

Freedom HS PTO Meeting Minutes

March 9, 2021

Wendy Simpson, PTO President, began the meeting welcoming everyone and thanking those who took the time to fill out the google form regarding tonight's meeting, which will enhance the Q & A with our school counselors.

Mrs. Leeson shared Mr. LaPorta's Principal's report:

-Thank you to everyone who could be here tonight. Also, thank you to Mr. Stannard, Mrs. Lohenitz, and Mrs. Oquendo for taking the time to be here as well.

-Health and Safety mitigation procedures are working well. The students have done an amazing job maintaining protocols and we are very proud of them.

-End of Year is fast approaching. We are looking at end of year events/ways to honor our seniors. We are looking to have a prom but are not sure how that will look just yet. Graduation will be in-person and be held at the BASD stadium. We are still ironing out a lot of the details, but we are looking forward to celebrating in some capacity.

-Academic Awards and Athletic Awards will also be happening in some capacity.

-Keystone testing required by the Department of Education will be administered June 1st, 2nd, and 3rd.

-Graduation is June 11, 2021 at BASD Stadium

Question: Will there be a senior breakfast? We are working on something but will be a modified format.

Question: Will e-learning be available in September? BASD Cyber Academy will continue to exist. As for e-classroom, conversations are happening, but it is hard to predict at this time.

Question: Are kids going back to school full time? Elementary school students will be going back to 4 days a week. The middle schools and high schools remain hybrid/2 days a week in-school learning. We do not have the support of the Bethlehem Health Bureau for the older students to return to full time.

Next, Wendy introduces Nate Stannard, FHS Athletic Director:

Mr. Stannard thanks everyone for coming. It has been a long journey since March 13, 2020.

-Spent a lot of time working with St. Luke's and the Bethlehem Health Bureau. We were able to have a late start to a fall season. Many great things happened. Trainers, coaches, and athletes all did great with following guidelines.

-Winter season was a bit tougher being indoors. Started in February, less games.

-Spring season started yesterday (3/8). We are hoping for a strong season and close to a full season. We will not be going outside our league; will stay in our county to minimize travel.

-End of Year Signing Day for college bound athletes will be April 30th in the gym. We are hoping we can have family there and will also do live-streaming for the event.

-May 26 will be the Athletic Awards Ceremony. We will have to scale down the number of people invited.

-There will also be culminating events for choir, band, etc.

Question: Will the athletic award ceremony be held at Northampton Country Club? No, it will be in the gym. 15% capacity is the current guideline.

Question: When will decisions be made for summer athletics? Hopefully by early May. Last summer the kids were able to set up equipment at Illick's Mill Skate park. This may be a possibility for this summer.

Question: Are there rules for spectators for Spring sports yet? Nothing is finalized but we should know more by the end of the week. It will be limited; probably keep to home team spectators only.

Question: Do you have any insight on non-sport activities, such as band/choir.

Mrs. Leeson: Choir has been given the green light to rehearse now. There will be some events happening. A spring concert for band and choir is scheduled to happen at Steel Stacks.

Panel Discussion with the FHS Counselors: Loretta Lohenitz and Selines Oquendo

Mrs. Lohenitz:

-Thanks to everyone who donated for the holiday giving tree.

-Introduces Mrs. Naomi Diaz, a social worker working with students

-It has been a challenging year for everyone. Counselors have been trying to limit the time students are pulled from class. We are looking forward to when we get back to normal.

Question 1: How can you tell the difference between normal teenage moods and depression?

Answer: There is often a fine line, however some red flags:

-loss of interest in more than one thing; different areas of their life no longer make them happy.

-duration of mood changes > 2 weeks

-withdrawals from friends

-academic decline

*Please reach out to guidance counselors and/or teachers. Communication is important.

Question 2: What plans and resources are in place now and post pandemic for the students?

Answer: We continue to be available via technology/teleconferences. Please feel free to communicate with the counselors so they can hook students up to outside resources if needed.

Question 3: Can you give us any strategies for the students working at home?

Answer: -Encourage a schedule and keep to it; time management; plenty of sleep.

**" The best teenager is a busy teenager"; kids need things to do and need structure to their day.

-Focus on the task at hand

-disconnect from screens/schedule breaks to avoid screen fatigue

-get dressed every day – tiny things like this give a sense of structure

Question 4: Do you have any guidance for post high school?

Answer: Reach out to guidance counselor and go over everything

Question 5: How does faculty reach out/help with resources when needed?

Answer: Naomi Diaz (social worker) has been a valuable resource.

-Encourage kids to get involved. Clubs are coming back into play.

Question 6: How can we find help for students who are struggling academically?

Answer:

-Moravian students tutor; sign up genius available with dates/times. Counselors can send out links and some are posted on Schoology. Mrs. Leeson will follow up to help get it on the FHS website.

-After school office hours with teachers. These are usually M-Thurs. There is an after school late bus. (Or Zoom availability)

-email teachers; they have been flexible, many give a grace period for handing in late work.

Question 7: How can we move forward during the pandemic?

Answer: Our reality isn't the same as our children. Adults worry and think kids are miserable, but they usually are not. Teens can be very resilient.

Question 8: How can we help reduce anxiety?

Answer: Teens can feel a sense of loss of control. Encourage communication with teachers. Coping skills can include breaking down each feeling, focus on what you have control of, and forget about "what-if" scenarios.

-Self-care: exercise, walk, helping others (takes your mind off things)

-Website: National Alliance on Mental Illness is www.nami.org

Question 9: Are there student support groups at Freedom?

Answer: We may try to implement something like that. Avedium is also available (peers supporting peers)

Ms. Diaz spoke about grief being a concern this year. Art therapy has been thought to be helpful. We are currently working with a therapist and may start up a type of short term series for this---possibly virtual.

She also mentions teencentral.com, which is a website powered by KidsPeace. Kids can type in struggles and share information. We currently use in Sophomore Seminar class.

Question 10: Is anything being planned for incoming freshman?

Answer: Looking to do something traditional. Mr. LaPorta will be meeting with the middle schools, but it will be virtual. We will also try to find a day where groups of kids can come over to Freedom (following covid protocols of course). E-School students will be invited to do this as well. The 8-9th Day will be modified.

Question 11: Will there be any college fairs in the fall?

Answer: We've been doing a virtual platform w/ Liberty this year. Next year we will have to see where we are.

Wendy thanks the counselors for their time tonight and for sharing their expertise.

Old Business:

Treasurer's Report- Jason Testa: Last meeting \$6,152.52

\$510 expense to Freedom Closet/Pantry

Current balance \$5642.52

No proposed budget at this point because we no longer have a funding source. The board welcomes any ideas for future fundraising.

Motion to approve by Nikki Testa; 2nd by Lori Walker.

Secretary Meeting Minutes from November: Minutes not up on website yet, so no motion to approve at this time.

Will do at next meeting.

PAC: reviewed previous PAC meetings. No new information as it is a review of Covid progress in the schools, which is now more or less outdated information.

Old Business:

-We are in the process of revising bylaws.

New Business:

-PTO Nominations needed for next year. Email will go out. Elections in May.

-Teacher Appreciation: Brainstorming ideas currently since unable to do traditional luncheon.

-Ideas welcome for future panel discussions.

Meeting adjourned 8:48 pm