



GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING MINUTES • September 28, 2023

A. In Attendance

It was noted that (a) parents and other “persons in a parental relation” as defined by NYC Chancellor regulations as 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 (Members) present was 100. Quorum was reached.

B. Call to Order and Housekeeping

The virtual meeting was called to order at approximately 6:35 pm ET. President Mauricio López Campero provided an overview of the meeting to attendees. Mauricio explained that the PTA meetings are set up in webinar formats. To ask a question, attendees should raise their hand and the host will allow the attendee to join the panel to speak. Attendees can also type their question in the chat. Mauricio explained that PTA meetings are held once a month and have traditionally been held on Thursdays. A survey was recently circulated to parents concerning their preferred day(s) and time(s) for PTA meetings. The survey results will be shared at a later date. The outcome of that survey will inform how PTA meetings are scheduled for the rest of the academic year. Mauricio reported that a number of 2022-2023 Board members have left office, and thanked them. Those members are: Patrick Nau (Executive Vice-President), Chu Zheng (Co-Treasurer), Christine Serdjenian Yearwood (Co-Vice-President, Community Affairs), Ellie Rabinovich (Upper Division Representative), Amy Ho (Upper Division Representative), Nick Skolnick (Lower Division Representative), and Janet Perez (Co-Vice-President, Community Affairs). The 2023-2024 Board is: Mauricio López-Campero (President), Yvette Choy (Executive Vice-President), David Wang (Co-Secretary), Kate Swearengen (Co-Secretary), Sophia Peng (Co-Treasurer), Amy Wong (Co-Treasurer), Afrosa Amin (Vice-President, Membership), Lisa Christopher (Co-Vice-President, Fundraising), Christina Lee (Co-Vice-President, Fundraising), Betty Ruan (Vice-President, Communications), Salua Baida (Vice-President, Community Affairs), Erica Soto Eng (Lower Division Representative), and Sunilda Caraballo (Upper Division Representative).

The PTA Mission Statement was read in the major languages spoken by families at Q300 to remind members that they are always welcome to any space where the PTA is present, regardless of their background. Salua read the mission statement in English and Spanish. Amy Wong read the mission statement in Mandarin. Tomonori Nagano read the mission statement in Japanese. Ellie read the mission statement in Russian. Afrosa read the mission statement in Bangla. Kathy Kim read the mission statement in Korean.

C. Principal’s Report

Principal Sonita Ramkishun gave the Principal’s Report.

With respect to staffing updates, Upper Division Guidance Counselor Christine Katartzis’s transfer request was granted. Upper Division Guidance Counselor Khary Chang will support the Upper Division students and will guide Eighth Graders through the high school admission process. If parents have questions about that process, please contact khary@q300.org. Principal Sonita is still looking for a Spanish language teacher for the Upper Division. The teacher that she intended to hire has not been processed yet. For those who know of anyone who is a Spanish language teacher who is certified in New York to teach at the Middle School level and who is willing to teach Grades 5-8 Spanish as a foreign language, or have questions about the credentials required, please send their resume to Sonita at principal@q300.org.

With respect to Teaching Assistants (TAs), who are temporary, non-Department of Education (DOE) employees whose positions are paid by money raised by the PTA, there are currently five working at the school. Two more are in the process of being onboarded, and two more are in the process of being interviewed. The TAs have been helping out in the Lower Division and have been assisting with drop-off, lunch, recess and dismissal.

Enrichments and electives have begun. Thanks to the PTA for helping to fund this. Grades K-2 are receiving Chess. Grades K-4 will be receiving Visual Arts starting in October. Grades K-5 are receiving Music. Grade 2 will be receiving Architecture. Grades 3-4 will be receiving Robotics and participating in the School Enrichment Model (SEM) where they have the opportunity to choose from Cooking, Musical Theater, Hip Hop Dance, Newspaper and Math Games. They will have a Fall option and a Spring option, so if they did not get their first choice for Fall, the school will try to prioritize it in the Spring. For the Upper Division, electives happen every Friday during the last two periods. The Upper Division students will get a total of four electives options during the school year – a seventh period and eighth period choice in the Fall, and a seventh period and eighth period choice in the Spring. Some of the choices for Fall are Minecraft, Astoria Film Festival, Chorus, Dance, Digital Photography, Multicultural Club, Origami, Cooking, Robotics, Ultimate Frisbee, Soccer, and Memory Makers.

An update on Covid-19 guidance: there is no remote instruction this year. If the child tests positive, please email Parent Coordinator Jenny Lando at jennylando@q300.org and let her know so the school can determine the return date, and so Jenny can share with the parent the Google form for tracking attendance. This is to ensure that the student's absence is coded correctly for attendance purposes and so the student's teachers know if the student should be masking in the classroom. Per Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, the quarantine period is five days. On the sixth day the child can return to school, but they must wear a mask at school through the tenth day. If families ever need Covid test kits, please email jennylando@q300.org and she will ensure the child goes home with test kits.

Updates on the Upper Division afterschool programs: formation of the Math Team is underway. The school will be notifying students who have been accepted to the Math Team based on their qualifying score. There is only one coach this year, and class sizes must be kept below 30 students. If a child did not get a seat, they will be put on a waitlist. If the child qualified but is unable to accept their seat, please decline immediately so another student can have their spot. The school is trying its best to accommodate everyone. The Debate Team is being supported this year through Global Kids. Lance from Global Kids will be coaching the Debate Team.

Thanks to everyone for what they have done to get the school year off to a great start, especially to David Wang for his outreach work over the Summer in finding TA and Spanish teacher candidates.

In response to a question about the onboarding of a Spanish teacher for the Upper Division, Principal Sonita clarified that the search was being reopened because the person she intended to hire would not necessarily be cleared by the DOE. If they were to be cleared, it would happen in mid-October at the earliest and the candidate would only be cleared as a substitute. Sonita needs a backup candidate in case this candidate falls through.

In response to a question about the Math Team, Principal Sonita clarified that the Math Team is available to Grades 5-8 and that the school is trying to cap the class sizes at 25-28 students. There will be a group of 28 students for Grades 5-6 and another group of 28 students for Grades 7-8. Students who have been accepted will be receiving their letters tomorrow.

D. President's Report

President Mauricio López Campero thanked Principal Sonita for her support. He said that one of his biggest priorities is to increase the PTA's reach within the community by engaging as many parents as possible. To that end, the PTA has many initiatives to build a sense of community, and will work to increase transparency.

PTA elections took place last June. However, not all seats have been filled. Additional elections will take place in October. The floor will be open to a Co-President (to work with Mauricio), a Co-Vice-President of Membership (to work with Afrosa), a Co-Vice-President of Communications (to work with Betty), a co-Vice-President of Community Affairs (to work with Salua), a Co-Lower Division Representative (to work with Erica), and a co-Upper Division Representative (to work with Sunilda). If parents/guardians are interested in any of these positions, please run.

E. Treasurer's Report

Sophia Peng delivered the Treasurer's Report. She reviewed the PTA's proposed budget for the 2023-2024 school year. She began by explaining the contents of the budget. Cash inflows come from the Direct Appeal campaign. This year, the PTA aims to raise a total of \$335,000 -- \$230,000 from the Direct Appeal campaign and \$105,000 from various fundraisers.

The PTA plans to raise \$32,000 through the following fundraisers: Summer Readathon (which just closed), Fall Costume Party, Meet and Greet, Winterfest, 10th Anniversary Spring Carnival, Scholastic Book Fair (the PTA receives a credit from Scholastic that can be used to buy books), and Stepping Into Summer. In addition, the PTA is planning joint fundraisers with PS17, the school that is co-located with the Lower Division, and which include raffles at the events listed above, as well as a Fun Run.

Further, the PTA plans to raise \$37,000 from shopping-driven fundraisers, including Thanksgiving pies, gift cards, and school pictures, as well as smaller sales with Square 1 Art, Flower Power, and Chuck E. Cheese. There are PTA discounts/proceeds associated with certain shopping sites, including the Tea Collection and spirit wear. Finally, there is bank interest.

In response to a question concerning the projected net proceeds of the 10th Anniversary Spring Carnival, Sophia noted the PTA has organized single fundraisers that have netted more than \$10,000.

For cash outflows, the PTA anticipates spending \$554,000 for academic enrichment, including TAs, teacher professional development and supplies, teacher wish lists, and enrichment programs that Principal Sonita previously discussed.

For the Lower Division, the PTA will be funding nine TAs, the largest number of TAs it has ever funded. That breaks down to two TAs per grade for Grades K-3 (one per class), and one TA for Grade 4. As Principal Sonita previously reviewed, there are five TAs currently working in the school, two TAs who are currently being onboarded, and two TAs who are a little further back in the process. The goal is to hire a total of nine. Further, the PTA has budgeted nearly \$158,000 for Lower Division enrichment programs and for the stepping up ceremonies for the Kindergarten and Fourth Grade. The Lower Division vendor-led electives include Cooking, Musical Theater and Hip Hop Dance.

For the Upper Division, the PTA has budgeted nearly \$110,000 to pay for services and resources including outside vendor-led enrichment programs and teacher-led electives (including the Math and Debate Teams's competition entrance fees), the maintenance of the hydroponics lab, curriculum-based special field trips (\$800 to each grade), and Eighth Grade graduation. The Upper Division vendor-led electives include Cooking, Chorus, Robotics, Soccer, and the Shakespeare Festival.

The PTA is funding schoolwide services and resources including teacher wish lists, teacher professional development, class libraries for new NYC DOE English language curricula, a printer and other supplies requested by Principal Sonita, and presentations where five to eight authors speak at schoolwide themed enrichments.

The PTA has an Enrichment Committee that surveys middle school students, parents and teachers every year to get feedback about what enrichments they would like to see. Q300 will evaluate the fall electives and determine whether to continue them in the Spring term.

The PTA's operating expenses include Welcome Breakfast for new families, a Back-to-School Picnic at Rainey Park, and expenses associated with the PTA meetings. The PTA maintains a Financial Aid Fund for any students who may have difficulty funding a field trip. Finally, the PTA funds the Diversity, Wellness and Green Committees (\$300 per committee).

The PTA has \$4,000 in operating expenses, including website hosting, auction platform, and insurance. In addition, earlier this year, the PTA had to pay certain fees associated with opening a new bank account and ordered new checks because of bank fraud; there were some fees associated with the creation of the new account and the ordering of checks. The PTA is looking to streamline communications this year with a new tool, which will mean additional expenses.

In response to a comment that the PTA plans to spend more this year than it will be taking in, Sophia explained that the PTA has rolled over a healthy surplus over the years. The surplus increased during the beginning of the pandemic with DOE restrictions on in-person activities prevented the hiring of TAs and in-person enrichment programs. Parent Coordinator Jenny Lando noted that the DOE's Office of Family and Community Empowerment (FACE) encourages PTAs to spend their surpluses, recognizing that there may be rollover from year to year. Since 2015, the PTA has been fortunate to have surpluses at the beginning of each school year to enable it to "hit the ground" each September and fund budget priorities such as TAs and enrichment programs. (Otherwise, the PTA would have to fundraise at the beginning of each school year and delay the start of these resources).

A parent commented that this year's graduating Eighth Graders were the Fourth Graders who did not have a moving up ceremony because of the pandemic, and asked that additional consideration be given to them this year.

Sophia reported that this budget is the largest spend ever in terms of academic support; the second largest was in 2018-2019. The largest contributors to this increase are the TAs. The PTA increased Lower Division enrichments by 50% of what the PTA spent last year, and increased Upper Division enrichments by 186%.

Sophia noted that last year, the PTA budgeted to fund eight TAs (and increase their pay from \$15 to \$20 per hour) and thereby spend down some of its money. However, due to hiring issues, only a few TAs were hired. This year, the PTA hopes to bring in nine TAs (a full complement is eight, but it was decided at the June 2023 PTA meeting that an additional TA should be funded to support the Third Grade). In addition, for Third and Fourth Graders, the PTA is adding Robotics as a full-year elective and offering new electives such as Cooking, Musical Theater, and a full year of Dance. In the Upper Division, the PTA is adding Robotics, Cooking, Dance, Chorus and Soccer as vendor-led enrichments. Doing a quick comparison to what the PTA has budgeted in the past pre-pandemic, the PTA is seeing the same percentage of its budget (47%) go to TAs. It has reduced the percentages on professional development/supplies/teacher wish lists. Lower Division enrichment is about the same (28-29%). Upper Division enrichment has increased significantly. Pre-pandemic, it was about 13% of its budget. This year, it is 20%.

In response to a question as to why the PTA is not increasing its fundraising targets if the PTA will be spending so much money, Sophia explained that last year, the Direct Appeal had its best year since Covid (\$202,000). This year, the goal is \$230,000. This is not as high as the PTA's pre-pandemic intake from the Direct Appeal, but it is a reasonable target.

In response to a question from a parent about the suggested ask for the Direct Appeal, Direct Appeal Committee member David Wang responded that the suggested amount is \$1,500 for a student in the Lower Division and \$1,000 for a student in the Upper Division, which is comparable to the suggested amounts at the other citywide schools. David noted that the Q300 community is economically diverse and that families should give what makes sense given their family budgets.

Sophia closed the Treasurer's Report by noting that this year's projected closing balance would be the lowest in recent years. If the PTA looks at the projected balance as a percentage of the spend, meaning will the PTA be able to fund the same level of spend next year, the answer is no. What the PTA is able to do next year depends on its fundraising efforts this year. Sophia and Amy will provide monthly Treasurer's Report to help gauge this.

There are three takeaways: (1) This is the largest academic support budget in Q300's history; (2) the PTA is spending its healthy reserves; and (3) The current projected balance will not support the same level of academic support next year. In April or May 2024, the PTA will need to start making decisions about what the PTA can fund for the next school year.

Finally, Sophia reported that the PTA collected some Direct Appeal installment payments over the summer, as well as bank interest. Over the summer, the PTA paid an initial installment of \$15,000 for the TAs. There were some modest fundraising expenses left over from last year. Finally, the PTA had to purchase new checks in connection with the new bank account.

Mauricio noted that budget items like TAs and enrichments need to be paid for at the beginning of the year. In the second half of the year, if there is a projected shortfall, the PTA will have to evaluate cutting some of these items or fundraising more in order to provide the same level in the 2024-2025 school year.

David Wang noted that the PTA has a whole school approach and that money is raised and allocated irrespective of the grade level that raises the money. He asked that the PTA continue think about how to bring in money from outside the immediate community.

A motion was made and seconded to pass the 2023-2024 budget, as amended. The motion carried.

Mauricio suggested that parents ask their children about the enrichments they had ranked highly, and the enrichment they had been placed in. He reported that, according to Principal Sonita, Cooking was the most popular choice.

F. School Leadership Team (SLT) Report

SLT parent member Maria Hantzopoulos reported that an SLT meeting was held on September 26, 2023. The meeting was in-person. The SLT picked meeting dates for the upcoming year and established some group norms. The SLT reviewed its bylaws, which is done every year. The SLT received the updates from Principal Sonita that Sonita previously provided at this meeting as part of her Principal's Report. The SLT also reviewed the school's budget in order to see where money is coming from and where money is going. The school has lost some staff who have not been replaced, and Principal Sonita explained where that money is going in the budget. The FY2023 school budget is available at <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/schools/Q300>, Budget and Finances, Budget Summary.

The SLT reviewed the Comprehensive Educational Plan (CEP). The Chancellor set new priorities in June 2023, which will inform the CEP goals. This year the Chancellor's priorities are learning to read well, the physical and emotional safety of students, a high quality academic experience for all students, students graduating college and being career ready and having a strong plan for economic security, and redesigning the system to be more inclusive and responsive for parents and families.

Finally, the SLT reviewed the Q300 Student Expectations Guide. The SLT received reports from Principal Sonita and the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) representative, Ali Lisberger. The UFT is trying to advocate for virtual SLT meetings to make the meetings more accessible to family observers. SLT meetings are currently being held in-person because they are governed by the Open Meetings Law, which currently requires that such meetings be held in-person.

Minutes are approved at SLT meetings and are immediately posted on the Q300 and PTA websites.

Mauricio López-Campero reported that a parent SLT member elected in June 2023 has since resigned. Elections for that position will take place at the next PTA meeting on October 26, 2023.

G. Committee Reports

1. Membership Vice-President Afrosa Amin reported on the Back-to-School Picnic, which was held at Rainey Park. Thanks to everyone who came. It was wonderful to meet the new parents. The Membership Committee is planning for the next event, the Costume Party. As soon as a date and venue are finalized, a notice will be sent to the community. A costume swap is also planned. In addition, a movie night is being planned for November.
2. Fundraising Co-Vice-President Christina Lee reported that the Tea Collection fundraiser will run from October 7-15. There is a 15% discount associated with all purchases, and the PTA receives a 15% kickback on all purchases. The Flower Power fundraiser is ongoing and will end on October 15. The PTA is also partnering with Box Tops for Education. Information about all the fundraisers, including how to take photos of box tops to get funds for the PTA, is available on the PTA website at <https://q300pta.org/fundraising-announcements/>. There are also shopping links posted on the PTA website for Mabel's Labels, Shutterfly, and Stop & Shop. The PTA gets kickbacks on purchases from these retailers. Please shop at retailers through <https://www.goodshop.com/>, where a percentage of each purchase can be designated to go to the PTA. The Thanksgiving Pie fundraiser is being planned with pies from Betty Bakery and La Guli. Maria Hantzopoulos is organizing a Pie Committee. To volunteer for the Pie Committee, please email q300pies@q300pta.org. Parent Coordinator Jenny Lando recently sent out an email regarding school photos from Stomping Ground. Upper Division photos will take place on October 2 and Lower Division photos will take place on October

27. To volunteer for photo day, please email Jenny Lando at jennylando@q300.org. The Fundraising Committee is planning a carnival to celebrate Q300's 10th anniversary. To volunteer, please email fundraising@q300.org. The PTA will also be printing 10th anniversary t-shirts. To volunteer, please email q300design@q300pta.org. Finally, a gathering at Uno Pizzeria & Grill is being planned where teachers, staff and families can meet the PTA Board. More information about that will be shared shortly. Fundraising Co-Vice-President Lisa Christopher added that the Fundraising Committee is looking for fundraiser leaders as well as "behind-the-scene" fundraiser organizers, who can help draft and send out fundraising email. Some open fundraisers include Book Fair, Gift Cards, Stepping Into Summer, and the Summer Readathon. In addition, the Auction Committee could use some help. Christina reported that the 2023 Summer Read-a-Thon raised a little over \$1,500, which was not as much as the 2022 Summer Read-a-Thon, but still a good result. The PTA will try to boost participation this coming summer. Lisa thanked all students who participated in the Read-a-Thon and said she was impressed by the book reviews and reading logs that were submitted. The grade winner, which received \$200 towards their classroom library, was Fourth Grade. David Wang asked on behalf of himself and Direct Appeal Co-Chair Sue Sekar that parents give to the Direct Appeal campaign that raises donations to pay for crucial enrichment programs, services, and resources that deepen the learning experience at Q300. The PTA will kick-off the Direct Appeal in early October. Contributions can be made via students' backpack or the PTA website. The PTA preference is for donations to be made by check so that the PTA does not have to pay the credit card fees associated with online donations. There is a suggested ask; some people give more and some give less. He noted that, "If the amount you give is meaningful to you, it is meaningful to us." Some employers match employee's contributions. The PTA cannot accept donations via Zelle; however, it can accept donations via Venmo. In January and February, the PTA will issue thank-you letter with the specific donation amount and the date of the donation for income tax purposes.

3. Executive Vice-President Yvette Choy read a report on behalf of Communications Vice-President Betty Ruan. There are many details on the PTA website about how to connect with the Board. Please consider joining the grade-specific WhatsApp group for timely Q300 info. The PTA will be sending out, through a backpacked flyer, a parent contact survey, a volunteer survey, and info about how to connect with the grade chat.
4. Community Affairs Vice-President Salua Baida explained that the Community Affairs committee is responsible for engaging Q300's larger community, which includes the PS 17/IS 126 communities that share campuses, District 30, and local elected officials. The committee will be outreaching to local elected officials to assist in funding capital expenses for the Q300 campuses. It also will be coordinating joint movie nights with Q300's co-located school communities. Finally, the PTA will be participating in District 30's Trunk or Treat scheduled for October 27 at Astoria Park. District 30 schools will send cars with trunks of candy, decorations, small toys and other items that students can choose from. To volunteer or contribute, please email communityaffairs@q300pta.org.
5. Lower Division Representative Erica Soto Eng reported on behalf of herself and Upper Division Representative Sunilda Caraballo. Erica announced the Class Parents for 2023-2024, and thanked them for stepping up.

H. Election Committee

A motion was made to nominate Kevin Gallagher, Ella Drummond, Tomonari Nagano, and Heather Clarke to serve on the Nominations/Election Committee for the 2023-2024 academic year. The motion was seconded. The Members then present approved the motion.

I. Approval of the Minutes

A motion was made to approve the June 24, 2023 general membership minutes. The motion was seconded. The Members then present approved the motion.

J. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 8:40 pm ET. The next general membership meeting will be held on October 26, 2023 at 6:30 pm ET on a virtual platform.

Kate Swearengen & David William Wang, Co-Secretaries