

# **Minutes from the State of the School**

## **Parents Association Meeting**

### **February 12, 2003**

Head of School, Eileen Mullady, opened the meeting with a moment of silence in remembrance of Michael Fisher.

Parents Association President, Marjorie Kuhn, reported the following PA news:

- The Notification Chain is in place for weather and emergencies. It is very important that parents make sure information is current.
- The General Store, Horace Mann's online resource for books, gifts, clothing, etc. now offers access to 19 retailers.
- Benefit 2003, "The Gift", is coming up April 30<sup>th</sup>.
- The Benefit Online raised \$29,000 from the first auction. The second is now up and running. Please logon.
- The Nursery Division completed several successful Community Service Drives which gathered books, toys and food for the needy.
- The Nursery and Lower Divisions raised a record \$5500 from the Penny Harvest which benefited from the participation of Upper Division students.
- The Guidance Department has sponsored several workshops to help students as well as parents deal with issues such as teen cruelty and eating disorders.

Eileen Mullady reported the following regarding the State of the School:

- HM accepted 100 out of 268 applications for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, expecting to yield 50 new students, and 60 out of 165 applications for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, expecting to yield 50 new students. Nursery and Kindergarten acceptance letters are presently being mailed.
- 74% of HM seniors applied early decision to colleges with 53% being accepted.
- The building projects are completed with the theatre being the last. Dr. Mullady has moved into the original headmaster's office which is above the Admissions Department.
- Dr. Mullady is happily back in the classroom, experiencing the journey through Horace Mann firsthand, beginning in the 3's. After traveling through to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, she will report her findings.
- Security procedures for evacuation, relocation, lockdown and shelter-in-place have been implemented. Dr. Mullady gave every assurance that in the event of an emergency, the children will be well cared for.

Jeremy Leeds, Head of the Guidance Department, discussed the importance of collaboration between parents, students, the faculty and the administration in order to influence our children's development as mature, civil-minded, positive leaders. The department is supporting these relationships with parent workshops, student peer programs and individual counseling.

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Patricia Zuroski, Head of the Nursery Division, described the reorganization of the townhouse at 55 East 90<sup>th</sup> Street. Every teacher moved classrooms with the Kindergarten now occupying the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors and the 3's and 4's on the lower floors. A workshop was created on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and a new bathroom on the roof. The library and language arts programs have been linked. The 3's schedule was revised, allowing for more interaction among the children. The winter weather has distinguished this schoolyear, influencing the exhibits and curriculum.

Marian Linden, Head of the Middle Division, reported the following:

- 465 students make up the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades with girls outnumbering boys.
- Two sobering events have recently colored this year:
  - o The death of 7<sup>th</sup> grader, Michael Fisher – students participated in memorials and tributes to Michael and his family.
  - o The Columbia Shuttle disaster – the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was chosen to place experiments on the shuttle which did not return. A memorial ceremony was held February 13<sup>th</sup>.
- The End Teen Cruelty program, directed by Dr. Deborah Phillips, seeks to foster respect for all people. The program, which began with the 6<sup>th</sup> grade will be phased into the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Incidents of teasing and mean-heartedness between students online have been reported. Ms. Linden asked parents to instruct their children that they are not anonymous when they are online and to consider the following:
  - o Where is the computer?
  - o During playdates, are the children congregating around the computer?
  - o Do you know your child's password and/or should you?

Larry Weiss, Head of the Upper Division, reported that with the completion of the new buildings, the focus is now on the values that underly the physical foundation. The faculty and administration are examining the following issues:

- Academic expectations – achieving uniformity without stifling the creativity of teachers.
- Faculty support – opportunities to see the world outside HM in order to improve teaching ability.
- Decision making process - How are decisions made? Who makes them? What is fair?
- Diversity of faculty, students and viewpoints.
- Affordability of the school, breadth and depth of programs offered and accessibility to all.

A question and answer session followed, mediated by Wendy Siegel, parent and member of the Values and Ethics Committee. Please note that the following questions and responses are not stated verbatim. They are approximated in the interest of brevity.

**Question #1: Please explain the security measures currently in place given the heightened state of alert (ie. evacuation, shelter, food, water, medical supplies). How are these issues being explained to the students?**

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*Response by Eileen Mullady:* HM has emergency procedures in place for evacuation, relocation, lockdown and shelter-in-place. In the event of evacuation, students on HM's Riverdale campus would be taken to the Riverdale School and students in the Nursery Division would be taken to Church of the Heavenly Rest (5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 90<sup>th</sup> Street). In the event of a lockdown, students would be taken to the Middle and Upper Division buildings while the Nursery Division would remain at 55 East 90<sup>th</sup> Street. At this point, 50% of the necessary food, water and medical supplies have been collected with that effort continuing. The faculty has a meeting scheduled to determine what will be said to students about recent world events. We will stress that school is a safe place. We are likely to lean toward less information rather than more so as not to increase anxiety.

*Response by Larry Weiss:* The HM website will be helpful in the event of a crisis, particularly when phones are not operating consistently. It is critically important that the school have useful information to contact parents and to be able to release students.

**Question #2: What is the school's role regarding students' behavior during non-school sponsored activities? What is the school's thinking regarding school trips?**

*Response by Larry Weiss:* We are a day school. Parents are responsible for their children's behavior after school while the school is responsible for the students' behavior while on campus.

*Response by Eileen Mullady:* The school is leaning toward a policy of no trips outside the country. We would like to allow other trips to continue.

**Question #3: Why isn't the 'End Teen Cruelty' program in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades and will an age appropriate version of the program be implemented in the Lower Division?**

*Response by Marian Linden:* The 'End Teen Cruelty' program will be phased into the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades next year, as mentioned earlier.

*Response by Eileen Mullady:* The Lower Division, led by Steve Tobolsky, has been proactive, leading the way by incorporating our ideals into a formal 'Code of Conduct' and into its assemblies.

**Question #4: Why isn't foreign language more of a priority?**

*Response by Eileen Mullady:* Speaking as a French teacher, our language program has more breadth and depth than most schools and begins at a younger age. We offer instruction in 8 languages while most schools offer only 2, beginning with Spanish and French in the Lower Division.

*Response by Larry Weiss:* The new building has a state of the art language lab with 28 spaces and computers which access news and information from around the world.

**Question #5: The recent eating disorders exhibit aroused a lot of discussion. What sort of follow up will go on to address some of the issues regarding gender and body image that appear to have generated controversy?**

*Response by Jeremy Leeds:* The exhibit and workshops that dealt with eating disorders were ground breaking. They brought forth questions from students which are educational, such as:

- Where do I go for help?
- Should I tell on someone in order to get help for them?

The Guidance Department wants to become more active in dealing with these type of questions and in helping students to access help.

**Question #6: Homework assignments in the Middle Division can be difficult to manage at home. How much time should a child spend on homework?**

*Response by Marian Linden:* The guidelines for teachers are as follows: for 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades respectively, 20, 25 and 30 minutes per night per subject. Realistically, it could take a student 7 to 45 minutes to complete a '20 minute' assignment. We need periodic reminders for teachers. If a child cannot complete an assignment, parents should send in a note to the teacher. If the work is excessive, parents should speak to the teacher first, the grade dean next and then, if necessary, Marian Linden. The Middle Division has cut back on projects.

**Question #7: Does the school realize middle school students are experimenting with alcohol?**

*Response by Marian Linden:* Actually, there is more experimentation with sexuality than alcohol. Parents should ask questions of children and be watchful over their children's whereabouts.

*Response by Wendy Reiter, Guidance Director:* The 7<sup>th</sup> grade is discussing alcohol and tobacco.

*Response by Larry Weiss:* Children learn by watching their parents' actions.

**Question #8: Please address the tuition increase and facilities' fee. How do you justify the large debt undertaken to construct the new buildings?**

*Response by Eileen Mullady:* The tuition is high, however, it still does not cover our programs. We are watching what other schools are doing in terms of their programs and compensation. Our faculty was not being paid enough, so we significantly increased the teachers' salaries and that is where the increase went.

*Response by Bob Katz, Chair of the Board of Trustees:* The Board of Directors agonized over the issues affecting our revenues (ie. tuition and headcount) and our expenses (80% are accounted for by compensation and benefits). We examined the breadth and depth of our programs, class size and financial aid. Ultimately, the board decided to increase faculty compensation because we had fallen behind. Regarding the decision to go ahead with the renovation of the high school immediately following the construction of the new middle school, we wanted to fulfill the promise for a new school and deliver. Everything is a little uncomfortable now. Although it would have been more conservative to wait, construction costs in New York were increasing too rapidly and we didn't want to miss our opportunity. It was necessary to take on the debt in order to finance the buildings. We have spent \$103 million and have collected \$65 million through capital campaigns to date.

**Question #9: While we applaud the formation of new athletic teams, how are funds allocated?**

*Response by Larry Weiss:* The Athletic Department transcends all divisions. Clubs can start with funds from parents (ie. squash and fencing). A club evolves into a team depending upon competition from other schools.

In conclusion, Wendy Siegel thanked the faculty as well as the Values and Ethics Committee.