



GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES • March 23, 2018

A. In Attendance

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 over 45.

B. Call to Order

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 4:40 pm in the cafeteria at the lower division campus at 28-37 29th Street, Astoria, NY 11102.

C. President’s Report

Maria and Margarita gave the President’s report. The following are the highlights:

1. If you reside in City Council District 22, please participate in Council Member Costa Constantinides’s participatory budget program, in which community members vote to fund certain projects within the district. Thus far, there are two potential projects at Q300 - the funding of a joint P.S. 17/Q300 research library at the lower division campus; the other is refurbishment of the exterior gate at the IS 126/Q300 campus.
2. Stepping into Summer Dance Party and Auction will be held on Sun. May 6th from 3 to 6 pm at the Bohemian Hall in Astoria. Tickets are on sale and will include admission, a multi-course buffet of food and entertainment. Please ask your favorite local businesses, your kids’ music, art, sports, or other programs, or even your neighborhood realtor to support the PTA by sponsoring an ad in the auction journal or donating auction items. You can also buy a short “Shout-Outs” for \$10 for inclusion in the journal. The deadline to include ads and auction items in the journal is March 29. There will also be a raffle for administration and teacher prizes, including being principal for a day and seeing a movie with a teacher.
3. The PTA is organizing the annual teacher appreciation day on May 8. Please stay tune for plans celebrating our teachers and their critical work in the education of our students.
4. In light of the the Chancellor's Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Guidelines, PFLAG, a support, education, and advocacy organization committed to advancing equality on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) will make a presentation at the April PTA meeting on ways in which the school can be a welcoming place for transgender and gender non-conforming students.
5. The PTA has purchased a class set of chromebooks and several printers for the middle school.
6. The PTA’s direct appeal has raised about USD \$183,000 and the school-wide participation rate is at 44%. Thanks to David Wang for all his efforts and Amanda Spielman for her design of the beautiful direct appeal flyers.

7. The annual Q300/PS 17 PTA Zumbathon, which was held on Mar. 9th, raised over \$4,500. That amount will be split between both PTAs.
8. Thanks to Eric Black for donating a box of new books from Scholastic to the school. We will ask administration how these should be distributed.
9. The eighth grade raised \$2,400 for its class trip, through the middle school bake sale held during the upper division parent-teacher conference on March 15 and the World's Finest Chocolate fundraiser. The fourth grade organized a bake sale at the lower division's parent-teacher conference on March 15 to raise funds for the fourth grade graduation. Thanks to Gina Reis for coordinating.
10. Thanks to Hong Van Tieu for raising funds for the PTA through the sale of tickets to the New York International Children's Film Festival and for getting auction items for the Stepping into Summer Party.
11. Thanks to Kim Alexandrescu for organizing the Tea Collection fundraiser for the PTA.
12. Thanks to Asako Hayashi for organizing the specialized high school exam preparation program at the upper division.
13. Congratulations to the eighth graders for their high school admittances.
14. The PTA will be holding elections for positions on the PTA and the School Leadership Team ("SLT") in the Spring. Please consider running!

D. Treasurers' Report

Co-Treasurer Sue Sekar provide highlights of the Treasurers' Report. In February, the PTA raised over \$6,746 in donations. Please see the attached Treasurer's Report, which summarizes the PTA's finances.

E. SLT Update

Monica Mohan gave the SLT report. The following are highlights:

1. The SLT will conduct a school-wide survey focusing on the following: (a) the functionality and content of the new school website that Principal Biniaris launched on March 8, 2018; (b) the new Q300 logo that Principal Biniaris had developed; and (iii) the new Q300 tagline that Principal Biniaris had created.
2. Pursuant to Q300's 2017-2018 Comprehensive Educational Plan ("CEP"), the SLT "Supportive Environment" committee (from the Great Schools framework that guides the SLT) will conduct a separate school culture survey that will focus in ensuring that the school has established a school culture where students feel safe, supported, and challenged by their teachers and peers and that the school has made school culture decisions through the lens of the school's core values of Inquiry, Inclusion, and Responsibility. The survey will be sent out to teachers, parents, and students next week. The survey will help the SLT develop next year's CEP goals.

G. Resolutions

The following resolutions were approved:

1. The PTA hereby appoints Lorna Thorpe to the Audit Committee. The other Audit Committee Members are Jasmine Rosner, Stephanie Peled, and Jennifer Zeynel.

2. Given that certain middle school clubs had previously been given separate line items but such clubs were not established, the PTA hereby combine such line items to a general middle school enrichment category to enable the PTA to fund other middle school clubs.

F. Principal's Report

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

1. Principal Biniaris acknowledged the presence of School District 30 Principal Leadership Facilitator William Fahey. Mr. Fahey spoke briefly. He noted that School District 30 Superintendent Dr. Philip Composto had planned to attend the PTA meeting, but could not due to a health emergency. Mr. Fahey stated that Dr. Composto plans to attend the next several PTA general meetings.
2. Principal Biniaris launched the school's new website earlier this month. He has received feedback about the website – some were positive; others expressed concerns. Earlier this week, the SLT had raised concerns about the website as did the PTA co-Presidents and the Executive Vice President in their monthly standing meeting.
3. Principal Biniaris noted that Q300's mission statement had not changed and that the mission statement was on the new website. He then stated that the phrase "data-driven decision making" has always been in the mission statement and that new website added the gifted and talented standards from the National Association for Giftedness, which are aligned with Q300's mission statement and core values. He further stated that the website is an improvement over the previous one.
4. Principal Biniaris then gave an approximately 30-minute Power Point presentation about how the school's student and staff activities align with Q300's core values of inquiry, inclusion, and responsibility. He emphasized that Q300 has not changing its programmatic standards and that he would present "photographic evidence" of the work going on in the school. His presentation included the following:

b. Student-Focused Activities.

(i) **Inclusion.** Through Q300's social emotional learning coordinator ("SEL") Erika Ball, the school is implementing a number of social-emotional programs, including the Sanford Harmony social-emotional learning program that provides a foundation for safe and positive learning environment and the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ("PBIS") program. Principal Biniaris noted that the Responsive Classroom program, which focuses on the strong link between academic success and social emotional learning "is not being abandoned." He noted that the school has organized a number of activities that emphasizes inclusion, including a spirit day in which students celebrate the school; the recent "walk up" day in which students are encouraged to stand with others by "walking up" to someone sitting alone at lunch; "walking up" to someone who is having a hard time in class, "walking up" to a teacher to thank them, and other actions; and "mix-it-up" day in which students are encouraged to have lunch with peers whom they do not regularly have lunch. Students are learning about the different interests and skills of their peers through the upcoming talent shows in both campuses.

(ii) **Inquiry.** Principal Biniaris noted that the curriculum emphasizes inquiry based learning with rigorous instruction. He noted that, for example, the kindergarteners and first graders participate in the explorations class, which is a class in which students learn pre-STEM and project-based learning through blocks and lego. In the middle school, students make presentations, including one on the reasons and results of American imperialism. He noted that activities such as career day and college awareness days enable students to ask important questions.

(iii) **Responsibility.** Principal Biniaris noted that the PBIS program encourages students to take the responsibility to exhibit good behavior. Further, students have participated in a tree stewardship program and fundraised for the hurricane relief in Haiti and Puerto Rico, and other programs that highlight responsibility to

others. Further, the school has recently enacted an upper division monthly assembly on such topics as cyberbullying, digital citizenship, and the school's code of conduct. The upper division recently started a student council in which students take responsibility on a variety of school activities.

c. **Staff-Focused Activities.** Principal Biniaris stated that the core values are imbued in the staff's work, including the following:

(i) **Inclusion.** Q300 has organized the teachers in teams, ranging from the school quality review team, the PBIS team, the school implementation team, which establishes protocols and procedures, such as a safety protocol when a student is injured during school hours, and the "sunshine" team - which encourages spirit and afterwork fun activities. Aside from the evaluations made by Principal Biniaris and Assistant Principal Anna Milonakis, Q300 has established a program in which teachers provide "no-stakes" peer evaluation of other teachers.

(ii) **Inquiry.** Q300 is using data to improve Q300's curriculum and has encouraged teachers to participate in external professional development. Q300 teachers have also worked with P.S. 17 teachers on professional development.

(iii) **Responsibility.** Q300 is delegating the leadership of the teacher teams to various teachers. Further, whenever Principal Biniaris and Assistant Principal Milonakis are not in the lower or upper division campus, a teacher is appointed as a building leader for that period to handle any administration related issues. (In response to a question, Principal Biniaris noted that a substitute teacher covers the classroom work of the appointed teacher.) Principal Biniaris noted that the fifty percent of teachers have facilitated a professional development workshop for their peers. He also has assembled a leadership cabinet of teachers from the lower and upper division to advise him on school-wide issues. He acknowledged that the cabinet consists solely of teachers whom he had hired.

H. Questions and Answers

Question and Answer Session. After the Principal's presentation, Maria, Margarita, and David took turns to facilitate a question and answer session with Principal Biniaris and later, Mr. Fahey. They called on several parents in a row to answer questions or make comments. The following are highlights from the session:

1. Website.

a. Website Launch Process.

(i) Many parents expressed concern that Principal Biniaris unilaterally developed and launched an entirely new website with new branding, including log and tagline, to the exclusion of the stakeholders of the community. The SLT should have been the vehicle in which the website should have been vetted, particularly because the "Parental and Community Involvement" group was supposed to work with the Principal on the website, pursuant to its action plan. According to the Chancellor's regulations and the SLT bylaws, the SLT determines the school's overall educational vision, its goals and priorities, the strategies that will be used to achieve this vision, and the alignment of resources to accomplish these strategies. Further, the SLT consists of the major stakeholders of the community, including parents, teachers, and administrators. Finally, had Principal Biniaris consulted the community, he would have gotten valuable feedback from the community.

(ii) Principal Biniaris acknowledged that the website launch process should have been different and that it should have been vetted by the wider community. He "owns" this issue and that changing the website should have involved "a broader discussion."

(iii) Parents expressed concern that the website changes were made just before the gifted and talented admission exam scores were released and was an effort by Principal Biniaris to recruit families who were not aligned with the school's core values of inquiry, inclusion, and responsibility, as well as other established educational practices from the school.

b. **Website Content.** Many parents expressed concerns with the website content, including the following:

- (i) The website content fails to link the gifted and talented standards to the core value of the school and how the core values are realized at Q300. The Power Point presentation that Principal Biniaris presented could have been a good starting point for the website content.
- (ii) The website introduces a new logo that is "nondescript" and does not reflect the history or a shared vision of Q300. A parent asked how the log, which is the letter Q on a pedestal on an open book, reflected the school's history, values, or future.
- (iii) The website fails to include info for English as a New Language Learners, Students with an Individualized Education Program ("IEP"), including those who receive Integrated Co-Teaching ("ICT") services.
- (iv) Given that the new new logo and color scheme in the website, one parent asked whether or not the school's uniform would accordingly change.
- (v) The website contained erroneous information about what actually was happening in the school (i.e. art and dance listings were wrong; Spanish and Technology described incorrectly, reading description inaccurate) and had a number of typos and grammatical errors.
- (vi) The website was an improvement to the previous one in terms of functionality; but it may be providing too much info; and may be overwhelming. Prospective parents are busy and may not have the time and energy to drive deep down into all the tabs. Further, the new brand does not reflect the community. Principal Biniaris noted that the website tabs may be "too congested."
- (vii) A concern was expressed about the use of "data-driven decision-making" in the mission statement. Another noted that the term has always been in the mission statement.
- (viii) Principal Biniaris should take down the new website and restore the previous version until the new website is properly vetted.

b. **Teacher and Staff Retention, Support, and Well-Being.**

- (i) Many parents expressed concern that since September 2016, more than half of the teachers and staff have left Q300. Further the 2016-2017 Q300 teachers gave low marks on to Principal Biniaris on such issues as instructional leadership, program coherence, and teacher-principal trust. Many parents expressed concern that teachers and staffers were leaving mid-year and the impact of that on the students' education. Others noted that the teachers are concerned that they do not have job security and that they are generally unsatisfied. Another parent stated that her kids love the school but is concerned that teachers may leave. Another parent noted that happy teachers make enthusiastic students.
- (ii) Principal Biniaris stated that he speaks with teachers. "We check in with one another." He noted that the teachers are supported through professional development and evaluations. He noted that he has no evidence there is not a risk of teachers or staff leaving and that he has empowered teachers by giving them responsibilities as noted above. He noted if teachers are empowered, they will stay. After a parent raised the issue about whether another teacher or staff is leaving, he later noted that a "secretary" is leaving Q300. When pressed, he noted that Sharon Murphy was leaving and that her last day was indeed, that day. Parents shared that this was shocking as she had been part of many children's experiences over the last four years and they had no closure of way of saying even good bye.

c. **Mission Statement and Instruction.**

- (i) **Instructional and Staffing Plan.** One parent asked when should parents expect to see the subjects and learning philosophy for next year and staffing plan against that for next year so that she can decide if she needs to consider other schools.

(ii) **Inclusion.** One parent stated that an indication that the school was not inclusive was that the it had not organized Black History Month related activities.

(iii) **Inquiry Based Education.**

(aa) Several parents expressed concern about the Principal Biniaris's commitment to the overall educational vision and practices that have been essential to the school's identity.

(bb) Several lower and upper division parents stated that they sent their children to Q300 because of its rigorous inquiry-based curriculum. They disputed the assertion that an inquiry based curriculum is not rigorous instruction.

(cc) One lower division parent noted that last year's third graders scored exceptionally well on the state exam, despite the fact that a third grade (ELA) teacher left mid-year. She further noted that last year's third graders had a strong foundational basis (inquiry and rigor) for their education during first and second grades that enabled them to do well on the state exam.

(dd) During Q300's school quality review under the previous principal, Mr. Fahey observed an Exploration class, in which kindergarteners and first graders play with blocks and Legos in order to learn pre-STEM and collaboration skills. He noted that the teacher did not provide any inquiry-based instruction or guidance and that there was a safety issue, as students were throwing blocks. He then stated that an inquiry based approach requires even more advanced preparation than traditional based education. Mr. Fahey noted that the community needs to clarify what is an "inquiry based" approach.

(ee) In response to a question about whether Dr. Composto is seeking to change Q300's educational approach, Mr. Fahey adamantly disagreed with a parent assertion that Dr. Composto was seeking to change Q300's educational approach. He stated that Dr. Composto empowers the principal to work with the school leadership team, the PTA, and the general parent body about each school's educational approach.

(iv) **Progressive Education.** Mr. Fahey noted that the term "progressive education" have different meanings and that the school community needs to define that term. A parent stated that she expected a rigorous, progressive education and that the term "progressive education" and "rigorous" are not mutually exclusive.

(v) **Lower Division: Differentiated Reading Groups.** One third grade parent expressed concern that during reading, lower division students were no longer grouped based on the students' reading level without regard to assigned grade. Now the differentiation only occurs only within the class. She also noted that her third grade student who reads at a sixth grade level is having difficulty finding books at school for her reading level.

(vi) **Lower Division: Technology.** A parent asked whether in the fall 2018, Q300 would be returning to a two-session a week technology curriculum. In the Fall 2017, several weeks into the school year, Principal Biniaris had transferred the lower division technology teacher, Ali Lisberger, who has a license to provide integrated co-teaching ("ICT") services, to the upper division, because the upper division did not have the requisite number of teachers who were licensed to provide ICT services. Ms. Lisberger had been teaching a two-session technology class each week. Since Ms Lisberger's departure from the lower division, technology has been taught once a week by the outside vendor, Engineering for Kids.

(vii) **Social Emotional Learning.**

(aa) One parent commented that Ms. Ball, has been pulled away from her responsibilities as SEL coordinator, as she currently is the assigned teacher who assists with the Engineering for Kids.

(bb) Several lower and upper division parents stated that they were drawn to Q300 not only for Q300's rigorous curriculum but also for the emotional learning and support that the school had purported to provide.

(viii) **Lower Division: New York State Exam Prep.** A parent expressed concern that the school was holding twice a week two-hour after-school state exam prep sessions for third and fourth graders. Principal Biniaris explained that Q300 does not provide exam prep during the school day. He is confident that the students "are learning what they need to" during the school day. The after-school sessions, which are optional, are to help students be aware of the exam's structure.

(ix) **Upper Division: Science Labs.** Parents expressed concern their students may not be eligible to take the Regents exam since they may not have met the minimum number of required lab hours.

d. **Administration.**

(i) **Need for More Support.** One parent suggested that give the difficulties in administering Q300 in two buildings, the Department of Education should provide Q300 with an additional assistant principal to provide Principal Biniaris with additional administrative support.

(ii) **Loss of Trust.** Several parents expressed concern that Principal Biniaris has lost the trust of the community due to his mishandling of the excessing of the social worker position last June, the fact that teachers and staff are leaving the school, and the launch of the website without any community input, among other issues. A parent stated that Principal Biniaris needs to rebuild the community's trust.

(iii) **Communication of Staffing Changes.** A parent asserted that the Administration has done a poor job in communicating staff changes. An example is the short staffing of ICT teachers in the upper division.

e. **Specific Student Populations.**

(i) **ICT/IEP.**

(aa) In the Fall 2017, Principal Biniaris failed to ensure the required number of teachers who have a license to provide inclusive co-teaching services.

(bb) A parent asked what type of professional development training has Q300 teachers undergone to identify and work with "twice exceptional" students. She noted that she has spent hours training her son's teacher at Q300 about how to work with him. She also asked whether Q300 would be sending any teachers to an upcoming conference about the education of "twice exceptional" students.

(cc) A sixth-grade parent expressed concern that Q300 is moving away from its commitment to students who may be considered "twice exceptional". She pointed out that the school's description in the 2016-2017 middle school directory noted that the school "encourage(s) students who may be considered 'twice exceptional' to apply for [Q300 has] academic and social/emotional supports in place to effectively meet their needs." However, that statement has been removed from the school's description in the 2017-2018 middle school directory. She noted that her family chose Q300, in part, due to the 2016-2017 middle school directory description. She expressed concern that Q300 is no longer committed to "twice exceptional" students and that aside from her family's experience at Q300, the removal of the statement is an indication of that lack of commitment.

(ii) **English as a New Language (ENL).** A parent expressed concern that Principal Biniaris has not informed parents of students who are ENL learners that the ENL teacher has taken parental leave and that their children had not been receiving mandated services for over 5 weeks.

(iii) **Fourth Graders.** Several current fourth grade families expressed the following concerns:

(aa) The school administration has not shared with parents about the school's plans for the moving the current fourth graders, who are rising fifth graders, to the upper division campus next year. Parents would like to understand whether next year's fifth graders will be taught in their class with a single teacher for all academic instruction or be taught by several teachers for subject-specific instruction. Further, the school administration has not shared whether lower division subjects, such as Spanish and Technology, will continue for next year's fifth graders. One parent asked whether or not the fifth grade curriculum presentation would be more in line with what is occurring in the lower division or in the upper division.

(bb) A number of parents expressed concern that several fourth graders are disrupting class instruction. One parent stated that the teachers can only do so much in the classroom and that parents needed to take a more active approach in helping their students following class rules and to be more respectful to their teachers. Other parents expressed concern that in a number of cases where a few students are disrupting the class, the entire class is disciplined, rather than just the disruptive students. One parent stated when a number of students disrupted gym class, the entire class was forced to sit by the sidelines and watch another class participate in gym activities as punishment for the disruption. Another parent suggested that the loss of the social work position, and the subsequent shift in the SEL coordinator's responsibilities, has resulted in lack of support for these kids and their teachers.

f. **Next Steps.**

(i) Mr. Fahey stated that he will have a follow-up meeting with Dr. Composto and Principal Biniaris. Dr. Composto is considering organizing committees for each area of concern. Mr. Fahey assured parents that Principal Biniaris and the school will have the full support of the Superintendent's office.

(ii) Mr. Fahey stated that the website will be pulled down, pending vetting by the community.

(iii) Mr. Fahey stated that Dr. Composto and he welcomed additional feedback from parents. They can be reached at pcompos@schools.nyc.gov and wfahey@schools.nyc.gov.

H. New Business

There was no new business raised.

I. Next Meeting and Adjournment

The April General Meeting will be held on April 19, 2018 at the upper division campus.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 pm.

/S/

David William Wang & Gina Reis, Co-Secretaries