Notes on the CHSCA Meeting, Feb. 11, 2021

Chsca secretary John Landry led the meeting on Zoom, standing in for president Marybel Martinez, with Julie Gearan facilitating. Louis Toro, the lead guidance counselor at the school, was our main speaker for the 35-plus parents attending. John Landry also prepared these notes.

**College Applications for Juniors and Seniors**

Mr. Toro will host his usual assembly for parents of juniors in early March, on Zoom. All 287 juniors will soon be receiving a folder explaining the entire college application process.

He strongly recommended that juniors take the SAT at some point. Not only are most colleges likely to reinstate the SAT (or ACT) as recommended, but it’s required for a college degree in Education, and it’s much easier to take it now rather than in college. He added that the College Board (the nonprofit that offers the SAT) is holding a scholarship lottery for all students who take the test, regardless of scores.

The school will host the test in April, with the essay included, but the essay is ending after the June test. Subject tests are also going away, as colleges find the AP tests are enough of an equivalent.

Julie Gearan, who has been representing us at the Parent Advisory Council meeting, added that a state grant has paid for access to a SAT preparation website, <https://schoolhouse.world>.

Three interns from PC will be at Classical as usual this spring to help juniors search for colleges to consider. Each will work with cohorts of six students at a time. Then in September and October, he expects colleges to send representatives to Classical as was usual in pre-pandemic times. He also expects families will be able to visit most college campuses as early as June. But many colleges have now beefed up their online video tours for prospective students, especially rural colleges that saw a big drop in applications in the fall.

He urges juniors to start thinking now about applications. More and more students are applying early, usually November 1, which means the deadline for preparing the application is in October.

For financial aid, the Biden administration is working to boost federal support. It may forgive $10,000 in student loans, or even more. Pell Grants may go up as well.

As for seniors, many of them (and their parents) are wondering if colleges will be open in the fall. Several colleges have already committed to being open, including U-Mass. He said URI and RIC are shooting themselves in the foot by not committing now, when many seniors are deciding where to go -- while already deciding to raise tuition.

Parents asked if there was a way for seniors to talk to students at the various colleges they are considering, to learn about the student experience in lieu of campus visits. He said only a few colleges had set up a college match program with the school. He suggested we reach out to the school’s alumni association for a list of alums by college willing to talk to seniors. He also recommended that seniors look around on social media to get a flavor of the colleges. Some have “Day in the Life” Youtube videos.

**How Students Are Doing Generally**

He said this has been a tough year for the students, and he’s worried about the long-term implications. Zoom learning is not going well. Many students are depressed, in a funk, not keeping up with homework. Failures in classes are up 10%, and he’s hearing similar rates at other magnet schools. Many students are throwing in the towel on grades, unable to see into the future.

He confirmed what we heard at our last meeting, that the mid-term exams this year were glorified period tests, not the usual full exams. Most faculty complied with the request from the administrators. So at least some of the mid-term stress went away.

There will be some sort of graduation ceremony, but fewer than half of the seniors have ordered a cap and gown.

The Virtual Learning Academy has been a “nightmare.” 200+ kids signed up for it in the fall semester (close to a quarter of the student body), and twenty-five switched back to in-person for the spring semester. The counselors made a point of welcoming them to school, and you could see how glad they were to be around other kids again.

**Other Developments**

He said the Khan Academy tutorial channel is looking good, and the school may try it out. The College Board is making it available for free, at least for now.

It was hard to lose assistant principal Michael Marino mid-year (he moved to another high school in the district). Also he noted that every high school in the district got an extra guidance counselor this year, except for Classical. The pressure on the remaining staff at Classical is not sustainable. He told parents of kids assigned to Mr. Marino to check their guidance counselor or with him as needed, if they haven’t heard already.

AP exams this spring will be the first two weeks in May. They’ll be held in the gym, for both cohorts at once, with enough room for up to 180 students at a time. (The AP English exam is the biggest.). The online AP last spring was a disaster. There are intermittent dead spots for internet service all over the city, so some students had trouble even finishing the test.

**Closing reminders**

If you know parents who are not getting the Chsca emails, please have them write to [classicalparents@gmail.com](mailto:classicalparents@gmail.com). For parents on Facebook, we encourage you to join our Facebook page for various discussions; here’s the link:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1601927543238005/permalink/3540485292715544/>

Finally, Chsca is looking for new volunteers and leaders for next year, as everyone involved in the group this year is a parent of a senior. Please let us know – all commitment levels are welcome.

Classical High School Community Association (CHSCA)