

Darien High School Parents Association
September 24, 2019

Welcome/Call to order by Lori Olson at 9:05 a.m.

Lori thanked many DHSPA volunteers: hospitality and all the committees that made Open House and Orientation a success.

Approval of the Minutes of the May 21, 2019 meeting: motion from Theresa Vogt, seconded by Ryann Pegler. All approved.

Vote on budget: copies of the proposed 2019-20 budget available online and at this meeting. DHSPA's budget funds enrichment for students, presenters and student life as well as teacher appreciation events. Carolina McGoeys motioned to approve, seconded by Melissa Williams. Budget is approved.

Directory pre-sales were successful. Please pick up your pre-ordered printed directory from Theresa Vogt's house. The Digital directory is available at any time. Purchase and download the app for the most updated directory.

Committee Reports and Announcements

Communications: please go to DHSPA website to sign up for weekly newsletter (DPN), and use Facebook for community event announcements.

Fairs: Clubs fair was a big success, over 50 clubs. Volunteer fair is Oct. 3.

Nominating: thank you to those who've volunteered.

Programs: our next meeting is College Panel night on Monday, 10/14

What's New at DHS?

Report from DHS Administration

Ellen Dunn, Principal: Thank you parents and DHSPA for support of all that's going at DHS; it's been a wonderful beginning to the school year. Meghan Emanuelson will moderate a set of questions for our panel today. Ellen introduced new Assistant Principal Mark Mazzone. In addition, Chris Manfredonia will provide an update on the new Health Curriculum at DHS.

Mark Mazzone - from NYC school, where he was a math teacher and administrator. Biggest change so far is the amount of support offered at DHS - more staff, more involved parent body. Thanks for the warm welcome.

Chris Manfredonia, DHS Athletic Director and K-12 Health and PE Director for DPS, provided an update on the new DPS Health Curriculum. The goal of the district's revised Health Curriculum is to improve the well-being of our students. Health classes are now grade-based, specific to each grade 9-12, as opposed to being taught in multigrade groupings. Grades 11 & 12 will take health in first semester; grades 9 & 10 in the second semester. PE classes will still combine grade levels.

Panel: Helpful Resources at DHS

Meghan Emanuelson, Director of Guidance, Panel Moderator

Brian Wallman, Student Resource Officer (SRO) - provides a layer of security at DHS and acts as an informal counselor. He will pop into classroom for law-related questions.

Lisa Messineo - School Counselor

Eileen Whelan - DHS Psychologist

Keith Keeler - Social Studies 6-12

Kate Dimoulas - Assistant Principal

Joyce Sixsmith - Connections Counselor, specialty is substance abuse

Frances Janosco - Gr. 6-12 English dept chair.

Advisory vs Guidance Seminar: the goal of both programs is to make DHS a smaller place for our students and prepare students for independence after HS.

Advisory occurs throughout the year across all grade levels. Students are assigned to a small group, and meet every 8 days on A day for 20 minutes with assigned faculty member. Goal here is to build school community through small groups and interact with another adult in the building. Link Leaders (senior class students) are assigned to Freshmen advisory. Content is created by an advisory committee, across departments at DHS. Attendance is mandatory.

Guidance Seminar program was started five years ago and is another way to get to know students in small groups. Each grade level is assigned a quarter (Seniors, Freshmen, Juniors, Sophomores), and will cover topics related to what's happening at that grade level.

When do parents jump in on an academically-challenging situation?

Parent approach will likely vary by student's grade level. Parents should coach, but encourage students to manage as much as possible on their own. One of our goals is to prepare students for independence after HS. Try to let students to manage it on their own unless it rises to a stress level at home, then parents should help students strategize on how to approach the problem. It's good for students to meet with teachers, often more than once. If parents are really concerned, please reach out to the teacher, then dept chair.

Every student (and parent) has a group of people to partner with including teachers, school counselors, department chairs, psychologists and Assistant Principals. Parents should always include the student in a meeting or cc: on an email, so that you model appropriate communication and students are involved.

Concern about your child's social interactions? Help students reach out to appropriate resources.

School counselors, psychologists and social workers are all here to help. Counselors can help students to navigate and find language.

Frustrated with something that happens in class? Hear your student out, try to get to the root of the problem. Reach out to teacher, dept chair if needed - let students work through some adversity, but intervene beyond that.

Honors/ AP class load: how many is too many? Start with conversation about student's intrinsic interests and choose courses best suited for the individual. Strive for balance and be mindful of the four-year path.

How do we help students maintain balance? There is an elective, a club, a sport and a challenge for every student here. Parents should encourage participation and model balance in their own lives; allow students to choose their own activities.

Substances: concern about exposure or use? Parents may be hesitant to reach out to the school for support, because of presumed risk that it will be included in school file. Primary concern is child's health and well-being. Joyce is confidential - action is best. School is very respectful of privacy. SRO is available to help parents - if you find something at home and you want to know what you have.

Consequences for risky behavior under the influence at school or at school-sponsored event: DHS' first concern is for student safety, now and in the next moment. Next, we want to teach accountability for actions; certain behaviors are non-negotiable may involve suspension and in-school consequences, possibly including 14-day period for non-participation in sports and clubs. If the "influence" is an illegal substance, it is referred to SRO. Students who are "caught" meet twice with Joyce who will assess the student's stage of involvement (experimenting, addicted). Consequences are less severe at HS than college or later.

Problems within Family: Families sometimes go through tough times (health, financial, divorce, death). There is support here at DHS. Social workers/ psychologists work with Dept of Social Services and can talk with families for interim support.

Juvenile Review Board (JRB): Juvenile "court" to consider offenses committed (anything below a felony). It is a committee with a cross-section of town representatives - youth commission, school, police dept. JRB determines consequences and acts as a diversionary program to avoid Stamford courts, which didn't provide appropriate support. If successfully completed, there is no report or arrest record.

DHS Clubs and Activities: more than 60 clubs, and 95% of students are involved in a club, sport or other. Students are invited to create clubs they'd like.

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,
Melissa Williams
DHSPA Secretary