

Syosset Council of PTAs

PTA FALL PRESS CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 2016

To the Syosset School Community,

The Syosset Council of PTAs provides an opportunity for parents to communicate directly with the Superintendent and the central administrative staff at regularly scheduled press conferences. Questions are submitted through the elementary, middle school and high school PTA or PTSA Press Conference Chairperson for each school in the district. The committee reviews and collates the questions and submits them to the administrative staff to be answered at the press conference. The written answers are then distributed through the elementary schools. Secondary school parents receive their copies in the mail.

It should be noted that if a question was submitted and does not appear in this publication, the question was either asked within the past two years or does not pertain to district administrative policy. If your particular question was not answered, please contact your PTA press conference representative. Also, it is not necessary to wait for a press conference to have a question answered. Sometimes, a brief phone call to the building principal or PTA president can easily resolve a concern.

GENERAL:

1. With shared buses, if a bus arrives late to the high school or middle school, it is subsequently late to the elementary school. In the afternoon, this can result in children arriving home as much as 45-60 minutes after dismissal time, even when they are only a short distance from the school. The same holds true for buses that have lengthy runs. From year to year, it appears there is little variation in the bus runs and therefore, the same children end up spending long time periods on the bus. Is there a way for the district to reroute buses from year to year to shorten the amount of time that the last few students on the route spend on the bus?

Bus routes are reviewed annually and are adjusted year to year based on changes in ridership. When possible, routes are designed so that students picked up first in the morning (longest time on the bus) will be dropped off first at dismissal (shortest time on the bus). However, this is not always possible due to traffic patterns, geographic location of stops, routing efficiencies and safety concerns. The district has proposed new configurations for traffic flow and bus stops at South Woods and the high school which will help streamline dismissal. The time savings will cascade to the elementary schools.

2. Is it possible for the district to indicate on the calendar or on the website if it is a red day or a white day at the middle schools and the high school?

The district will investigate this possibility with the student management system software to see if we are able to comply with this request.

3. Are sports coaches at the middle school and high school levels required to have proven experience in the sport(s) they are coaching, beyond holding a coaching certification?

Physical education teachers are permitted to coach with valid certification. Certified teachers need only complete coursework in order to coach. Non-teacher coaches must first apply for a temporary coaching license from the State Education Department. All coaches must be certified in First Aid, CPR and AED and must complete a concussion management course every two years. When possible, the Athletic Director looks for sports-specific expertise.

4. How often are head coaches reevaluated in their positions? Each year certain sports seem to have the same issues with multiple player injuries, or poor playing strategies, yet the head coaches rarely change. Is there a written policy pertaining to the evaluation and rotation of head coaches, and if not, would the district consider creating one?

Head coaches are evaluated at the conclusion of each season and are retained when there is a positive evaluation. Rotating coaches has not been considered as continuity and stability are vital for the success of each individual program.

5. Can the Code of Conduct for student athletes be more specific and definitive in respect to good sportsmanship, proper respect and good attitude? Can it include a section about correct maintenance and use of equipment? Can the athletes' code be updated to prohibit the use of e-cigarettes/vapor cigarettes?

The Code of Conduct for student athletes and coaches includes a section that deals with sportsmanship, respect and a healthy attitude. Coaches are expected to enforce proper conduct as it relates to care of equipment. There is a section of the code which is related to tobacco use. A change in the Code of Conduct to include e-cigarettes/vapor cigarettes will be forthcoming.

6. Is there currently a specific level of the Code of Conduct for student athletes that must be maintained in order for a player to continue playing on the team?

The Code of Conduct outlines proper etiquette as well as expectations for each student athlete. Coaches are expected to address proper conduct with their athletes. Each violation of the Code of Conduct is handled individually.

7. Why is a student allowed to participate on a school sports team after having been suspended? Is a coach notified when a student has been suspended from school?

While on suspension, students are not permitted to participate in any school activity. Once the suspension has ended and the student has complied with all disciplinary requirements, they may return to their respective activities. Coaches are notified when a student has been suspended.

8. Using Edline, Infinite Campus and Google Classroom all at the same time is confusing for both students and parents. What is the timeframe for the district to make a selection? Once the selection is made, will all teachers be required to use this tool?

The district recognizes the challenge of using multiple platforms. Infinite Campus is our student data management system and used for attendance, schedules and grade reporting. Edline and Google Classroom are used for homework online. Google Classroom, with features such as collaboration, digital submission of assignments, etc., is only being used as a vehicle for posting homework online and is being piloted in some classrooms as part of our technology pilot program. At this time, no one program can be used for both student management and homework as each one is unique in its functions. The technology workgroup is aware of this challenge and has it as a priority.

9. Currently, each school can use a different photographer for school pictures. Is it possible for the district as a whole to utilize one vendor? This would allow parents with children in multiple buildings to take advantage of the "3rd child free" price packages that many photographers offer as well as other special offers for multiple children, such as yearbook purchases.

School photographers are arranged by student council, student clubs and/or the PTA. The district will encourage the student governments to coordinate procedures. If the district takes a larger role, we will be bound by our procurement guidelines.

10. Raw vegetables are available for purchase in the middle and high school lunchrooms each day but can they be offered as a vegetable option with the "meal"?

Raw baby carrots and sliced tomatoes are included as a vegetable option on several days during the week in the monthly menu cycle. Aramark does offer vegetable crudites, which consist of grape tomatoes, celery sticks, and carrots sticks, packaged in 10 oz. clear plastic cups with lids, and accompanied by a soufflé cup of dressing. They have always been an a la carte option. Aramark reports that the larger portion size, labor to compose, and disposable goods costs of the vegetable and dressing cups and lids contribute to the higher product and production costs vs. meal-included vegetables. However, Aramark agreed to create a smaller sized crudité option that could be available with the meals.

11. If a security guard in a school is called away from his/her post for an emergency or for any other reason, who covers that post in his/her absence?

In the event a security guard at any school is called away from their post, there is communication between the security guard, the main office personnel and the custodial staff to provide back up coverage.

12. If there are multiple negative requests for a teacher, is that taken into consideration in his/her evaluation and in his/her assignment for the following year?

Teacher evaluations are based on the district's Annual Professional Performance Review Plan. Currently the district's plan is aligned to Education Law §3012-d, in which teachers' evaluations are based on a matrix of observations and student learning objective scores. Principals seek to assign teachers based on certification, tenure area, as well as the skills needed to support the academic, social, and emotional success of all learners. Principals incorporate parent feedback into their leadership of each building.

13. How is the GPA calculated in the middle school and the high school? Can it be included on the report card and/or on the parent portal?

The middle school GPA is a numeric calculation of letter grades that are converted to an eight point scale. An explanation of this conversion can be found on the middle schools' website through the link entitled 'honor roll and grading scale,' and the GPA for the middle school can be viewed on the report card. A student's high school GPA is based on his/her accumulated high school credits, including all high school credit bearing courses taken in grade 8. All honors and Advanced Placement courses are weighted for the computation of the GPA. All grade point averages are on the student's profile page on Naviance. The district will create a link explaining the detailed GPA formula for high school students. Each high school parent and student has an access code to view the Naviance page. As always, parents are encouraged to reach out to their child's guidance counselor with their questions.

14. Can the district provide an update on the technology pilot program, the expected duration of it and how children will be chosen for it? Will the same children continue to be in the program once they begin? Can the district provide more information for parents as to what is being done with the pilot program so that everyone remains informed?

The current status of the technology pilot programs can be found on the district's website from the Technology Workgroup link under Curriculum and Instruction. The current round of technology pilots were selected through an application process that was open to all teachers last spring. The pilots that began this year are expected to continue throughout the school year. Many of the pilots that began this year are grade level or subject expansions of the first round of technology pilots.

15. When items in the Code of Conduct or school rules are broken, how does the school/district ensure that consequences for violations are uniformly implemented?

All schools must adhere to the code. All infractions result in consequences. That consequence is calibrated to the severity of the incident and to prior disciplinary history, disability, etc. of the student. Not all these factors will be apparent to non-staff members.

16. In a situation involving bullying, what is the process for determining the consequences of the bully's actions and who, specifically, is involved in making this determination? Are there guidelines that are followed for determining the consequences, so that they are consistent for the actions from situation to situation and more stringent for repeat offenders? Why are the student who was bullied and his/her parents not privileged to information regarding the consequences imposed?

The district takes all acts of bullying very seriously. The process for determining consequences for bullying includes an investigation of a complaint made by a student, parents, or teacher. After completion of the investigation, a determination is made as to whether the incident or action meets the bullying standards under the Dignity for All Students Act (DASA) policy guidelines, which in turn provides a range of appropriate remedial measures. By law, students and their parents will receive a verbal review of the results of the investigation but are not entitled to information regarding the consequences imposed on another student because the consequences become a part of the "offender's" school record and, therefore, may not be shared and are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

17. Once Response to Intervention (RTI) has been initiated for a student and it's decided that a more intensive intervention level is needed, who makes sure the support is given in a timely manner?

It is the building principal's responsibility to ensure that all IST service determinations are implemented in a timely fashion. The determination of the provision of support services through the RTI model is made by the building Instructional Support Team (IST). Members of the IST include the building principal, developmental learning teacher, classroom teacher, special education teacher, and related service providers. The frequency, duration, and type of service, as well as who will be responsible for delivering the service, is finalized by that team.

ELEMENTARY:

1. What is the rationale behind having only one birthday celebration with food per month?

The district spent a year long process to reduce the potential for accidental exposure to life threatening food allergies and improve our response should it occur. The rationale behind having one birthday celebration per month is to reduce the days on which food is brought into the classrooms, which in turn reduces the exposure to foods that can potentially cause allergic reactions. On the days in which food is brought into the classrooms for these celebrations, it is from a pre-approved snack list which also limits the types of foods. Further, on these designated days, school personnel, including nurses, are on higher alert for foods that don't adhere to the list. The safety of all students is a shared responsibility.

2. Can a dance program or other elective programs be made available for physical education?

The Commissioner's regulations require all elementary students to participate in the district's physical education program. Currently, our physical education curriculum contains parts of the dance elements in the primary grades. Electives are offered at the high school level and include various dance offerings.

3. How are food allergies being handled in the cafeteria? What is the protocol for establishing tables for allergies and how is it implemented? How often is it reviewed to make sure it's working properly?

The schools have reduced allergen tables. We ask students who bring peanut or tree nut-based lunches (peanut butter, almond butter, peanut containing granola, etc.) to avoid these tables. Every effort is being made to isolate these sometimes airborne allergens, and special cleaning procedures are used for these tables. The principals have the opportunity to review these procedures on an ongoing basis based on observation and feedback.

4. Is it possible for extra help to be on a day that is consistent throughout the school and proprietary to avoid conflicts with other morning activities?

In most schools, extra help by classroom teachers is offered on Wednesdays to avoid conflicts with other early morning programs such as chorus, band, orchestra, art enrichment and other extra help sessions provided by support teachers such as the speech teacher or resource room teacher. In some cases, depending on a teacher who is shared among buildings, a conflict may exist. This topic will be added to an elementary principals' meeting agenda. Parents who have concerns should reach out to their child's teacher or the building principal.

5. Will spacing for the two lunch periods be reevaluated each year as enrollment changes?

Master schedules at the buildings are reviewed each year based on expected enrollment numbers. There are advantages to a single lunch period that allow for the maximization of instructional time, teacher collaboration and space for lunch or indoor recess. However, as with any change, we will review the lunch schedule possibilities in the spring and summer as we select schedules and finalize enrollment.

6. Students take many benchmark tests in addition to state exams. Is it possible to compile a list, by grade, of all of the assessments for the year, along with how the results will be utilized, so that parents can stay informed?

The list of assessments was updated this year and parents can access this information on the website. A number of pre-tests and benchmark assessments have been eliminated as the district's APPR Plan was revised.

7. There are many services available in our district, on both the enrichment and intervention levels; however, parents are not always aware of them. Is it possible to compile a list of these services, as well as the qualifying factors for each, so that parents are aware of what is available for their child?

General education reading, math, and writing support services, as well speech/language and occupational therapy support, are available in all buildings. The determination for the need for any of these services for a student is made by the building Instructional Support Team (IST). Each student's learning needs are reviewed by the IST; therefore, each student's unique performance data guides the determination for need rather than any one qualifying factor. Parents are encouraged to address any questions relative to the IST process to the building principal.

8. When the principal is not in the building, who is responsible for dealing with emergencies or parent/student issues that require immediate attention?

All Syosset schools have designated and trained faculty and staff responsible for dealing with emergencies or parent/student issues when the principal is not in the building. Our Building-Level Safety Plans delineate emergency response protocols in which our faculty and staff are well-versed, and identifies a School Safety Team that ensures a chain-of-command in the absence of the principal. At the middle school and high school levels, assistant principals, administrative assistants, guidance counselors and psychologists are designated to respond to parent/student issues.

9. Each grade level has a maximum teacher/student ratio. Is there a mandate governing an administrator/student ratio?

There is no mandate relative to administrative student ratio.

10. Each year, it appears as though supply lists are including an increasing number of items for use by the classroom/teacher as opposed to the individual student. What is the annual cost that teachers are reimbursed for supplies? Are common supplies ordered and distributed by each school? Is there a way to reduce the amount of classroom/teacher supplies being added to the list of items that students purchase?

The district provides all educational supplies for the teachers. Teachers may not be reimbursed for voluntary purchases. Common supplies by grade level for individual use are coordinated and ordered, in most cases, by the school's PTA. Parents should reach out to their child's teacher to assess where a reduction in the amount of supplies can be made.

11. Beginning in 6th grade, students are required to use an agenda book to record homework assignments. Currently, some elementary schools use them, which allows for students to learn how to use the book prior to the start of 6th grade. Can this become standard practice in all elementary schools?

The use of agenda books at all elementary schools will be reviewed to provide a more consistent practice.

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

1. Can parents and students be informed about the Nassau BOCES, non-special education schools, such as Barry Tech and Long Island School for the Arts, during 8th grade planning meetings and then again in high school programming meetings?

Students may attend Nassau BOCES in their junior and senior year. High School Counselors discuss these options during programming and individual meetings with their students. Additionally, students who are interested in these programs can attend the annual "Taste of Tech" day which provides tours of the facilities. As part of the transition planning meetings, the high school and middle school counselors will present a full scope of the program, for all students.

2. In the past, 8th grade students were provided with a scientific calculator and it was theirs to keep, even after high school graduation. Currently, under a new policy, calculators are "loaned" to the students, they remain school property and must be returned. What was the rationale behind that change? Can parents be provided with an option of purchasing the calculator from the school, where the cost would be less than the standard retail price, due to volume purchasing?

The school district distributes calculators in a similar manner to textbooks. They are distributed at the beginning of the year and then collected at the end of the year. The calculators are district property and giving them away would be considered a gift of public funds, which is not permissible under New York State Law. The district purchases calculators from vendors who have New York State contracts or BOCES contracts. We are not permitted to re-sell them.

3. Why are middle school students allowed to play on high school teams? When 7th and 8th grade students "play up" on a high school sports team, what is being done to ensure their safety, given the possibility of a significant size difference among players? Is the Physical Maturity Chart being adhered to?

Some particularly gifted middle school athletes may be permitted to try out for the high school program. The varsity coach is responsible for overseeing this process with the Athletic Director. The NYS process that is required to "move up" is called the Athletic Placement Process. The maturation portion of the test is administered by the chief medical officer for the school district prior to the physical component of the process being given. The developmental readiness and safety of every student is paramount in the decision to move them up to the high school level.

HIGH SCHOOL:

1. High school sports teams can have considerable expenses that must be absorbed by the student. Can the parents be provided with estimated expenses for the season prior to tryouts? This will allow parents to decide, if they want/ have the ability to make the financial investment in the sport.

There should be little expense to an individual student in order to participate on a high school athletic team. Any student who has difficulty meeting team expenses should speak directly with the coach or athletic director. Booster club events (outside of the season) would help to raise money to offset any cost that a student could incur for the possible expenses listed below:

1. Teammates buying sweatshirts, sweat pants, tee shirts, etc.
2. Varsity team trips out of state or trips that require an overnight stay
3. Booster Club fees/ costs vary from team to team
4. Outside facility training expenses- out of season and voluntary

There is no requirement that any student must pay out any money to participate on a high school interscholastic team. Outside training is also voluntary and does not impact the tryout process.

Under no circumstances will a child be denied participation due to their inability to pay for any of the above expenses. When we have students with a hardship, either the booster club or coach will pay the expense and the anonymity of the student will be paramount.

We are always reviewing our programs to ensure compliance with our rules.

2. At the high school, it appears that all sports tryouts for the season occur in the same week. Can tryouts be separated into two different weeks? This would allow a student to try out for a second sport if he/she failed to make the first one.

The starting dates for tryouts are determined by Section VIII. The need to fulfill the required number of practices prior to the start of the scheduled contests makes it necessary for all sports to start at the same time. This means that tryouts cannot be extended into a second week.

3. How would a club sport, such as hockey or crew, transition to a school sport?

Section VIII is the governing body for athletics in Nassau County. At the present time all crew and ice hockey teams compete at the club level.

4. How are the students for the high school Peer Education program chosen? Is there a system of checks and balances to determine if the students applying to the program are being truthful in their statements about what they did in middle school?

Students are selected in the spring of their 8th grade year. As part of the process, all students must fill out an application, hand in at least three teacher recommendation forms, and be interviewed by a panel made up of teachers, counselors, and current students.

5. Are teachers required to provide a syllabus showing the order of topics for the year, particularly for math classes? Can all math teachers be strongly encouraged to provide review sheets before each test? Does a time frame exist for teachers to return test grades to students?

Teachers are not required to provide a syllabus, however most teachers start their year providing this information to their students, along with their classroom policies, etc. Teachers also have information on their webpages that is readily available for all students. The review process is determined by the teachers and students are informed prior to their test how the review will be conducted. Teachers are routinely encouraged to return their test grades in a timely fashion. We want all students to succeed and we will continue to find ways to provide adequate support. Parents are encouraged to speak to their child's teacher to help alleviate their concerns.

6. Can the Spring Parent-Teacher Conferences either be held on two nights, or increased in length to three hours? It is extremely difficult to meet with all teachers in a two-hour time frame if you have more than one child and given the lengths of some of the lines.

The two-hour Spring Conference was added a few years ago to accommodate the parent request to have an evening meeting. Parents are also encouraged to reach out to their child's teacher in the event that they are not able to meet with the teacher. Last year, the district implemented a scheduling software program for the middle school evening parent teacher conferences which was well received.

7. The Nassau BOCES Doshi STEM Institute, at the Long Island High School for the Arts, closed in June 2016 due to low enrollment and funding shortages. Are there any plans to create a similar STEM-based program for the Syosset High School students interested in a more advanced STEM curriculum?

There are already a number of STEM-based programs in place to meet the needs of students who wish to pursue more advanced STEM curricula.

- 1) This year, our science research program has produced 9 semi-finalists for the Siemen's Competition and 2 regional finalists. Students in the Research Program can engage in science and social science research, making it an interdisciplinary program.
- 2) Our high school science department offers an AP class in every available science content area, for a total of 6 AP classes.
- 3) SY-STEM Robotics continues to grow and our students work towards competing in the FIRST Robotics Technical Challenge each year. There is a partnership with surrounding districts at Composite Prototyping Center where students collaborate, build and program their robots.
- 4) We have Maker Spaces in both middle schools and are in the process of utilizing Maker Spaces or Fab Lab in the elementary schools. Students at all levels have been participating in the 'hour of code' as well. The high school is currently planning to expand their 3-D printing capacity, renovate science lab spaces and develop new STEAM-based elective courses.

We are also always thinking about ways in which we can meet the future needs of our students. These components will enhance what we have in place and allow for us to build new programs.

SEPTA:

1. New York State Education Department (NYSED) has requested feedback on the Common Core Standards and the revised Common Core Standards. Has the school district provided any feedback based on the needs of the special education students?

The district's review of the revised Common Core Standards is ongoing. In its review, the district carefully considers the impact these standards will have on all of our students. As the district prepares to address these Learning Standards, the need for instructional support and accommodations of our students with disabilities will be monitored by the building level Instructional Support Team and the Committee on Special Education (CSE).

2. Syosset High School offers American Sign Language (ASL) as a world language. However, it is not offered in the middle schools. For children with dyslexia, ASL can be a good solution for the world language requirement for graduation. Having to wait until high school to begin this course of study puts these students behind their peers. With the new graduation requirements, is it possible to begin offering ASL at the middle school level?

Middle school students currently have three world language options – French, Italian or Spanish. Students with disabilities are given the support necessary to succeed in their world language class in accordance with their IEP. Students who are interested in learning ASL are encouraged to begin in 9th or 10th grade, which allows them to complete a three level sequence in the language before graduating.

3. Are all teachers, both regular education and special education, required to keep progress-monitoring data and provide it to the parents upon request?

All teachers retain performance data on students in order to issue student grades for report cards. These data are shared with parents upon request. The progress monitoring data for RTI Tier II/ III services and IEP annual goal achievement are collected by the student's intervention service provider and/or the student's special education teacher. These data are also available upon request. Parents are encouraged to contact the building principal should further information be desired.

4. If a child is suspected of having Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), is it required that they be tested by the school district or can the parent seek private testing?

A private diagnosis of ADD should be shared with the building psychologist. The parent and psychologist will determine together whether further diagnostic measures at the building level are warranted.

5. If a child is classified with ADD, and has a disability categorized by Section 504 and not IDEA, is that child entitled to receive special education services?

Section 504 is a civil rights law designed to prohibit discrimination based on a disability in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. The IDEA is an educational entitlement law. Special education is the provision of specially designed instruction to a student who is identified as having an impairment that adversely affects his/her educational performance. The development of an Individual Education Program (IEP) which delineates annual goals and special education services for students among other things is regulated by the IDEA.

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6. On October 23, 2015, the US Department of Education sent a letter to educators offering guidance regarding the use of the terms dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia in evaluations, eligibility determinations and on IEP documents, as well as for us in determining other support services. Based on this letter, has the district made any changes?

The district continues to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of students to determine the need for special education services. If data supports the diagnosis of a reading/dyslexia, math/dyscalculia, or writing/dysgraphia disability, it would be so noted in the student's assessment report and his/her IEP under present levels of performance.

7. Experts have claimed that the ESSA, Every Student Succeeds Act, will have some positive and negative impacts on special education students. How does the district view the impact of ESSA on its special education students?

The district is in the process of reviewing the revised regulations of the ESSA which have been released recently. It is expected that the federal Department of Education will be issuing changes moving forward. The district will review new information as it becomes available.

8. There has been recent controversy over the negative impact of RTI on outcomes for dyslexic students. How does the district interpret these results? Based on these results and their interpretation, have there been any changes to how the district uses RTI for dyslexic students?

The district uses best practices to match reading interventions to the learning needs of the student as concluded by the study cited. A student whose data supports a diagnosis of dyslexia would be receiving a Tier II or III research-based reading intervention that directly addresses his/her phonological processing/word decoding skills in a multi-sensory format.

9. When a student is struggling in co-teaching classes, even with support (lab, workshop), but doesn't need general studies classes, what other services can be offered to him/her?

The need for additional special education support services would be reviewed by the Committee on Special Education (CSE). Based upon the student's performance data and functional assessment, the CSE would consider the continuum of services including related services, consultant teacher, resource room, or special class as well as the use of supplemental aids and accommodations to determine the appropriate level of service for the student.

**For detailed information on the continuance of services, please visit
www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/lawregs/sect2006.htm. This link will be added to the district's website.**