Notes on the CHSCA Meeting, Jan. 14, 2021

Chsca secretary John Landry led the meeting on Zoom, standing in for president Marybel Martinez. A student, Milly Asherov, was our main speaker, and principal Scott Barr and assistant principal Brian Baldizar also spoke to 25-plus parents. John Landry also prepared these notes.

**Providence Student Union and the Mid-Term Exams**

Milly Asherov, a junior at Classical, told us about this group, which was formed about five years ago. It’s a student-run organization with chapters at all the public high schools in the city. The students are pushing for school improvements in several areas. In 2019 they helped to reduce the bus pass distance requirements so more students could get a pass. Last spring they pushed for making classes pass-fail during the pandemic. Their “Counselors not Cops” campaign aims to replace all school resource officers with social workers. Other items on their agenda are ethnic studies courses, reducing standardized testing, and setting up a principal’s group of student advisors. They’re also considering a regular newsletter to keep students and the community informed.

At our meeting, Milly focused on the concerns of Classical students about mid-term exams to be held in late January. A few other members of the Classical chapter joined Milly and contributed some thoughts. The chapter recently conducted an online survey of students and that found a lot of stress about taking the tests. Many students, especially sophomores and juniors, have been learning mostly online this semester. The chapter is asking the school to drop the exams or replace them with something less stressful.

Mr. Baldizar praised Milly’s initiative and courage, and recognized the higher levels of stress. He said the administration has asked teachers to lighten the mid-term stress, and most teachers have agreed. Year-long courses still need a mid-year checkup and assessment of some kind, but the school has some flexibility.

**Other Pandemic Issues**

In response to a question, Milly said the pandemic has affected student mental health. She said there’s been a good expansion of counseling services at the school, but most of the sessions are in the basement, in a “dungeon” room. She urged the school to find a room on the first floor, to help make students aware of the services.

About classes this year, she and other students said some teachers have reacted to online learning by adopting a “teach yourself” method with a lot of asynchronous work. She said a lot of students are struggling to keep up, especially in the harder classes. Teachers are on a spectrum – some have really risen to the occasion.