



## SPECIAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES • MAY 3, 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 (together, the **Members**”) present was at over 100. District 30 Superintendent Dr. Philip Composto also was in attendance.

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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 Special General Membership of the Q300 PTA Association to order at 6:00 pm in the auditorium at the lower division campus at 28-37 29th Street, Astoria, NY 11102.

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### C. Resolution.

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Parent David Wang re-introduced a resolution (the “**4/19 Resolution**”) that raised a number of issues that have caused concern among members of the PTA and the larger Q300 community. The 4/19 Resolution had been made from the floor and then tabled at the end of the April 19, 2018 general membership meeting. Subsequently, by April 27, 2018, at least ten (10) Members emailed the Co-Presidents and Co-Secretaries requesting a special general membership meeting solely to discuss the Resolution. Pursuant to the Bylaws, on April 27, 2018, the PTA called the special general meeting for May 3, 2018 and proper notice was given to the Members.

The following are highlights from the discussion:

1. David noted that on April 30, 2018, Principal Bill Biniaris circulated an “Action Plan and Response to Concerns” (the “**Principal’s Plan**”) to the PTA Board, the SLT members, and the Leadership Cabinet, and on May 1, 2018, Principal Biniaris circulated the Principal’s Plan to the Q300 community. The Principal Plan sought to address the issues raised in the Resolution. As a result, David modified the 4/19 Resolution to reflect the Principal’s Plan. A motion was made to substitute the 4/19 Resolution with a modified resolution (the “**Resolution**”). The motion was seconded.
2. David then proceeded to discuss the purpose of the Resolution and provide background information for the drafting of the Resolution. He explained that the Resolution was drafted to bring together the various issues raised over the last several months, including those raised in the general membership meetings on March 23, 2019 and April 19, 2018 and the community-wide meeting on April 12, 2018 with Superintendent Dr. Philip Composto. The Resolution allows the community to bring its concerns in an orderly fashion to the Administration and places the Administration on notice that the Members are not satisfied with the current direction of the school. It was noted that the Resolution was an operational document and not one to bring a no-confidence vote of the Principal Biniaris’s leadership.
3. The next topic that was discussed was the process in which Principal Biniaris would obtain tenure. Dr. Composto explained that the tenure decision is made three years after Principal Biniaris began serving as Permanent Principal of Q300. Accordingly, Principal Biniaris began serving in the position of Permanent

Principal in January 2017; he is up for tenure in January 2020. Dr. Composto noted that having tenure give a principal right to due process and not one of guaranteed employment.

4. The meeting then focused on a page-by-page review of the Resolution. David accepted most of the proposed revisions from the floor. He also proposed alternative language for certain proposed revisions. The revisions included the following: (a) specific references of Q300 were changed to “the Administration” to provide more clarity on who was responsible for certain issues of concern; and (b) the inclusion of the following resolution clauses: (i) The PTA urges Dr. Composto to closely work with the Q300 Administration to ensure the school operates according to the school mission and vision and with alignment with the CEP and with sufficient planning and execution to avoid ongoing disruption; (ii) the PTA urges Dr. Composto to receive formal written feedback from the PTA before tenure is decided about Principal Biniaris; and (iii) The PTA resolves to continue to provide feedback to the administration and Dr. Composto. Further, certain references to Q300’s Comprehensive Education Plan was also included in the Resolution.
5. A motion (the “**First Amendment**”) was made to amend the Resolution by (a) striking the first five clauses in the Resolved section and (b) adding the following: The PTA votes for no-confidence in Principal Biniaris’ leadership and demands his immediate resignation from the position as principal. The motion was seconded and then discussions were held. It was also noted that the PTA does not have the authority to fire a principal and that the motion was “symbolic.” A parent urged the Members to consider the long-term implications of the vote. Thereafter, the Members voted on the amendment by secret ballot. The amendment failed -- 43 “yes” votes; 43 “no” votes and 12 abstentions.
6. A motion (the “**Second Amendment**”) was made to amend the Resolution by (a) striking the first five clauses in the Resolved section and (b) adding the following: The PTA votes for no-confidence in Principal Biniaris’ leadership. The motion was seconded. The PTA Co-Presidents determined that second amendment was improper when it presented practically the same issue as the motion previously considered.
7. A motion (the “**Third Amendment**”) was made to amend the Resolution by replacing the term “regular” with quarterly in the second resolved clause, so that such clause is as follows, “The plan should include both short- and long-term goals, priorities, action items, and timelines and should be subject to review, feedback, and further revision on a **quarterly** basis through a structured and transparent process with all stakeholders.” (emphasis added.) The motion was seconded. The Third Amendment passed by voice vote.
8. The Members voted on the Resolution, with changes that were discussed and accepted, by secret ballot. The modified Resolution passed -- 79 “yes” votes; 8 “no” votes and 0 abstentions. Attached is the final Resolution.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

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M. Daniel Bach Acting Secretary

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## RESOLUTION

On May 3, 2018 at a special general membership meeting, the members of the Q300 Parent-Teacher Association, Inc. (the “**PTA**”) hereby adopt the following resolution:

**Whereas**, the 30<sup>th</sup> Avenue School (“**Q300**”), established in 2014, is a citywide gifted and talented (“**G&T**”) school located in Queens, New York City. As described in Q300’s mission statement and the Comprehensive Education Plan (“**CEP**”), Q300’s core values are Inclusion, Inquiry, and Responsibility. Its founding principal is Matt Willard (“**Willard**”).

**Whereas**, in May 2015, then-Principal Willard announced his resignation from the position of principal of Q300. Shortly thereafter, Vasilios Biniaris (“**Biniaris**”) was appointed interim acting principal of Q300;

**Whereas**, in January 2017, Superintendent Dr. Philip Composto (“**Composto**”) appointed Principal Biniaris to the position of permanent principal of Q300;

**Whereas**, during his tenure at Q300, Principal Biniaris has been responsible for a number of issues that have caused concern among the members of the PTA and the larger Q300 community. Such issues include the following:

a. The Q300 administration (the “**Administration**”) must develop and implement a plan that fosters teacher and staff retention, support, and well-being.

(i) Teacher and staff turnover has been unacceptably high, leading to a chaotic and unstable working and learning environment. More than 40 percent of our teachers and staff members have left their employment at Q300 since the beginning of Principal Biniaris’s tenure in September 2016. A number of these departures came suddenly and mid-year. In certain cases, Principal Biniaris did not notify parents of these departures until long after the fact. As a result, students have lost core teachers, staff members, and learning time; to fill gaps, existing teachers have been shifted midyear from one classroom to another and even from the elementary to the middle school; long-term substitute teachers have been used in place of permanent teachers, and the sudden losses have resulted in the need to hire new teachers on a rushed basis and often during times when qualified candidates are not looking for new positions. This has come not only at a financial cost to the school, but also impacted the stability of the remaining teacher population and significantly impacted the opportunity for students to learn.

(ii) The 2016-2017 School Quality Survey provides a portrait of Principal Biniaris’ support of his teachers and their well-being. The statistics include the following:

(aa) Only 37% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader makes clear to the staff his or her expectations for meeting instructional goals. In comparison, the citywide average is 90%;

(bb) Only 26% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader communicates a clear vision for the school. In comparison, the citywide average is 87%;

(cc) Only 26% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader sets clear expectations for teachers about implementing what they have learned in professional development. In comparison, the citywide average is 85%;

(dd) Only 26% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader knows what is going on in their classrooms. In comparison, the citywide average is 81%;

(ee) Only 16% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader participates in instructional planning with teams of teachers. In comparison, the citywide average is 77%;

(ff) Only 26% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly. In comparison, the citywide average is 81%;

(gg) Only 26% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they trust the principal/school leader at his word (to do what he says that he will do). In comparison, the citywide average is 81%; and

(hh) Only 37% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that the principal/school leader looks out for the personal welfare of the staff members. In comparison, the citywide average is 82%.

(iii) The results of the 2016-2017 School Quality Survey will make it challenging for Q300 to recruit high-quality teachers.

(iv) In March 2018, a highly lauded, effective teacher was forced to resign after the administration threatened to terminate her employment. In response to community pressure, Principal Biniaris requested that the resignation be withdrawn and initiated her tenure process.

b. The Administration must properly plan for and meet students' educational needs and to ensure proper staffing. The following concerns have been raised:

(i) Elementary School

(aa) Beginning in Fall of 2017, the elementary school Spanish language program became inconsistent and unstable because the school's ENL requirements had increased and the ENL/Spanish teacher, the only teacher certified to serve ENL students, needed to switch to full-time provision of ENL services in order to comply with the federal Title III mandate (to which the school had been out of compliance). In October, the administration reassigned the Spanish classes from the permanent ENL/Spanish language teacher to a series of substitute teachers before installing a long-term substitute teacher in January 2018.

(bb) Beginning in Winter 2018, the ENL teacher took a parental leave and the administration failed to provide adequate coverage and students mandated to receive ENL services went without them. Further, the administration failed to notify the parents of ENL learners of such leave. These ENL students have not received mandated services since the ENL teacher began parental leave on February 9, 2018 and the school is out of compliance with the federal mandate.

(cc) Following the excessing of the school's social worker (a founding member of the faculty) in Spring 2017, there was a last minute shift of a fourth-grade teacher into a new social-emotional learning (SEL) coordinator position. This cascaded to a number of required short-notice and mid-year teacher changes, i.e., the move of a middle school integrated co-teaching ("ICT") teacher into a fourth-grade position, which led to the ICT deficiency in the middle school and the reassignment after the school year began of the elementary school technology teacher to the ICT classroom in the middle school. In addition, the SEL coordinator position was intended to provide much of the work that the social worker had provided, including conducting one-on-one sessions, classroom support and push-in, restorative circles for community concerns, conflict resolution, a community leaders peer support program, and other proactive measures to promote students' social and emotional well-being. However, due to transfer of the technology teacher to the middle school, the SEL coordinator has had to cover the technology classes, which are serviced by an outside vendor (and thus require that a full-time staff member attend each class). As a result, she has had very little time to provide SEL support to teachers and students beyond once-a-week character education classes.

(dd) Principal Biniaris destabilized the technology curriculum for the elementary school by moving the elementary school technology teacher, who has a special education license, to the middle school in an attempt to resolve the shortage of special education teachers in the middle school (see below). As a result, students were deprived of a consistent teacher as a series of substitute teachers taught technology for seven weeks. Subsequently, Principal Biniaris hired an outside vendor to teach the technology class and reduced the number of technology classes from twice a week to once a week. While the move of the technology teacher was originally expected to be temporary, it has been extended for the entire school year.

(ii) Middle School.

(aa) In the Spring and Fall of 2017, the administration failed to adequately review the Individual Education Programs ("IEPs") of enrolled and incoming students with disabilities ("SWD"), and subsequently failed to ensure the required number of middle school special education teachers for SWD with IEPs in ICT classes. Had the administration reviewed IEPs in a timely manner, the then existing ICT teachers would not have been excessed on June 30. As a consequence, there were no ICT teachers in the three mandated classes at the start of the school year, until the elementary school technology teacher was moved and a hire was made in late September 2017. As well, there was only a content specialist in the 8th grade ICT classroom for the first two weeks of the year, followed by 4 months of substitute teachers who were not certified in special education, and unable to provide mandated services. Further, the administration failed to notify affected families prior to and during the first weeks of the school year.

(bb) Eighth graders who are enrolled in the Living Environment Regents course may be ineligible to take the associated Regents exam because the work completed may not comply with the state requirements for laboratory activities. Despite receiving repeated parental complaints about the inadequacy of instruction and laboratory activities beginning in Fall 2017, Principal Biniaris only provided plans to rectify the situation in April 2018.

c. Significant changes to Q300's curriculum and professional development program must be made with consultation with the School Leadership Team and be in line with the CEP. The following concerns have been raised:

(i) The incorporation of inquiry and project-based learning as part of the curriculum has been left to the discretion of the individual teachers, rather than continued on a school-wide basis.

(ii) Dynamic and differentiated reading groups across grade levels have been discontinued in the lower grades.

(iii) The middle school advisory curriculum has been weakened. During the first two years of Q300, the curriculum was led by a social worker, who supported teachers and staff members in its implementation. During the third year, Principal Biniaris refused to permit the social worker to lead the curriculum. Following the failure to provide mandated ICT services in Fall 2017, SWDs with IEPs have had their advisory class replaced with a study hall in an attempt to make up for missed services.

(iv) Prior to Principal Biniaris's arrival, all teachers and staff participated in a four-day social emotional responsive training, which is an integral whole school culture approach to social emotional learning and academic support. In violation of the Comprehensive Education Plan, new teachers have not been trained in the practices of Responsive Classroom by attending one of their external trainings and/or receiving training from one of the Q300 teachers who have been trained and have demonstrated excellence in social and emotional learning.

d. The Administration must foster a collaborative environment, a key feature of the Department of Education Framework for Great Schools. The following concerns have been raised:

(i) In Fall 2017, Principal Biniaris set up a new leadership cabinet (“**Leadership Cabinet**”) that consisted only of teachers he had hired, i.e., only teachers hired since Fall 2016. After pressure from community stakeholders, he has since opened up the cabinet to include teachers who have been at the school prior to his assuming the position of principal.

(ii) Principal Biniaris unilaterally developed and launched an entirely new website with new branding, including logo and tagline, to the exclusion of the stakeholders of the community. The School Leadership Team (“**SLT**”) should have been the body through which the changes should have been developed and vetted. Pursuant to the CEP, the SLT had been working to set up a committee to improve the website. Principal Biniaris ignored these SLT efforts and did not consult with them in launching a new website. After parents raised concerns, Principal Biniaris agreed to take down the website and consider input. The SLT subsequently has developed and is implementing a collaborative process for the creation of a new website.

(iii) For the 2017-2018 school year, Principal Biniaris submitted a proposed school budget that was not aligned with Q300's CEP. In particular, the proposed budget eliminated the school's social worker position. This was a significant change that was inconsistent with the CEP. The social worker played a vital role in the development of Q300's students and school, particularly with respect to the SEL that is an integral part of the school's core values of inquiry, inclusion, and responsibility. Among other duties, the social worker provided one-on-one student counseling; pushed-in to classrooms that needed more support; developed and monitored students' IEPs; identified students who need IEPs or other

support; worked daily with students on conflict resolution and other issues that arose in the classroom, lunchroom, recess, bus, and home; assisted with the middle school advisory program; ran a community stewards program; and provided SEL training, including Responsive Classroom training, to teachers and staff. Parents, teachers, and staff valued the social workers' work and role immensely. The social worker's expertise in addressing the social and emotional needs of a growing population of gifted students, spread across two buildings, allowed the school's administrators and teachers to focus on the immediate and important demands of running what has quickly become one of the New York City's best K-8 schools.

e. The administration must work collaboratively with the PTA to plan for and implement PTA funded programs.

(i) In June 2017, the PTA voted to provide funds equal to salary of the position of a social worker, after Principal Biniaris made plans to excess the social worker ostensibly for budgetary reasons. It should be noted that the prior to the reallocation of PTA funding, the SLT came up with budgetary solutions that would have addressed the school needs and maintained the social worker position, in accordance with the CEP. These proposals were rejected. Despite the offer of funding, Principal Biniaris excessed the social worker. As a result of parental pressure and superintendent intervention, Principal Biniaris reinstated the position. In the interim, the prior social worker accepted an offer from another school and left Q300. The role was not subsequently filled with a dedicated social worker as agreed.

(ii) Despite the PTA-approved funding (which was made at the Principal's request) for a year-round arts enrichment program for the seventh grade in the 2016-2017 school year, Principal Biniaris declined to implement the program until April 2017.

(iii) Despite the PTA approved funding for Middle School enrichment programs that would begin in the Fall 2017 (at his requests), Principal Biniaris did not begin such enrichment programs until February 2018.

(iv) Principal Biniaris did not provide timely input and follow-through in order to schedule the annual 7<sup>th</sup> grade overnight trip to Taconic Outdoor Education Center this year. The substituted day trip has not been scheduled due to this failure to provide follow through.

(v) Despite the PTA-approved funding (which was made at the Principal's request) of a band/orchestra program for 4th grade music in 2017-2018, the administration did not coordinate the program with the music vendor. The vendor ultimately provided an alternate program. The administration failed to notify the parent body about the change, despite the suggestions from PTA leadership and SLT members to do so.

(vi) While the PTA approved funding (which was made at the Principal's request) for professional development for teachers, Principal Biniaris has had difficulties scheduling such professional development. The PTA has had to step in and coordinate to schedule such professional development.

(vii) The administration had poor follow-through in scheduling PTA-funded enrichment program vendors. As a result, the PTA has to intervene to coordinate scheduling on his behalf.

(viii) The administration has not been timely in providing updates on financial matters, despite repeated requests for such updates.

**Whereas**, the PTA appreciates the efforts of Superintendent Dr. Composto as well as the recent efforts of Principal Biniaris, in working toward resolving many of the issues listed above.

**Whereas**, at the General Membership Meeting held on April 19, 2018, a prior version of this Resolution was made from the floor and then tabled for further discussion.

**Whereas**, on April 27, 2018, at the request of ten (10) Members, the PTA called a Special PTA Membership Meeting for Thursday, May 3, 2018 at 6:00 pm in the auditorium at the lower division campus.

**Whereas**, on April 30, 2018, Principal Biniaris circulated an “Action Plan and Response to Concerns” (the “**Principal’s Plan**”) to the PTA Board, the SLT members, and the Leadership Cabinet, and on May 1, 2018, Principal Biniaris circulated the Principal’s Plan to the Q300 community.

**Now therefore be it resolved that:**

1. The PTA urges 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;

2. The PTA urges Principal Biniaris to invite and address comments and feedback on the Principal’s Plan through a structured and transparent process with the SLT, the PTA, the teachers and staff members, and other stakeholders in the Q300 community and to circulate by June 4, 2018, a revised Principal’s Plan. The plan should include both short- and long-term goals, priorities, action items, and timelines, as well as being in line with the CEP and should be subject to review, feedback, and further revision on a quarterly basis through a structured and transparent process with all stakeholders;

3. The PTA urges Dr. Composto to closely work with the Q300 Administration to ensure the school operates according to the school mission and vision and with alignment with the CEP and with sufficient planning and execution to avoid ongoing disruption;

4. The PTA urges Dr. Composto to receive formal written feedback from the PTA before tenure is decided about Principal Biniaris;

5. The PTA resolves to continue to provide feedback to the administration and Dr. Composto; and

6. A copy of the above resolution duly certified by the authorized signatories of the PTA be furnished to New York City Department of Education Chancellor Richard A. Carranza, Superintendent Dr. Composto, and Principal Biniaris.

We HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing resolutions were passed by the Members at the meeting referred above.

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David William Wang & Gina Reis, Co-Secretaries