

Grade Level Representatives Notes

Dear ECS Families and Faculty,

We wanted to let you know about a collaborative initiative amongst the school administration and Parent Community of ECS - the Grade Representatives Committee. This committee is comprised of school principals and volunteer representatives from each grade level.

The purpose of the Grade Reps program is to collect trending concerns and feedback from each grade to share with the administration with an eye toward problem solving when needed. We welcome your questions and concerns and look forward to addressing them during these monthly meetings. Feedback / notes will be shared through the room parents and can also be found online: <http://ecspco.org/volunteer/grade-representatives/>.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact your Grade Level Rep or the Board.

Notes from Wednesday December 5, 2018

LOWER SCHOOL

- **ALL**
 - Q: We are concerned about the elimination of athletics. Could we add a fitness based lower school club?
 - Aaron Coleman: With the combination of very limited facility space for adequate physical activity/athletics and the limited availability of volunteers, at this time, I cannot add a fitness based lower school club.
 - Q: What happened to before school morning club?
 - Megan Gregory was given new morning duties this year, so her schedule does not allow for it.

UPPER SCHOOL

- **5th grade**
 - Q: Late homework - inconsistent between 5th grade and other grades. If they completed an assignment should they still get a zero
 - A: If you have questions about your student's homework, grade or homework policy, please contact the teacher directly. Reminder, 5th grade is a transition year to middle school so we are trying to prepare them for that transition the best we can.
 - Q: Will there be a study period added in at Rogers?
 - A: Students do currently have activity time in middle school where some grade levels have offered students the chance to stay in to complete work if they so choose.

CAMPUS WIDE

- Q: What is the addition of language going to look like?
 - A: Spanish courses at ECS follow the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. The standards are organized around the “5 C’s” of learning languages; communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities. For our K-5 students, Spanish will be part of the specials rotation. We are currently working with our middle school specialists to develop our middle school Exploratory program schedule which will include Spanish. More information about the course will be available in the spring.

UNION- Board

- Q: How do we ensure a level of “quality” with teachers if they are in a union? As I understand it will be difficult to fire teachers, even for poor performance. After seeing some documentaries of the NYC school system, I am scared. They have teachers that don’t even teach and just sit there because they know that can’t be fire since they are in the union. Scary how people take advantage of the system.
 - A: We can’t guarantee anything with or without a union. We have no way of knowing what a contract will look like once it is bargained.
- Q: When is the vote?
 - A: December 19th
- Q: How will the union affect ECS funding and hiring process?
 - A: We do not know until a contract is bargained. The bargaining committee could ask for these types of issues to be changed. We would bargain in good faith. However, we could not and would not agree to anything unless the administration and board determined it was in the best interest of our school and students.
- Q: Is it possible to get specifics on why teachers want a union and so fast? What are the reasons behind this decision. Secondly, I am feeling very “stuck in the middle” with this whole topic and I am being asked to take sides without all the information. Is it possible to get specific reasons why the board is against the union? How will it impact the school and students? Also, is it possible to know the teachers reasons for seeking a union? I want to make an educated decision but seem that I can’t because I don’t know the reasoning behind each side’s decision. It was all very abrupt to me.
 - A: People should not feel stuck or that they have to choose sides. This is by design an adversarial process and there are teachers who are for the union and teachers who are against the union. We do not know how a union will impact the school at this time. It doesn’t matter how the board or parents feel- it matters what the bargaining unit thinks and whether they vote yes or no to the formation of a union. Being “pro-teacher” does not equate to being “pro-union”. We are “pro-teacher” and want to work with them directly to continue to make this an exceptional school. We think we can do that by working collaboratively with teachers, not in an adverse manner.
- Q: Parents want to work with teachers to support them- how can they do that? We tend to build up teachers- but then keep tearing them down. We recognize the concerns for

forming a union and want to help. Is forming a union the best answer? To these problems?

- A: We can't answer that question. There are teachers who want a union and teachers who do not want the union. You should reach out to your teacher to ask what the best way to support them is. The board believes that a union is not the answer to the issues that the organizing teachers have raised.
- Q: Will all teachers have to be a part of the union and pay to be a part of it? If so, how are teachers being aware of this information?
 - A: The union would likely seek a union security clause if they win the election. If we agreed to such a clause, all teachers would be required to pay dues. No matter what, there is no way to opt out. The Janus case does not apply to ECS. The union has acknowledged that on its own website. We are trying to get the facts out- not including our opinions or feelings to make decisions about the union.
 - Staff meeting on Thursday after school.
 - Jon will spoke to staff on Thursday, December 6, and staff had the opportunity to ask questions and voice concerns.
- Q: What did the teachers ask of the board? Couldn't they have done it without asking?
 - A: The organizing teachers asked the board to sign a Joint Request for Certification. If the board had signed it , the organizing teachers would bypass part of the process and go straight to formation/approval of the union. We said no to the teachers request because we received emails from teachers who signed and did not realize what they were signing. We also wanted to seek creative and collaborative ways to work with the teachers to solve their issues. They did not take us up on that. Therefore, we sought a secret ballot election run by the National Labor Relations Board, a neutral government agency. We want every teacher's voice to be heard, since we received emails from teachers who feel they signed without understanding what it meant. Because of this there will be a secret ballot election, that way it is completely anonymous- no one will ever know if/what you voted. The board wants staff to have a complete say in what they want, and ensure everyone understands what they are signing on for.

Q: Expansion rumors. Who is making these decisions? How does admin get ahead of the rumors? How have admin and teachers been communicating so far?

- A: We have tried to make the expansion process as collaborative and transparent as possible, knowing that there will always be mistakes even with careful planning and our best efforts towards transparency of process. Change and growth are hard no matter what, and listening was the very first part of the process, as well as providing a predictable and reliable communication schedule. We also worked with our accounting firm to understand the affordability of expanding programming, of bringing on more students, and of right-sizing our spaces. We worked with advisors that are experts in change management to create a process so everyone had a chance to voice their ideas and concerns, and we consulted a

school scheduler that prioritizes the values of the program while designing a schedule that meets the needs of students. We've learned from our past mistakes that making promises you can't deliver on is not something we want to do as an organization, so sometimes communications may feel less detailed or clear given how complicated this process has been.

- Starting in January/February of last year, we completed 6 in-person focus groups for staff and parents, and we published online surveys for anyone unable to attend. Our counselor and PULSE Fellow facilitated the sessions so no administrators were in the room, and open communication could be available. This team also went into every classroom to listen and talk with students, gather ideas and hopes and dreams. Upon completion, this team summarized all of the data and provided specific recommendations to guide decision-making. Information was documented and shared to our entire community, and we met with all staff members in small groups to share out how the staffing model would support additional programming and students. This foundation of information allowed administrators to have a lens in which to understand the values, ideas and key pieces that were critical to hold onto as we grew. Additionally, the feedback received from the focus groups and surveys allowed decisions to be made on the values and input that had been received.
 - As promised to our staff throughout this process, we revised job descriptions to become more clear for all staff members moving into this school year. We clarified roles, and we did include some blackout dates for taking Paid Time Off (PTO) to ensure we had sufficient coverage for students. We also requested that staff choose 5 evening events over the course of the year to participate in. These updates were published on the last days of school, and were considered DRAFT as we continued to take input and revisions for the finals to be published at the close of the 2018-2019 school year.
 - We also updated our org chart to support additional structures for consistency and clarity of reporting, and accountability. As an organization, we have run a very lean administrative team in order to invest the most personnel in front of students at the building level. Growing as an organization also meant creating some positions that help stabilize the organization and maintain the background needs for a growing staff and community.
 - We recognize that the volume of information may have been challenging to process, and the pace of moving forward has been speedy, to say the least. We've tried our best to deliver on the plan we rolled out nearly 18 months ago, knowing that this would be a challenging timeline and we would make mistakes along the way.
- Q: What about the student to teacher ratio? Are you still committed to 11:1?
 - A: We have indeed had a long-term commitment to the two adult model in our classrooms, and have every intention of maintaining that commitment. The current model for achieving that important adult/student ratio places a special educator, educational assistant or additional general education teacher (in Cultural Literacy

and Thinking Lab) in classrooms. As we grow and serve more students, our special education department believes that we need to be as flexible as possible in order to provide a continuum of services to all students. So in expansion, special education teacher's schedules will be more reflective of that needed flexibility, which will include more one-on-one and small group student time as well as continuing some co-teaching. We have also added two special education teacher positions dedicated to more effectively address the needs of our students requiring Emotional and Autistic support. Our special educators will **absolutely still be present in our classrooms and on grade level teams**, and able work in a more dynamic way based on student need on a personalized and responsive basis. Inclusion will very much remain at the heart of what we do, and our maximum caseload per special education teacher will be 12-15 (which remains below the PPS average of 20 and far below the state maximum of 50.) Given a more dynamic special education team approach, it is important we add in *an additional layer to the teaching teams*, which is why for the 2019-2020 school year, we are adding an educational assistant in every grade level (k-8) and two paraeducators in all of our K-5 classrooms. Additionally, there will be building based paraeducators that will be able to be flexible and will have schedules that meet the needs of students. The effect will be an overall increase in the adult presence in more of our classrooms. Educational assistants and paraeducators are professionals that will work directly with all students, and take instructional direction and expertise from the lead teacher in the classroom.

- Q: Why the AFT? PSEA/NEA are other options to name just one and there wouldn't appear to be the inherent conflict of interest that exists with the local AFT representing both PPS and ECS teachers (given that each operate within systems that don't have a history of collaboration and in fact, PPS had previously denied ECS charter).
 - A: You will have to ask the organizing teachers
- Q: What's been the AFT's track record in PA as it relates to charters (have the charters remained viable after unionization)?
 - A: Cannot answer but there is a lot of information available online. We suggest that everyone do their research.
- Q: Where have the teachers seen that unionization has helped teachers affect curriculum choices, class and teacher structures, as well as autonomy (as this is my understanding of teacher's issues as suggested via their letters)? Have there been real successes they can point to as a result of unionizing? If so, can they provide them?
 - A: Not all the teachers agree with the union and you will have to reach out to the organizers for their perspective on this. We also do not think that these are the types of issues that unions seek to address in the collective bargaining process.
- Q: Why didn't teachers reach out to parents if they had significant concerns about what was happening at school? Assuming teacher's interests are what's best for kids, parents would be natural allies. I also noted in all of the teacher letters to the Board that they did not mention families. This is concerning.
 - A: I cannot answer that question. I do wish they had reached out to the board as

well. You should reach out to organizing teachers.

- Q: Is the parent information session still happening?
 - A: No, the board has new legal counsel- we cannot provide that.
 - A teacher union is different because it has a parent component but ultimately the decision is up to the bargaining unit
 - No matter what happens- we will keep moving forward!
 - We believe the issues that have been raised can be solved without a union- but you can create a union at anytime.
 - If you have any specific questions please send them to molly.bennett@board.ecspgh.org and I will work to get an answer.
- Q: Is it sudden or has this been going on in the backburner?
 - A: We don't know, board was surprised at the board meeting on Nov. 14- that was the first the board had teachers express concerns. This is all happening very fast, and we hope everyone pauses to collect as much information about what this decision would mean for our school.
- Q: We want to hear more about the educators passion for the school and what they want to do in specifics? Are the teachers going to have any opportunity to make public statements?
 - A: They can legally do whatever they want. I would encourage you to hear from both the organizing teachers and the teachers who do not want a union.
- Q: Can the board suggest also having a union rep at that meeting? Are Jon's comments also being made public?
 - A: Jon's comments- probably not, not required to have an organizer but all of the teachers will be present
 - Want to educate teachers what this union means-
 - No interest in making this adversarial at all. We want it to be collaborative.
 - Everyone be completely informed and make the best decision for themselves.
 - The organizing teachers and a union rep have been talking to teachers for awhile without there being any other side present. This is an opportunity for the teachers and the administration to come together to talk and understand each others viewpoints.
- Q: What is the structure that will be on going that will take the place of a union?
 - A: Can't explore that prior to the vote; we can't make suggestions or promises, we are legally bound to a process. We can say that we are committed to working collaboratively with the staff and think we can achieve great things by working together.
- Q: What are some specific examples of conflict with school culture if a union happens? What will need to change? Will teachers make decisions on how they will move forward?
 - A: I am unable to give specific examples without knowing what the bargained contract will look like.
- Reminder that all board meetings are open to the public. You can find the dates of the board meetings on the school calendar.

- Update from Kate Dattilo, COO:
 - *I am writing to share the bittersweet news that I have made the decision to resign from my role as COO at ECS. Working at ECS has truly been a gift and an absolute pleasure. I cannot imagine a more fulfilling or rewarding professional experience. Over the past ten years, ECS has become an extension of my family and this decision has been an emotional one. A few months ago, I was approached by an independent school in my area with an offer to join their team in a strategic projects role. After much deliberation, I made the difficult decision to accept the offer. The new position will allow me to spend more time with my family.*

My work at ECS has been an absolute labor of love and I am so grateful to the entire ECS community for the opportunity to be a part of such an amazing 10 years.

*In sincere appreciation,
Kate*