of many teachers, has been used more by the kids during the fall than it had been before. Sylvie commented that entire grades have been going to the Midway and this has created different opportunities.

Lauren asked about how the buddies system has been working with ESH. Carol reported that most MS advisories (approx. 80%) have some sort of buddies – younger or older (in some cases both). Buddies have been involved in cider-making, an airplane project on the roof of ESH. Jason added that there are actually more classrooms with buddies than there were last year, alleviating one of the concerns regarding the move to ESH. Now Middle School 7th and 8th graders have their combination advisory/ lunch periods during which visits with buddies can be scheduled. Some also meet on Friday mornings during advisory. Sylvie added that the Lower School has no special classes before 10 am and that's when Buddies happen with LS classrooms.

Jason Lopez

Jason passed out a handout regarding the results of the parent survey done last year. He will also be issuing something in next enews. He highlighted a number of programs that have been enhanced or created as a result of the parent surveys. Areas such as attention to individual child, grades in middle school, adjustments to progress reports, etc. are all areas of program opportunity connected to the surveys. In the 3rd section which addresses social and emotional development, issues like executive functioning and mindfulness training are being developed. All of these came from survey - how to adjust things for this year. He also mentioned the Friday night coffee house from 7-9 also stemmed from the survey.

He added that lots of work is being done on diversity in the curriculum. There are now in place advisory committees for each division where diversity shows up in curriculum.

Lynn Sasamota closed the meeting with a couple of announcements.

1. The next PA speaker will be Tony Wagner via Skype. The PA meeting will start meeting ½ hour earlier, at 6:30 pm on Monday, February 3. Tony Wagner is Innovation Education Fellow at the Technology & Entrepreneurship Center at Harvard University. He will speak on "Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People who will Change the World". Learn more at tonywagner.com.
2. The nominations process for the PA Board for 2014 will be starting soon, so everyone should be thinking about possible candidates.

Susan Ataman
Secretary