

MINUTES

MS 54 GENERAL PTA MEETING: 4/20/17

The meeting was called to order and presided over by co-presidents Katie Miller and Jerome Kramer.

Quorum was achieved.

Co-Presidents Report:

- Vote on motion to approve minutes from the March PTA meeting.
Approved.

- PTA positions available for next year:
 - Parents were encouraged to apply for a position on the PTA. There are a number of Executive Board positions that will need to be filled for next year: Auction chair, co-recording secretaries, co-treasurer(s), assistant treasurer, co-fundraising officer, possible corresponding secretary, 7th and 8th grade reps.

- Bylaws amendments, as presented at March PTA meeting:
 - The PTA bylaws were recently updated to comply with the new A660 regulations. Copies of the proposed bylaws, and a summary of changes, were made available at the PTA meeting in March.

Vote on motion to approve revised bylaws.
Approved.

- 108 Construction Project Update:
 - West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing has proposed a development project across the street from the school. PTA co-presidents attended a meeting regarding the proposed construction last month. The project is moving into an Environmental Impact Study phase. School is keeping track of potential effects on the MS54 environment.

- Central Park Tae Kwon Do (CPTKD) Residency Update:
 - CPTKD completed a successful six-week residency with five 6th Grade gym classes. The program had been instituted as a means of alleviating overcrowding in the gym

space. Mr. DiPasquale stated that that the students responded overwhelmingly favorably to the program.

- Yoga Residency Update:

- The Wellness Committee organized a yoga residency through Bent on Learning with the hope of alleviating gym space overcrowding in the Eighth Grade gym classes. Instructors will begin a three day per week program today. They will also work with teachers once/week beginning next week.

- Addition of fundraiser to 2016-1017 list:

- Discussed possible addition of a school fundraiser through EngineRm (a rowing program) to take place in May.
- Copies of the 2016-2017 Fundraising Calendar were made available at the meeting.

Vote on Motion to Approve revised 2016-2017 MS54 Fundraising Calendar.

Approved.

Treasury:

- Budget as of 4/20/17:
- Bank balance is \$352,416.72
- Total income is \$467,557.01
- Expenses are \$399,781.44
- Positive net income is \$67,775.57
- Money Market account balance is \$250,069.72

Fundraising:

- Annual Fund Update:
- The Annual Appeal has reached its target, but parents were asked to please continue to give to help our school.

- Auction Update:
 - Parents were told that ticket sales are low and were asked to please purchase tickets, donate items, and bid on items. The school needs these funds to cover basic school costs. Tickets are available for purchase on the school website.

Principal's Report:

- School Update:
 - School Survey numbers were up this year. Parents were thanked for filling them out.
 - District 3 is sponsoring a science fair at Urban Assembly High School on 4/22 from 11-1. Information is available on the District 3 website. Stuyvesant High School is hosting it's first-ever technology conference for middle school students on 4/22. Information is posted on the school website.
 - Administration is beginning to plan for next school year. Parents were encouraged to please email if they have any suggestions or feedback, or attend an SLT meeting.

8th Grade Student Panel on High School Admissions Process:

The panel consisted of Eighth Grade students who plan to attend the following high schools next year:

The Chapin School (private school), Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School (Fine Arts; Instrumental), Brooklyn Technical High School, Stuyvesant High School, Bard High School Early College (Queens; Manhattan), High School for Math, Science and Engineering at City College (HSMSE), Regis (private school), The Bronx High School of Science, Millennium High School, and undecided between Beacon and the United Nations International School (UNIS.)

Learning about High School Options:

Students on panel toured between 6 and 15 schools each.

Tours and open-houses fill quickly.

Visit high schools in the spring of 7th Grade to make the fall of 8th Grade less stressful.

Visiting schools helps students understand what type of school feels like the right fit, so also tour schools that are not on the top of your list.

Some students want a big school and some function better in a smaller environment.

Touring helps students understand what makes each school unique.

Speak to students and teachers to get an understanding of what the school is like.

Remember that the students leading tours may be tired and not the best representatives of the school.

It's helpful to learn about these aspects of student life at a school: getting good grades, time for a social life and how much sleep students get.

The city-wide and borough high school fairs are tedious, but students can learn a lot—especially about schools that they may not get to visit.

Interview Process:

Interviews should be approached with positivity. Students should seem interested and act as if they want to go to that school.

Test Prep:

To prepare for the Specialized High School entrance exam (SHSAT)—students did the among the following: six/hour per week course over the summer; found Barrons and Kaplan books to be very useful; took SHSAT practice tests; used a tutor.

If using a tutor, make sure the tutor knows if you do not understand something.

Do the bulk of test prep in the summer and then continue to practice in the fall.

Additional Advice:

The high school process, and test prep in particular, is stressful, so it's important to rely on friends who are going through the process as well.

Try to avoid “last year of middle school friend drama”, and to keep a positive mindset.

Fill in as many schools as possible on both the specialized and selective high school lists.

Remember that there are many great high schools, so you don't have to get in to your top choice.

Do not have set expectations about a school or create false hope. You should explore all of your options.

Students suggested the importance of trying to stay relaxed and remember that everyone gets in somewhere.

Question and Answer Session:

Q: When did you begin working on your portfolio for LaGuardia and how did you do it?

A: I went to art studios and sketched throughout the summer. Then I put together my work and mounted it, which is not required. The work has to show what you are good at.

Q: What programs at LaGuardia did you apply to?

A: Vocal and Drama, on two separate days. You can apply to up to 3 programs.

Vocal and Art. I spent six hours at the school on the day of the auditions.

Vocal and Instrumental. I was there from 8:00-1:30.

Q: What was the most interesting school you saw that we may not have heard of?

A: A private school called the United Nations International School that was really interesting. I like the topics they study there.

Townsend Harris in Queens, though it is a one-and-a-half hour commute. It has amazing facilities and a huge amount of graduates have gotten scholarships to college.

The High School for Environmental Studies. The principal was engaging and the school has a bio/eco conscious focus.

HSMSC is a fantastic school with a STEM focus.

Q: For those who chose to attend selective schools, how did you make your choice?

A: Bard Queens: I like Humanities, it's a relatively small school, and has seminar classes.

Bard Manhattan: My brothers went there and liked it. And I liked it when I visited.

Millennium- It's a small school, so I felt like can't get lost there. I like the focus on Humanities and the students were welcoming.

Q: What did you learn about the work/life balance in the schools you looked at?

A: Bronx Science and Stuyvesant: No sleep.

Bronx Science: My sister went to Bronx Science and slept from 12-6 because of the workload and commute.

It depends on the person.

For non-specialized, Bard has a lot of writing, the others probably get more sleep.

It depends on the activities you do after school.

Q: What was the interview process like?

A: Beacon: Interview was in a group of two/three people. They look at two essays: one from 7th or early 8th Grade that is graded, and one you have to write and turn in before the interview. They ask you questions about the essays at the interview.

Bard: Think of the interview as them showing you what they are about, not just seeing what you are about. The interview was a great experience.

Q: Do 7th Grade teachers help you compile your portfolio?

A: Teachers have a folder for each student, and at the end of the year, you get it back. You can ask for a signature or comment from your teacher on your work.

Dr. Elster: For the Beacon portfolio, students often use a research paper and science lab.

Q: Did anyone research teachers at each school?

A: You can go online and read teachers' bios. You can also meet them at the schools and see how motivated they are in the classroom.

Q: If you applied to both private and public schools, was there a scheduling conflict?

A: I had to do test prep and interviews for both, which was stressful. You should start studying now or over the summer. The private school interviews were

30-45 minutes long. The public school interviews were 15 minutes long.

It is best to prepare for interviews with someone who is close to you, but who you want to impress- like an older sibling or parent.

Dr. Elster: For Fine Arts portfolios, there is a great Afterschool program at The Jewish Museum. For music auditions, the music teachers work with kids during Early Academy. Remember who your child is, and what your child needs, during this process. Some kids start test prep in the spring and take courses, some have tutors, and some kids just take a practice test in October. Have your child take a practice SHSAT test and see how they do. Test prep places also give practice tests and diagnostic feedback. There are lots of good choices.

Q: How many kids got in to each school this year?

A: Dr. Elster: The information will soon be put on the school website. This year, fewer got in to Beacon and Stuyvesant and more got in to Millennium and Bronx Science.

Q: How many tracks can you apply to?

A: Dr. Elster: You can apply to specialized, non-specialized and audition schools.

Q: How does Round 2 work?

A Dr. Elster- Round 2 is like an appeal, but very few are granted.

Next PTA General Meeting:

5/9, 7:00 pm- Maurice Frumkin, NYC Admissions Solutions' founder and president, will speak about the NYC high school admissions process.