

**Wellesley Middle School - Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)  
Minutes from the FRIDAY, January 23, 2015 Meeting**

Welcome – Andrea Ortigosa de Doglioli welcomed everyone to the PTO Meeting

Speaker: Kate Mahoney, Head of WMS Guidance: Overview of the process for 8th grade transition

- Ms. Mahoney spoke about the WMS Course Selection process and the transition process in general. Course selection happens each year and school counselors help students with it. At the Middle School, School Counselors go into the classroom and talk to the kids and spend approximately 40 minutes talking to them about course selection. Many classes are required courses for students but as the kids get older and move up in grade, they have greater choices in terms of electives. Students are asked to bring this information to parents as parents always have a part in the process and have to give their children permission to take particular courses.
- Transition from Grade 6 to Grade 7 – (discussion with students in February). Students making this transition will be taught the new structure. In grade 7, students transition from houses (used in Grade 6) to clusters (used in Grade 7). In Grade 7, the students no longer travel with the same group of kids. There is some overlap of kids in classes but not the same kids in each class. Kids tend to like this change and are ready for it. Grade 7 is also a first for kids with respect to (1) taking a foreign language; and (2) having lunch table freedom – they can sit with whomever they want. This can be an exciting time for students.
  - 7th Graders are required to take certain specials – “lab” which is a guided study time, art, music and industrial technology. There is some choice with respect to requirements for performing arts – kids can choose orchestra, band, drama, chorus or a combination.
- Transition from Grade 7 to Grade 8 – (discussions with students in March). Students move from a cluster format to a team format – two teams in 8th grade – Team A and Team B. Kids in 8th grade are being prepared to make the transition to the high school where there are no teams. Grade 8 is the first time when math is level and students have many more elective course options. In Grade 8, students are no longer required to take the “required electives” (art, industrial technology, music and lab). They have many electives from which to choose.
- Transition from Grade 8 to Grade 9 – (February/March time period). This is the biggest transition. School Counselors meet with students on an individual basis for 20 minutes. Students have an opportunity to visit the High School. The High School has many electives from which the students can select -- journalism, film classes, art studio, television studio -- many options.
- Choosing Electives -- Kids want to be independent, they want to make their own choices, and they want to be with their friends. Parents need to be aware of these factors as they help their children with making choices about electives. We encourage kids to pick the elective that they really want as it is highly unlikely that they will get placed with friends. We really try to encourage kids to take what they are interested in rather than focusing on classes with their

friends because it does not happen – getting into class with friends. If you have any questions please call the guidance office.

Speaker: Tim Eagan, District wide head of Classical and Modern Language: What language can my 7th grader take and what do language options look like as they head to the high school?

- Grade 6 – Students are making the decision about whether to take a language in 7th grade and what language to take. Mr. Eagan would encourage most kids to take a language in 7th grade. If you are wavering on the decision, he would welcome the opportunity to talk with you and discuss the pros/cons of taking a language. In 7th grade, foreign language is a major subject and meets every day -- 5 days per week and there is homework involved. WMS language in 7th and 8th grade is the equivalent of one year of language at the High School.
- It is important for parents to have some level of connection with their children with respect to foreign language. That does not mean that parents need to speak the foreign language, but it is important for parents to check in with their child, ask them what they have learned. You do not need to know the language to help them; if you have concerns, reach out to the teachers -- do not wait for them to contact you.
- The majority of kids who complete 7th and 8th grade language at WMS move to 2nd year of language at the High School. HS Year 1 and 2 language classes are unlevleed and honors. The pace of the classes at the High School is much faster and there is more homework -- what the kids do in two years at WMS is the equivalent of one year at WHS -- kids tends to adjust to the faster pace after the first few months.
- Most competitive colleges want 2 years of consecutive studies for foreign language and they do not count any of the time that language was studied in middle school.
- In terms of studying two languages, it is possible but difficult to do schedule wise in the first year at the WHS. If a student wants to study two foreign languages, it is easier if they wait to do this in their 2nd year at the high school.
- Spanish 1 at WHS fills in quickly and priority is given to WHS freshmen. Sometime courses are under enrolled and, as a result, those language(s) cannot be offered so you need to be aware of that fact. (i.e., only three students enroll for a specific foreign language, then it cannot be offered that term.)
- Travel Program -- WHS has a great travel program. We have French exchange program and German exchange program. We hope to have more exchange programs in the future and are working on it. These exchange programs are vibrant exchange opportunities. Exchange program is open to WHS sophomores, juniors and seniors. Usually around 25 students participate; the exact number depends upon the number of students coming to us as part of the exchange. The program run every other year for each particular country.
- Five languages offered: French, Spanish, German, Mandarin Chinese and Latin
- If you have any questions, please contact him – email: [eagant@wellesleyps.org](mailto:eagant@wellesleyps.org)

Question and Answer Session for Tim Eagan:

**If a 7th grader starts a foreign language at WMS, can they change it at HS?** Yes.

**Can they switch foreign language in 8th grade?** No, because we do not have the capacity. There is no entry program for foreign language in the 8th grade.

**Native Speakers and placement into more advanced language classes** -- At WHS we can test a child who has foreign language capacity already and place them in the proper class. We do not have that capacity at the middle school.

**Is there is slower paced foreign language program?** Yes. We have a program which is good for kids who did not take a language in middle school or who are hesitant to take a language. This course is designed for kids who want to eventually take Spanish 2 but need more time. This course breaks Spanish 1 class down and teaches it over a 2 year period. [Spanish A and B are open for juniors and seniors only -- these classes are for kids who are not planning to move to Spanish 2.] Mr. Eagan encourages parents to talk to him or school counselor about proper placement.

**Can a student who took 7th and 8th grade language move to language 1 at the WHS and repeat?** Students are only allowed to repeat the first year of a language when it is in their best interest. Sometimes students want to repeat because they are nervous about the pacing. We need to support them in moving forward. For some students it makes sense to repeat. Repeating is possible but done in a formal way with a teacher recommendation.

Speaker: Thom Carter, WPS Director of Visual Arts: What art classes are available for 8th graders?

- Mr. Carter encouraged parents to have their children take an elective in art; legislation pending in Massachusetts requiring a year of visual or performing art for admission to MA state schools; Wellesley has a winning Art Dept.; won two prizes last year including the American Vision Winner
- Wide variety of art language - two dimension and three dimension – some classes have pre-requisites and some do not. (i.e., drawing, painting, artists' journal, printmaking).
- Encouraged parents not to overextend their children too much in their freshman year of high school because if a student has to either move up or down a course level, it can have the ramification of bumping them out of their elective course.
- Popular classes –
  - Photography is the hardest elective to get into at WHS-- keep trying to get in-- it is a fabulous class which is taught the old fashion way. Kids develop pictures in a dark room. If your child likes photography but an art elective does not fit in their schedule or they cannot get in to an art class, there are clubs they can join. For example, the photography club.

- Ceramics is a very popular art elective. WHS has both wheel and advanced wheel classes.
- Metal classes – Wellesley is one of the few districts that has metals at both middle school and high school.
- New Electives/Courses -- printmaking, small scale sculpture, and studio 2D/3D. This studio class is terrific and projects will be connected by theme.
- We will be adding art intensive classes (similar to AP type class). These classes are typically only for juniors and seniors and students will be allowed to enroll in such classes with the recommendation of a teacher.
- Travel Program: Morocco trip coming up. The trip will occur over April break; it is usually a ten day trip and students are required to write an essay about why they want to go on the trip.
- Please contact Mr. Carter via email ([cartert@wellesleyps.org](mailto:cartert@wellesleyps.org)) or telephone if you have any questions.
- Final thoughts from Mr. Carter: It is a sin for your child not to take an elective at WHS. We have such a rich program to broaden their world and minds. The world is looking for creative thinkers and that is what we do in my department.

*Question and Answer Session for Thom Carter:*

**How do you decide who gets into a class?** Done by the computer and it depends on what other classes your child is taking. Important piece of advice – tell your child not to put their favorite elective down twice as that it does not increase their chances of getting into that elective.

**Do the art and photography clubs meet at the same time as sports team?** Yes

**If your child wants to take painting and drawing 1 in the fall but does not get into it, can they take in the spring semester (is painting and drawing 1 offered second semester)?**  
Yes.

**Are performance arts offered during the school day or is it an after school program?**  
Offered during the school day but plays and a cappella groups are afterschool. We have amazing programs.

Speaker: Nancy Cali, WMS Math Dept. Head: What do the levels of grade 8 math mean & how do I know what's right for my student?

- 8th grade is the first year that kids are divided into separate classes based on achievement. Process for 7th graders moving into 8th grade usually starts March. Teachers will give their perspective on which level is optimal for the student to take in grade 8. Teachers also ask the kids to reflect on their own experience in 7th grade math and ask the students what level they think is best for them.

- If the teacher disagree with what the child thinks is the best level for them, then we have a conversation with the student. Recommendations are then sent home to parents. The final decision about what level to place a child in 8<sup>th</sup> grade math belongs to the parents, not the school. You do not have to put your child in the level that is recommended by the teacher. Please talk to your child's teacher about the recommendation. Every year, parents do override our recommendations and sometimes the kids succeed beautifully and oftentimes, they struggle.
- Ms. Cali said that she will be sending information home about habits of mind and attitudes towards learning which will help parents in making a decision on math level for 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She asks that parents please consider the teacher's recommendation seriously and she encourages parents to talk to their children's teachers.

Question and Answer Session for Nancy Cali:

**Can you make changes to the math level selected if it does not seem to be working out?**

Yes, it is possible if the schedule allows it. A request can be made to change a class but it may entail changing other classes as well. They try to make the change with as little disruption possible to the student's schedule.

**Now that physics is taught in 9th grade, is it important for the kids to be at the same level in physics and math?** No. I know that physics does not required calculus. I think it would be a great idea to talk to science and math dept. heads at the WHS. (Parent at the meeting added that at the intro to HS meeting held for parents, they suggested that 8R would be required for physics and they recommended that if you want child to be in honors physics they should be in honors math.)

**Are there programs offered at WHS to catch up or to rise a level?** No. There are a lot of summer school courses offered by other high schools and private schools in the area. The head of the Math Dept. at WHS might be able to offer suggestions. Does not believe credits are accepted but participating in this type of program allows your child to be prepared for the courses.

**What are the number of course required for graduation?** Two years of math; maybe three years of science; 4 years of English, social studies/US history. That information can be found in the Program of Studies but there is a difference graduation requirements and college entrance requirements.

Speaker: KC Kato, School Committee Representative

- The budget is a challenge. The Superintendent presented a budget in the fall and it was above what was set as the guideline by the Town. Three levels of budget presented:
  - 4.5% increase -- results in some reductions;
  - 5.2% increase -- keeps level services with some enrollment spending to get class sizes within the guidelines (6th grade above guideline right now);

- 5.9% increase -- allows for funding of programs that are consistent with strategic plan, i.e., foreign languages pilot at elementary school.
- Challenge with budget results from federal and state mandates that are required but that are not funded by either the federal or state government and the Town's contractual obligations.
- Public Hearing on Tuesday, January 27, 2015 at 7pm at Town Hall. This meeting is an opportunity for you to offer your opinion and what component are important to you.
- Sharon Grey is the WMS Committee 21 and will provide information to you on the budget process.

Question and Answer Session for KC Cato:

**What can we do to help School Committee pass a good budget?** It helps us make choices if the community gives us their thoughts. Please send emails or come to public hearing and provide your comments. Once School Committee pass the budget, it goes to the Advisory Committee and they get to decide if they agree with School Committee so it is important to give them your thoughts as well.

Speaker: Liz Rogers – addressing rising 8th grade parents who might be interested in high school PTOSO -- look at the description of volunteer position and reach out to us if you are interested in any of the positions. (website -- [www.whsptso.org](http://www.whsptso.org))

Minutes submitted by Connie Burton