



GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES•December 19, 2019

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 (**Parents**) and (b) eligible Q300 teachers and instructional staff members who are currently employed on a full-time basis (**Staff**) at Q300 were present. The total number of Parents and Staff (together, **Members**) present was 58. Quorum was reached.

B. Call to Order

Co-President Lynn Kennedy called the meeting to order at 6:25 pm in the lower division auditorium.

C. Co-Presidents’ Report

Lynn gave the President’s report. The following are the highlights:

1. Congratulations to Sonita Ramkishun for her appointment as a permanent Assistant Principal and to Principal Bill Biniaris for his new role as principal at the Park Avenue Elementary School in Warwick, New York. Thank you for your work for Q300. Lynn acknowledged the presence District 30 Community Superintendent Dr. Philip Composto.
 2. In advance of the discussion on the leadership transition and principal selection processes, Lynn laid out some ground rules.
 3. Since Principal Biniaris’s announcement of his resignation from the principal position, Lynn had a phone call with Dr. Composto, PTA board members have met with the school leadership about next steps. Dr. Composto and the School Leadership Team (SLT) met on December 16, 2019. The PTA has connected with many community stakeholders to determine how to move forward with the leadership transition and principal selection processes.
 4. Lynn noted the following: (a) the January and February general meetings will include sample workshops from summer camps that have generously donated camp program spots for the auction at the PTA’s upcoming International Potluck Winterfest; (b) thanks to those who volunteered the joint movie night on December 6, 2019; (c) thanks to those donated to the coat and sock drives; (d) thanks to the Membership committee for organizing the holiday teacher appreciation breakfast that will be held tomorrow; (d) the PTA is seeking neighborhood liaisons to help organize events in your neighborhood.
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D. Co-Treasurers’ Reports

Co-Treasurer Yi-Wen Wang delivered the Co-Treasurers’ Report. Attached is a copy of summary of the PTA’s finances for November 2019. During this period, the PTA raised over \$65,000, which included over \$48,300 from the Direct Appeal and nearly \$21,000 from other fundraisers (including \$15,845 gross for the gift card sales). Direct Appeal Co-chair David Wang reported that the Direct Appeal has raised \$178,000 in donations and pledges. Thanks to those who have contributed. For those who have not, please do so. Please note that if a donor mails a donation to the PTA with a postmark on or before December 31, 2019, the PTA will count the donation for this tax year.

E. Principal Selection Process and Leadership Transition Plan

Dr. Composto gave a presentation concerning the principal selection process and leadership transition plan. The following are highlights:

1. Dr. Composto thanked Principal Biniaris for bringing change and growth to Q300. He acknowledged that there were “growing pains” but that “growth has come.” He noted that he had worked closely with Principal Biniaris and thanked him and wished him the best.
2. The hiring of a principal is governed by Chancellor’s Regulations C-30 (Reg. C-30) process, which has been amended recently to provide more opportunities for parental input. Parents have an opportunity to suggest the criteria for the principal selection. Dr. Composto is responsible for ensuring that Reg C-30 process is followed. The vacancy will be posted from February 3, 2020 to February 18, 2020 and qualified candidates must apply through the Department of Education (DOE) website.
3. After reviewing candidates’ applications, Dr. Composto will forward the resumes of a certain number of candidates to the Level I committee. The Level I committee interviews, evaluates and ranks the candidates. Each member ranks each candidate individually. Dr. Composto then reviews the Level I committee evaluations and rankings and the selection criteria that the PTA has provided. He may interview those candidates as well. Prior to his selection of the principal, he must consult the SLT. In response to a question, Dr. Composto stated that a lot of times the interim acting principal is not appointed to the permanent principal position.
4. Dr. Composto has put Assistant Principal Sonita Ramkishun’s name forward to the DOE as the interim acting principal. The DOE has not yet confirmed the appointment but is expected to do so.

Principal Biniaris, current assistant principal Sonita Ramkishun, and assistant principal Anna Milonakis explained leadership transition plan. The following are highlights:

1. Current assistant principal Sonita Ramkishun will become interim acting principal. She will focus on curriculum, supervision, and community relations and in the following areas: (a) 3rd grade education, (b) math and science (4-8); (c) gifted and talented (G&T) instruction and professional development (K-8); (d) arts and enrichment (K-8), (e) safety (K-8), and foreign language (K-8).
2. Assistant Principal Anna Milonakis will focus on the following areas: (a) early childhood (K-2); (b) English Language Arts and social studies (4-8); (c) special education instruction and professional development; (d) language acquisition (K-8); (e) wellness (K-8); and assessment (K-8).
3. Principal Biniaris noted that Q300’s instructional leadership team, which is focused on assessing the school’s instructional practices and finding ways to improve, has begun looking at whether or not there are gaps in the instructional practices. He noted that the team is committed to helping the staff go through this transition.
4. Both Assistant Principals Ramkishun and Milonakis will check in with United Federation of Teachers (UFT) representative Ali Lisberger on a weekly basis. At least one-staff meeting will be held in January to talk about “glows” and “grow”. Monthly coffees with the Q300 leadership and parents will occur.
5. Ms. Milonakis noted that there are systems in place to make the transition go well.
6. Principal Biniaris thanked the parent community. He thanked Dr. Composto for his mentorship and help. He also thanked the teachers, who have been very kind, and he will miss them very much.

Dr. Composto answered questions. The following are highlights:

1. Parents asked whether Dr. Composto could provide support and guidance to the administration in this time of transition. Another parent asked whether or not Dr. Composto could supplement the leadership with another senior leader. Dr. Composto stated that he has a retired assistant principal in mind who could provide additional support if necessary. The Q300 leadership would make the final decision about any supplemental leader. The pro-rated salary for any supplemental leader would be paid out of the budget line for Assistant

Principal Ramkishun's salary. (Assistant Principal Ramkishun's would be paid out of the budget line for Principal Biniaris' salary.)

2. A parent thanked Dr. Composto for his support of Q300, from the school's creation through its growing pains. In response to parent question, Dr. Composto explained that if parents find someone who has "all the credentials" but is not in the Principal Candidates Pool (which is a requirement to apply for any principal position), he will assist the candidate in getting a seat in the in-person next assessment series so that the candidate could be assessed and if accepted, be a part of the Pool. He noted that he was able to get Ms. Ramkishun, who is not in the Pool, a seat in a recent assessment series, so that she could be qualified to assume the interim acting principal position. In response to a question, he stated that if you find someone who's interested, contact the PTA president and he would help get the person who is qualified into the Pool. He did not know specifically if there were in-person assessment series in January but they "happen all the time."
3. A parent asked whether or not it would be possible for Dr. Composto to post the vacancy at a later date, to give the Q300 community to reach out to potential candidates. He understood that other superintendents have deferred posting in order to allow for such outreach. Dr. Composto stated that the DOE had wanted the posting to occur as soon as Principal Biniaris announced his resignation earlier this month. He stated that "we can't delay any further." He noted that if there are not viable candidates at the close of the posting (February 18, 2020), the vacancy will be posted again.
4. Dr. Composto stated that the last time the Q300 principal position was open in 2016, Dr. Composto received applications from only ten candidates. Four of the candidates were unqualified and one failed to show up to the Level 1 interview. In response to a question, Dr. Composto noted that there are hundreds of members in the Pool.
5. Dr. Composto noted that he had received an email from a parent requesting a "worldwide search." He stated that other than posting the vacancy on its website, the DOE does not do any advertising open principal positions and that most DOE schools do not conduct a search. He then noted that "parent can do a search."
6. Lynn noted that the PTA has begun working on a job description that goes beyond the standard DOE vacancy notice. Dr. Composto stated that the "PTA can post it anywhere."
7. Dr. Composto noted that the PTA can provide additional selection criteria, separate from the principal certification requirements.
8. Dr. Composto stated that parents will have the opportunity to provide suggestions asked in the Level I committee interviews.
9. In response to a question, Dr. Composto noted that once the principal is appointed, the principal must start immediately, even if the appointment is made mid-school year. A parent expressed concern that an appointed principal may not want to start the new job mid-school year and asked whether or not the candidate would be allowed to finish the school year at his or her current school. Dr. Composto stated that he had never heard of such a situation and that it takes 2 to 3 weeks for candidates to wrap things up at the current school.
10. Dr. Composto stated that there are no DOE rules that prioritize Q300 internal candidates over candidates from other schools.
11. District 30 Deputy Community Superintendent William Fahey will serve as Dr. Composto's designee on the Level I Interview Committee.
12. A parent expressed concern that Q300 students have borne the brunt of teacher turnover with the last administration change. The parent noted that, "Our kids academically can withstand that, emotionally they shouldn't have to, behaviorally some of our kids can run rings around new teachers. When there is a new administration brought in, I want to make sure our kids and teachers are supported, that there are the right professional developments to have the kids treated like the people they are. They haven't had the supports they need." In response, Dr. Composto stated that while he can't stop teachers from coming and going, he will hopefully get the right leader whom the teachers will want to stay at Q300.

13. A parent expressed concern that this is the second change in principal since his or her child started at Q300. The parent asked if whether or not the DOE conducts exit interviews. Dr. Composto stated that the DOE does not do exit interview. He, however, did have a conversation with the founding Principal Matt Willard and with Principal Biniaris.
14. Dr. Composto stated that he would provide some transparency with respect to those who are interviewed by the Level I Committee.
15. Dr. Composto stated that he loves the fact that the Reg-C-30 process has increased the timeframe from 3 to 6 months, which allows more time for parent input. He noted even if a parent is not on the Level I Committee, the parent can reach out to the PTA co-presidents to let them know what the criteria should be.
16. A parent noted that many teachers are at the meeting and their input is important. Assistant Principal Milonakis stated that her input is important as well, that she's been at Q300 for three years, and that she would like to have her voice be heard as well.
17. A parent asked what Dr. Composto plans to do to help the new principal work on two separate campuses. Dr. Composto noted that he is "pushing for a single site" and that in the meantime, he will try to get a little extra funding to help pay for the administrative issues of having two separate campuses.
18. A parent noted the new principal should have a principal coach who is aligned with Q300's values. Dr. Composto stated that he is "very careful with that."
19. A parent asked that, given that Q300 is located in to separate campuses, would it be possible for Q300 to have two interim co-principals. Dr. Composto noted that the school budget would not pay for the salaries of wo interim co-principals.
20. A teacher asked whether or not a supplemental leader (see point 1 above), if appointed, would observe and rate teacher performances. Dr. Composto noted that such leader would have the right to observe teachers. He would recommend that such leader meet with Assistant Principals Ramkishun and Milonakis to understand the school norms and the curriculum.
21. Teacher Scott Waldman noted that as far as the day-to-day operations of the school, "we do well here", that "most teachers take on responsibilities above and beyond their job", and that they will work together with Assistant Principals Ramkishun and Milonakis during this period of transition.
22. UFT representative Lisberger stated that based on her conversations with teachers, she would like to give Assistant Principals Ramkishun and Milonakis a chance to see if they can take on the leadership role for now. She mentioned that the teachers would rather not see a supplemental leader come in right away.
23. A parent acknowledged that the teachers have gone beyond their duties over the years. Another parent stated that the suggestion for getting a supplemental leader was not a comment of their capabilities. But rather, in the current leadership configuration, there are three leaders -- one principal and two assistant principals. With Principal Biniaris leaving, there will only be two leaders. Parents want to ensure that the two leaders have enough support to take up the principal duties. Perhaps, Assistant Principals Ramkishun and Milonakis do not need a supplemental leader, but rather another office assistant.
24. Dr. Composto confirmed that the DOE practice is to have the vacancy posting posted for only 15 days, despite the Reg. C-30 stating that the postings be made for a "minimum" of 15 days.
25. A parent noted that the PTA has drafted a principal candidate outreach notice (Notice) to inform qualified candidates about the pending Q300 principal vacancy and provide an overview of Q300, and a list of desired strengths that a candidate should have. When the Q300 principal vacancy is posted on the DOE website, the post lists only the name of the school, the position, and the school number. The Notice is to provide qualified candidates more information. The PTA would like to send the Notice out as soon as possible. In the next several days, the PTA will seek community input, including the SLT, teachers, and parents, on the Notice.
26. Dr. Composto stated that he is "looking for a solid leader who has heart. I'm comfortable with the criteria that have been put together. I will review it and work on it." He noted that looking at a candidate's resume does not give the story. He will call around to the candidate's superintendent, principal, and others.

27. A parent asked that the Notice include a statement that if an otherwise qualified candidate is not in the Pool, it is easy to get into the Pool.
 28. Parent Coordinator Jenny Lando offered to circulate the draft Notice to the community. Dr. Composto agreed. The PTA will get suggestions and feedback via a google form response. The deadline for such responses is due on December 23, 2020.
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F. Resolution

1. A resolution was presented to appoint a principal candidate outreach committee to identify and recruit qualified candidates about the position of Q300 principal. A motion was made to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded. A majority of Members present approved the resolution. If anyone is interested in serving on the committee, please contact the co-presidents.
 2. A resolution was presented to allocate \$3,800 to fund an upper division film elective taught by the Astoria Film Festival. A motion was made to approve the resolution. The motion was seconded. A majority of Members present approved the resolution.
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G. New Business

1. A parent expressed deep thanks to Principal Biniaris for all his work, including building up the middle school. There was little doubt that the parent's fifth grader would continue at Q300's middle school. He noted that Principal Biniaris has grown tremendously as a principal. Finally, the parent expressed appreciation to Principal Biniaris for the Fall 2018 survey of 6th-8th graders with IEPs and more importantly the results. He was impressed that 92.9% of respondents noted that they almost always feel that others treat them the same as those that do not have IEPs. He expressed thanks to Principal Biniaris for creating that inclusive environment and wished Principal Biniaris good luck in his new school.
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H. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:25 pm EST. The next general membership meeting will be held on January 23, 2020 at 6:15 pm in the lower division campus.

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M. Daniel Bach and David William Wang, Co-Secretaries