



## GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES• April 19, 2018

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### A. In Attendance

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It was noted that (a) parents and other “persons in a parental relation” as defined by the regulations of the New York City Chancellor and designated persons having a relationship to a child or children currently attending Q300 (the “**Parents**”) and (b) eligible Q300 teachers and instructional staff members who are currently employed on a full-time basis (the “**Staff**”) at Q300 were present. The total number of Parents and Staff present was 166.

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### B. Call to Order

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Co-PTA Presidents Maria Hantzopoulos and Margarita Soto called the meeting of the General Membership of the Q300 Parent-Teacher Association (the “**PTA**”) to order at 6:10PM in the auditorium at the upper division campus at 31-51 21st Street, LIC.

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### C. Co-Presidents’ Report

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Co-Presidents Maria Hantzopoulos and Margarita Soto gave the President’s report. The following are the highlights:

1. Appreciations were expressed to the following parents: Lynn Kennedy for her work on participatory budgeting; Keri Goldman for organizing the Square One arts fundraiser; participating families at the Alvin Ailey Family Fun Night; Nishka Chandrasoma, Denise Anza, Gaurav Pradhu Gaonkar, Connie Kwan, Paula Marisi, Hong van Tieu, Dennis Holnagel, Donna Schroffner, Sonia Barua, Wei Tian, Nick Mazing, Anar Chanda, Ellie Rabinovich, Maria Hantzopoulos, and Eileen Yim for participating in the lower division open house; and Ellie Rabinovich and Hong van Tieu for answering prospective Q300 parents at the Parents Alliance for Citywide Education Forum on citywide gifted and talented programs.
2. Stepping Into Summer Auction and Dance Party will be held on May 6, 2018. The online auction also begins that day.
3. NY Chess Kids Tournament will be held on May 6, 2018 at Q300.
4. Thank you to teacher Erika Ball for helping organize the Mets Family Outing on June 3, 2018.
5. A Teacher Appreciation breakfast will be held on May 8, 2018 at both campuses. Thank you parents Sarah Willet Chang and Sonal Ross for organizing. Stay tuned for signing up to donate breakfast foods and volunteer at the breakfasts.
6. Congratulations to the Q300 chess team that placed second in the statewide all girls’ chess tournament.
7. The PTA will circulate its annual enrichment and budget surveys to parents in a few weeks, once the PTA receives Principal Bill Biniaris’ priorities for enrichments.
8. The PTA has raised \$188,000 from the Direct Appeal. Thank you to David Wang, Sue Sekar, Adriana Limboi, Blain Kennedy, Kevin Gallagher, and Amanda Spielman for all of their hard work.

9. The Co-Presidents shared some thoughts on the events and recent meetings regarding the issues of concern raised by the Q300 community. They highlighted there are both some very wonderful things happening in the school; however, there are some deep concerns as well. They urged Principal Biniaris to consider merging the old and the new, rather than creating an either/or scenario.

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#### **D. Resolutions**

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1. **Amendment to the budget to redirect \$2,000 to Elementary School Visual Arts from Spanish to fund the school administration changes of PTA enrichment funding.** A motion was made to pass the resolution and seconded. A majority of Members present approved the motion.
  2. **Amendment to the budget to add an online bookstore/fair fundraiser with estimated revenue of \$200 and expenses of \$100.** A motion was made to pass the resolution was made and seconded. A majority of Members present approved the motion.
  3. **A resolution to form the Nominations Committee for upcoming PTA Board and SLT Elections.** A motion was made to pass the resolution and seconded. A majority of Members present approved the motion.
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#### **E. Special Presentation by PFLAG**

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In light of the the Chancellor's Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Guidelines, a representative from PFLAG, a support, education, and advocacy organization committed to advancing equality on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) made a presentation on ways in which the school can be a welcoming place for transgender and gender non-conforming students. She discussed her experiences with her child who identifies as transgender. Please visit [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) for more information on the organization.

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#### **F. Co-Treasurers' Report**

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Co-Treasurer Sue Sekar circulated the attached Treasurer's Report, which summarizes the PTA's finances as of March 30, 2017. The PTA raised \$12,619.51 and spent \$51,890.2. The PTA's expenditures included paying teaching assistants, music enrichment, and chrome books. The PTA had an adjusted cash balance of nearly \$193,381.27 as of March 31, 2018.

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#### **G. Superintendent's Report**

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A representative from the District 30 Superintendent's Office gave the following update:

1. The environmental science lab sessions have begun at Long Island City High School.
  2. Principal Biniaris and the representatives from the Superintendent's Office met with Q300 teachers to discuss next steps in resolving the issues raised by the community.
  3. Principal Biniaris has met with teacher Cristina Baron, who has withdrawn her resignation.
  4. Q300 is working with the Superintendent's Office to recruit teachers.
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#### **H. Principal's Report**

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Principal Bill Biniaris gave the Principal's Report. The following are highlights:

1. Principal Biniaris expressed thanks to Co-Presidents Maria Hantzopoulos and Margarita Soto and Vice President Ellie Rabinovich.
2. Principal Biniaris discussed several concerns that have been raised by the community.

- a. The process for the design of the new school website should have been more inclusive. He noted that moving forward, the website design process will be more inclusive. He has reviewed the School Leadership Team (“SLT”) website survey results. He noted that several respondents noted that the word choice in the website text may not have been linked to Q300’s core values. He noted that the cost of the development of the Q300 website, with unlimited updates, was about \$2,800.00.
  - b. He reiterated Q300’s commitment to inquiry-based instruction and project-based work in the classroom. Further, the school needs to provide social emotional support.
  - c. He felt encouraged that teachers and staff are working together to serve the students.
  - d. He outlined the actions that Q300 has done to address community concerns:
    - (i) The school-wide leadership cabinet now includes teachers who had been hired prior to his tenure as principal.
    - (ii) The SLT has formed a committee to incorporate the website survey results into the development of the school’s new website.
    - (iii) Q300 has scheduled a number of professional development workshops devoted to trust, teamwork, and restorative circle exercises.
    - (iv) He and teachers are taking a one-day responsive classroom training, funded by the PTA. He noted responsive classroom and PBIS are not mutually exclusive character development programs. He stated that the school will fund future responsive classroom trainings.
    - (v) He will give notice to teachers about the scheduling of classroom evaluations. Previously, the evaluations were performed without advance notice.
    - (vi) He will resume monthly parent meetings with parents.
    - (vii) The school has set up a Committee for Special Education that will include parent stakeholders.
    - (viii) He has allocated additional funds to permit teachers to have more classroom planning time.
    - (ix) He has established a hiring committee made up of administrators and teachers.
3. Principal Biniaris noted the occurrence of a number of enrichment programs this year. All lower division (K-4) students have had arts and music class. Third and fourth graders have had dance. Second graders have had architecture. In the upper division, students have participated in enrichment clubs and PTA-funded enrichment electives. Further, upper division had a teacher teaching art and when that teacher went on leave, Art House Astoria provided an arts and music program.
4. Parents were given the opportunity to express their concerns. Principal Biniaris was given to opportunity to respond after several parents spoke. The following are highlights:
- a. A parent expressed concern that his son’s first grade teacher Cristina Baron was being forced out of the school. As a principal in school district 12 in the Bronx, he noted Principal Biniaris should have finalized his staffing plan by now. He also noted that Principal Biniaris had not responded to his and his wife email offering to provide support to Q300, including setting up a partnership with Bank Street College, where his wife works. He stated that Q300 needs to ensure that teachers are able to implement inquiry-based instruction in the classroom and that the Administration’s evaluation of teacher class performance needs to be consistent with the school’s professional development plan. He also expressed concern about the introduction of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) instead of Responsive Classroom, the latter of which helps develop positive behavior in students to create a positive climate for learning. He asserted that the parent community has lost trust in the Administration.
  - b. A fourth-grade parent stated that the parent “wants to believe and trust” Principal Biniaris, but so much has unraveled this year in terms of the curriculum. The parent urged him to be proactive in planning, transparency (“tell us the truth and tell us in advance”) and lamented the lack of clarity about instructional methods.

- c. Several parents stated that while their children are happy at the school, they expressed concern about the high staff turnover rate at Q300. One parent noted that teachers have told her that the school is a “hostile work environment.” Another parent, who is an employee in the school system for over ten years, stated that teachers tend to stay at a school, and that a high turnover rate is an indication of something amiss with the school leadership. A parent noted that the school cannot have new teachers coming to the school every year – great teachers are cultivated over time.
- d. A sixth-grade parent expressed her support for Principal Biniaris and is heartbroken for him. She noted that with any new leader, there is staff turnover. In response to heckling during her remarks, she urged the community to engage in a cordial discourse.
- e. Principal Biniaris stated that he wants happy teachers. He asserted that he has had “frank discussions” with teachers. He expressed appreciation that teachers have been open about stating what needs to change at the school. He finds the changes that they have expressed manageable.
- f. An eighth-grade parent expressed her thrill about the energy at the meeting and hopes that it will continue – that parents continue to show up to meetings. She stated that the administration needs to clearly articulate what the school environment will be for our students, that this is not about being pro-Bill or anti-Bill, but simply pro-school and what is best for our kids. She stated that the administration missed an opportunity for a “teachable moment” when it discontinued middle student email accounts due to inappropriate emails circulated among the students. A parent shouted from the audience in support for the discontinuance of those email accounts, as her daughter had been exposed to inappropriate content from such emails.
- g. A kindergarten parent stated that the parent’s family was “wowed” by Principal Biniaris’s presentation at last year’s open house, including – technology, differentiated reading groups across lower grades, Spanish language instruction. However, due to the staffing management issues, there have been problems with the implementation of these “selling points” and that none of them have happening as planned.
- h. Principal Biniaris expressed his commitment to technology and Spanish language instruction. He noted that when the lower division technology teacher, who has a special education license, was moved to the upper division in an attempt to resolve the shortage of special education teachers, he hired an outside vendor to teach the technology class once a week. (This was a reduction in the number of classes per week from twice to once a week.) Principal Biniaris further noted that Q300 is committed to differentiated reading groups within each class, rather than across the lower grades. He expressed concern about the time it takes for students to switch classes when the differentiated reading groups occur across the lower grade. He pledged to gather data concerning both approaches to the differentiated reading groups and make a decision.
- i. In response to a parent question, Principal Biniaris noted that a new fifth grade teacher is nearly in place, that there is no plan to end exploration room, where kindergarteners and first graders play with wooden blocks and other STEM related activities. He also noted that there have been discussions about creating a Q300 library.
- j. A seventh grade parent stated that her student loves the school and teachers and expressed appreciation that Principal Biniaris has done a great job hiring new teachers in the middle school.
- k. An eighth grade parent expressed concern that even though she has been a strong advocate for students with special needs, she was not asked to join a recently created Q300 committee concerning special education.
- l. A parent posted a question on Facebook about why Principal Biniaris did not notify parents that the English as a New Language (ENL) teacher had taken a leave of absence nearly two months before.

- m. Principal Biniaris stated that the school needs to do more for special needs and noted that a substitute ENL teacher will begin at the school on April 23, 2018.
  
  - n. A fourth grade parent stated that many members of the Q300 community have lost trust in Principal Biniaris when he forced the resignation of a highly lauded, effective teacher. She stated that “you will not get back our trust” until the community knows what brought about the decision to force her to resign or be terminated. (In response to community pressure, Principal Biniaris requested that the resignation be withdrawn and initiated her tenure process.)
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### **I. Resolution Made from the Floor**

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Parent David Wang offered a resolution from the floor that raised a number of issues that have caused concern among members of the PTA and the larger Q300 community. The resolution urged Principal Biniaris to work collaboratively with all stakeholders in the Q300 community to resolve the many concerns of the Q300 community in a timely and swift manner that upholds the school’s core value of inquiry, inclusion, and responsibility and to draft and present a concrete plan with priorities, action items and timelines to resolve such concerns by the May 2018 SLT meeting and the May 2018 PTA general meeting.

A motion was made and seconded to table the resolution until the next PTA general meeting. A majority of Members present approved the motion and the resolution was tabled.

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### **J. Next Meeting and Adjournment**

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The May General Meeting will be held at 6:30 pm at the lower division campus. The meeting was adjourned at 8:40PM.

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Prepared by: David William Wang & Gina Reis, Co-Secretaries