Notes on the October CHSCA Meeting, Nov. 12, 2020

Chsca secretary John Landry led the meeting on Zoom, as president Marybel Martinez had to miss. Assistant principal Brian Baldizar spoke at length to about 40 parents and other participants. John Landry also prepared these notes.

**Pandemic Update**

For all the disruption, many of the usual activities are continuing. Several fall athletic teams are competing, and the girls’ tennis team is in the state finals. The entrance exam for 8th graders is taking place this weekend online [since postponed], with about a thousand kids registered. As usual a team of Classical teachers and administrators will then assess the applicants on a mix of criteria, not just the test results.

Parent-teacher conferences will still happen, online, probably in early December. Look for the signup sheet soon. As always, please limit your choices to the teachers you most want to see, not all of your kid’s teachers.

After-school tutoring has been delayed, but should start up soon, mostly by zoom.

As for academics, the A/B system has been working pretty smoothly so far, and the kids are going along with masks. Everyone is worried about the recent uptick in infections across the state, so the principals are making sure the protocols about masks, daily screening, moving around, and eating are still followed.

A dozen-plus students have been infected, and we don’t know how, and whether there’s been any spread in school. Many of the kids live in dense housing, and the first few cases involved siblings. School districts are making different decisions about staying open, and that’s ok; there are no state-wide criteria. Classical will follow the city school district’s decision for all public schools. So far faculty have been coming in at a good rate.

Anytime a student calls in sick, the school treats it as a probable case. Covid isolation and testing is non-negotiable for probable cases. Once a student is positive, the DoH gets involved. The school goes over seating charts and calls the families of every nearby student, beginning a conversation. A few kids usually have to go into quarantine. So far the largest number of Classical students in quarantine from exposure has been eight.

In the past, an average of twenty kids called in sick each day; now the number is much higher, and all of those families get a call back.

Unfortunately the state Department of Health has been overwhelmed. Parents calling the department have had to wait for hours.

Some good news: No major health problems so far for any students or staff infected.

Some of the students have even recovered or never had symptoms in the first place. They’ve passed a subsequent test, and have come back to school.

The biggest issue is that the administrators can’t keep track of struggling students (for any reason), because they’re busy with pandemic duties. “We’re missing kids in real time.” Mental health was a worry before the pandemic, and now it’s harder to see problems because the kids are in school less. Referrals, appointments, etc are all slower to happen this year. Social worker Nikki Best has continued her three support groups and added a fourth, this one for teachers needing to de-stress.

The principals are also worried about teachers and other staff. Morale is low, and people are feeling unappreciated. Mr. Baldizar urged us to send supportive notes to faculty and other staff, handwritten or by email.

On ventilation, the school is supposed to receive a large shipment of HEPA filters to attach to the box fans. As the weather turns cold, teachers will be able to close the windows and still get good air circulation.

About graduation for seniors, that’s too far in the future to plan. Administrators are working on some way to have the traditional senior toga procession, which usually happens in Spirit Week in late October. It’s a big deal, helps kids feel part of a community, so the administrators are working on ideas to hold Spirit Week in the spring safely.

Assigning homework for days when kids are at home is tricky. Need to keep students moving forward.

Taking attendance in class has been tough. Sometimes teachers don’t know where kids are. This is not an issue for contact tracing – every kid gets called even if marked absent.

Grading is still in flux. Last spring it was simply Do No Harm, but now the school/district is looking to be accurate as well as gentle. Might go with A-B-C-Incomplete.

**Other Issues**

Here are the corrected responsibilities for each assistant principal by grade etc.:

9th grade, last names A-F, Mr. Baldizar; G-O, Mr. Marino; P-Z, Ms. Battey.

10th grade, Ms. Battey; 11th grade, Mr. Marino; 12th grade, Mr. Baldizar.

Mr. Baldizar urged us to write to him and other assistant principals about concerns. He said he may not be able to respond right away, but he will get back to parents.

About seniors applying to college, the school had to cancel some SAT tests. (It was offering SAT tests almost monthly, to get more kids to take it, but they’ve had to cancel some of them due to poor attendance. 85% of the kids signed up for the December test were from Massachusetts, so it was dropped.) Most colleges are not requiring tests this year. But the materials in support of early college applications this fall have gone out pretty normally.