

Oxford PTA Meeting Minutes January 21, 2015

- I.- Meeting called to order (approximately 30 people in attendance by the end of the meeting) including Principal Beth Rhine, PTA President Sabrina Leunig, and PTA Secretary Amy Feldman. (Treasurer Zoe Scheffy could not attend).
- II.- Gertrude Allen spoke, represented the Berkeley Symphony: Music in the Schools program supported by the Berkeley Fund. She welcomed anyone interested in attending to the next monthly luncheon of Monday, Feb. 2nd. Anyone interested should contact Sabrina for contact information.
- III.- Sabrina reviewed the Budget Report provided in advance by Zoe. She highlighted fundraising to date, explained the large Scrip amounts and reminded attendees that the surplus money collected from food baskets would be used to purchase Target and Safeway gift cards for Beth to distribute to families in need at her discretion.

A question was raised by Tara Baker about the Scrip accounting and it was decided informally that totals should be reviewed again.

- IV.- A call was made for people to consider themselves or people they know for the open leadership positions for the coming school year (PTA president, vice president, treasurer and Kinder liaison).
- V.- An update on the many volunteer positions needed to be filled for the Spring Dance and Raffle was provided. Sabrina initiated a discussion of whether attendees were happy with the Pencil communication system. Of those answered, mixed feelings were expressed in general terms. It was noted that in classrooms where room parents are using Pencil for volunteer sign-ups, use seems to be higher. Sabrina noted that they will likely use it for one more year before deciding whether to stick with it or change to a new sign-up/communication system.
- VI.- Guest speaker, Jason Baeten, head of school at The East Bay School for Boys, along with teachers Donnell and Corina were introduced. They spoke for the next hour. Please see presentation summary added as addendum to these minutes.
- VII.- Motion to approve November meeting minutes as distributed was approved.

Meeting adjourned

East Bay School for Boys Presentation

Head of school Jason Baeten, joined by teachers Donnell and Corina

The foundation of single-sex education:

- vulnerability, honesty and humility as the basis for learning
- single-sex education allows for kids to get to a place of vulnerability more easily
- boys and girls both need love and good boundaries above all else—they emphasize “high firm/high warm” at their school

Brain-based differences between boys and girls:

- both sexes more alike than not, but some physical brain differences exist
- understanding brain-based gender differences as a place to start when seeking to expand abilities and nurture growth
- Jason summarized some neurological differences using the work of Joann Deak (author of *Girls Will Be Girls*) and Lise Eliot (author of *Pink Brain, Blue Brain*) including:
 - boys are typically stronger in spatial thinking, gross motor skills and perceptual reasoning while girls are typically stronger in language, auditory processing, fine motor skills and sequential thinking
 - girls brains are wired at the adult level by age 18 and boys by age 25
 - boys have weaker impulse control in general
 - boys’ thinking seems to be enhanced by gross motor activity to a greater degree

Social differences between boys and girls:

- typical boys who engage in bullying have few friends, feel isolated and may not know their target whereas typical girls who engage in bullying have many friends, are doing well in school and know their targets
- boys report having more “good friends” than girls
- boys are more likely to build compassion and empathy through active participation in support rather than by talking about an issue or problem
- The Greater Good project at Cal is a good resource for articles on nurturing compassion in boys and the East Bay School for Boys has links and resources on their website as well

The teachers provided the following summary of strategies and practices they use in teaching middle-school-aged boys:

- keep verbal messages concise and clear
- consider how to communicate by speaking less and relying more on nonverbal communication
- increase visual content (i.e. write instructions/messages down)
- boys are very attuned and responsive to the energy in the room, so the adult needs to model very calm and centered behavior rather than increasing the tension
- rather than rules that are negatively phrased, switch to positive norms/expectations and avoid shaming

- work on building in a 'stillness' practice to increase time that boys are able to sit quietly
- if a boy interrupts a conversation, avoid turning towards him to reprimand— instead, hold up a finger and continue with the conversation until it is appropriate to pause, then provide your full attention
- let boys know how you feel when their behavior is challenging and then pause as a group to collect and calm (“I am starting to feel disrespected, so we are all going to pause quietly for a minute before moving on.”) rather than calling out the specific boys and/or focusing on the negative behavior

Some questions from the audience were then fielded. The following is a brief summary:

When it is appropriate to address peer pressure and risky behavior with boys?

- start talking about risky vs. good decisions as early as possible
- process before or after the fact—never in the moment
- be aware that men have higher addiction rates

How do you know when to push vs. when to make a shift (i.e. child complaining about piano lessons or some aspect of school)?

- really hear what he is saying and then help your child to name his feelings and talk then through when calm
- have the conversation in an un-charged moment while engaging in a side-by-side activity (vs. face-to-face conversation)
- the message is: “I am not going to change my expectation but here’s where you do have a choice”
- keep in mind that firm boundaries should be those that reflect your values and not arbitrarily drawn

How do you help a boy gain comfort expressing his feelings?

- ask small clarifying questions
- help boys work through a linear story to process their feelings about what happened
- consider what messages they are receiving (i.e. from society) that may encourage them to shut down

How do you support impulsivity and make that inclination more adaptive?

- create purposeful activity
- make sure they know what is coming next and what to expect
- use timers and checklists
- set very clear expectations

In regards to the spectrum of gender, are there any universal strategies that are essential in working with all boys?

- using a calm and centered emotional approach
- focusing on being authentic

What are appropriate limits on video games?

- restrict time to build a positive habit
- parents should choose games and avoid ones that do not mesh with the family's values
- no screens in bedrooms with doors closed—screen time should be out in the open
- some families use a system of 1 hour reading time earns 30 minutes screen time
- some families set a 'no screen' hour for all family members each night
- Commonsense Media is a good website to use as a resource for deciding what games are appropriate

How do you help your son understand and internalize a compassionate message without over-talking it?

- role-play scenarios
- if the child goes into "Yeah, I got it," reflect that you can see that he is done talking about it, but that you will circle back to it the next day to make sure that you both had the same understanding
- set a scheduled time each week to reflect/review the big events of the week