

HSA General Meeting

October 6, 2016

The meeting started at: 7:11pm

HSA Co-Presidents, Shannon Behm and Chris Lisi, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. They gave an overview of online resources for the Lafayette community, including the HSA website, where parents can find constant contacts and other communications, information on upcoming school events, the weekly specials schedule, the HSA budget, and information on the HSA Board. Parents and the greater Lafayette community were encouraged to send comments and feedback to the HSA and to become members of the HSA.

Attendees also were reminded that the Fall Festival is on October 15th from 3 to 5, followed by a showing of The Wizard of Oz at 5:30pm.

The agenda for the meeting included a presentation from Dr. Broquard on All Things Learning at Lafayette, followed by a Q&A with Dr. Broquard. Parents were asked to write any questions they had on notecards for Dr. Broquard to address following her presentation. There also were bins with examples of grade level curriculum for attendees to see as well as handouts on Lafayette's mindfulness program, the HSA budget and school calendar.

Dr. Broquard introduced herself and gave an overview of where things are now that everyone is settling in to the new building. She acknowledged the difficulties with moving into a new building where everything is familiar, yet nothing is the same. She asked parents for their patience and grace during this transition and emphasized the need to work together even through the difficult times. She acknowledged that she is hearing from parents that the building is not accessible and stated that this is something they are working on. Even though construction was finished in August, there still is a lot of work to be done.

Dr. Broquard then gave a presentation on "All Things Learning at Lafayette," which is available on the Lafayette website.

The presentation provided an overview of the school – she mentioned that Lafayette is the largest public elementary school in the District of Columbia with 760 children, 83 total staff, a strong HSA, and a very involved and supportive parent body.

During the presentation, Ms. Diesner, the Lafayette school counsellor, provided an overview of the mindfulness and peace programs at Lafayette. Ms. Diesner explained that the school regularly looks at behavior, how it is being addressed in the classrooms, what works, what doesn't, and how to connect peace into all parts of the school. Two years ago, the school's Climate Committee adopted a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports ("PBIS") system. They spent the first year learning about the PBIS system and then tailored it incorporate Lafayette's Mindfulness Program to create a common language and school wide framework for addressing behavior. Ms. Diesner noted that the focus of the program is on being mindful – understanding why you are doing what you are doing positively, rather than merely following a rule for the sake of following it. Last year, Lafayette introduced the Speak, Act and Move Mindfully ("SAMM") program which encourages children to speak and act mindfully. More information on SAMM can be found on the Lafayette website at: <http://www.lafayettehsa.org/what-is-samm/>.

Dr. Broquard also discussed curriculum and technology in her presentation. She noted that as a DCPS school, Lafayette follows the Common Core standards based curriculum for each grade. (Here is a link to the DCPS Common Core standards: <http://dcps.dc.gov/page/elementary-school-academic-standards>.) She also acknowledged that while Lafayette follows Common Core standards, Lafayette teachers can enrich and supplement as they see fit to meet the needs of Lafayette students. She noted that she hires great teachers who can choose how to teach the Common Core standards in their respective classrooms.

Dr. Broquard mentioned that they are working to ensure consistency in what is being taught in each classroom within each grade level. This year, there are 2 instructional coaches, Jessica Matthews-Meth and Cara Hoppe, who work on this with the grade level teams. Each provided an overview of what they do as instructional coaches, including engaging in collaborative planning and working with grade level teams to share information and experiences so that students have comparable learning experiences across each grade level. They also look at student work samples to see where student growth and needs are. Take a look at this link regarding instructional coaching: <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/10/03/personal-best>

Dr. Broquard emphasized the need for balance – she noted that while there is a science to teaching, it also is an art. She acknowledged the numerous staff departures last year due to retirements and other reasons, and noted that there is room for growth with staff satisfaction and that she and the staff will be working on this issue. She mentioned that a student survey indicated that student satisfaction was at 97%, which was up from last year.

Dr. Broquard also reviewed Lafayette's PARCC scores, which are provided in the presentation itself. PARCC is a standardized test used in DCPS to gauge student achievement. She noted Lafayette has the highest math scores in the District of Columbia, but that English Language Art ("ELA") scores went down. Upon further investigation, her team learned that the weakest ELA scores related to evidence based reading and writing. They are now working on that in all of the grade levels. Dr. Broquard also noted that the achievement gap between black and white students is closing (from a 40% difference in 2015 to a 19% difference in 2016.) Finally, she noted that PARCC is only one metric and that there are many other pieces of information for determining how students are learning at Lafayette.

Dr. Broquard also noted that the "Informances" for each grade level are happening. More details about these informances are in the power point presentation. Students also still have Drop Everything and Read ("DEAR") time, but it now is called Flex time and may take different forms.

Finally, Dr. Broquard asked that parents and Lafayette families use existing channels to communicate concerns and have a dialogue. These include the Local School Advisory Team ("LSAT"), whose meetings are usually open to the public, the Academic Leadership Team (ALT) which meets regularly to discuss curriculum, the Climate Committee, and the teacher's unions. She also noted that she is accessible and that parents can come and talk to her any time.

Question & Answer

Parents were asked to write questions on notecards and place them in a box for Dr. Broquard to address. Dave Gessert, Chair of the LSAT, and Jared Cohen of the LSAT, collected the questions and grouped them into categories. Each question was read aloud for each category. The questions will be made available and Dr. Broquard will provide written responses and additional communications on these issues as needed.

Some attendees expressed frustration that the format of the Q&A did not allow for a real time back and forth dialogue. Parents were encouraged to put follow-up questions on notecards, but that it was important to get through all of the questions first in order to ensure that all questions were heard and answered. Jared clarified that the LSAT had established the format of the Q&A in an effort to ensure that all questions were heard and received a response.

Dave also gave a brief overview of LSAT explaining that the LSAT is an advisory team made up of a group of elected and appointed members to advise the principal on matters related to student achievement, resource allocation and school culture. The LSAT meets the first Wednesday of each month. The LSAT is one of the avenues that parents can use to share ideas or concerns. His contact information is on the Lafayette website.

Category One: School Environment

The questions in this category related to whether Lafayette traditions and student activities have been eliminated, teacher autonomy, and student transitions during the school day.

Dr. Broquard explained that grade level “Informances” would continue this year, and that specific activities are determined by the teachers in each grade. She also stated that there is a student newspaper, student council will be starting up, and that no student groups or activities have been eliminated. Regarding teacher autonomy, she explained that teachers can determine how they want to teach in their classrooms but that they cannot deviate from the grade level Common Core requirements. On the issue of transitions, Dr. Broquard stated that there are no bells this year, and that teachers decide how to manage student transitions from one activity to the next.

Category Two – Lunch

The questions in this category reflected concerns about silent lunch, including that students were being moved to another table for whispering to a friend, that the focus on silent lunch and silent hallways was stifling children’s freedom and taking away important opportunities for socialization, and that some students were not eating or otherwise were stressed out because of silent lunch. One question also asked about the possibility of adding more acoustic paneling to address the noise level.

Dr. Broquard responded that the teachers are running lunch and that 230 students in the lunchroom can be very loud. Teachers and the Climate Committee are looking at what to do about lunch. Dr. Broquard explained that she believes that transition is important and that asking kids to mindfully eat for 7 minutes is not unreasonable. Dr. Broquard acknowledged that if a child is struggling to follow directions, sometimes they do go to another table. She stated that this is not about punishment; it is about teaching kids to be productive eaters. Dr. Broquard has asked for more acoustic panels and those are being priced. She also invited parents to come and observe lunch.

Category Three – Recess

The questions in this category raised concerns about recess, including a shortened recess in second grade, that recess was being taken away as a punishment, and how children can identify teachers at recess.

Dr. Broquard stated that she does not know what happened with regard to recess being shortened in second grade. She explained that all students at recess have a grade level teacher with them at recess and that they are considering having teachers wear safety vests so that they are more easily identifiable to students. Dr. Broquard also stated that it is not school policy or practice to take recess away as punishment and that she has communicated this to her teachers. She asked to please let her know if this is happening and she will fix it.

Category Four – Discipline

The questions in this category related to concerns around discipline and behavior management and what is perceived as an overly punitive environment in the school. Some comments cited that certain students are upset, do not want to go to school, or are stressed out by the behavior charts / systems in their classrooms. Someone shared a Washington Post column discussing how behavior management charts may be doing more harm than good for students.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/parenting/wp/2016/09/29/the-darkside-of-classroom-behavior-management-charts/>

Dr. Broquard explained that she does not share the view that the classrooms or the school is harsh. She explained that they set high expectations for students and work with students individually to help them meet those expectations. Dr. Broquard cited the PBIS system that is in place and invited parents to come and visit the school. She also suggested talking with the teacher if there is an issue with an individual child or with a particular classroom system. She also is researching clip charts, as the school regularly assesses the latest research to determine what is best for the students.

Category Five – Teachers and Staff

The questions in this category focused on concerns raised with regard to teacher and staff retention and support, teacher autonomy, and how parents can support teachers. There also were questions about how parents can be involved and volunteer.

Dr. Broquard explained that there are many new teachers. They have new teacher meetings every month and created a teacher support committee. She also acknowledged that they would like to and plan to do more to support new teachers. Dr. Broquard acknowledged that some veteran teachers are unhappy and that many are happy. She is working on staff unhappiness. A new teacher stated that she is ecstatic to be at Lafayette.

In terms of supporting teachers, Dr. Broquard suggested asking your teacher what he or she needs, volunteering, and giving them praise. Dr. Broquard stated that parents should work with their classroom teachers and room parents to volunteer in the classroom. There also should be volunteer opportunities coming up in specials as well (music, library, art.) She explained that parents still will have to come in through a controlled access point for security reasons but that there are no restrictions on

parents volunteering. Another follow up question asked whether more than 2 teachers had left last year due to teacher satisfaction.

Category Six - Curriculum and academics

The questions in this category related to curriculum and academics. Questions focused on testing changes, Next Generation Science (“NGS”) Standards, and what is being done to enrich and supplement the Common Core curriculum.

Dr. Broquard acknowledged that the testing is not going to be right for everyone but that they regularly assess appropriate standard testing for students. Dr. Broquard explained that last year the focus was on gaps and interventions and that this year the focus is on proficient and advanced and enrichment to the Common Core curriculum. She also explained that teachers haven't received specific training related to the new NGS Standards, but had gotten some training in using FOSS science kits.

Category Seven – Miscellaneous

There were general comments that commended Dr. Broquard for all of the hard work over the past year to handle the construction, and for the need for parents to continue to be involved. There also was a thank you to the HSA Board.

There was a question about the status of baseball field. Dr. Broquard stated that they are working on a SIT team meeting. The goal is for the fields to be ready in the Spring. The playgrounds should be installed around Thanksgiving, and the gym floor is being laid now.

There was a question about the bell that was donated by the class of 2013. Dr. Broquard stated that it is safe but not up yet due to the ongoing construction.

Other suggested activities to foster more communication with parents included a parent survey, quarterly curriculum nights, continuing Tuesday tours, and reinstating coffee talks.

Other questions and comments raised concerns about negative dynamics in the Lafayette community and a difficult parent-principal relationship, including a question about whether the principal characterized parents that sent a letter expressing concerns as racist, elitist and fear mongering to staff. Dr. Broquard responded that it is important to work together, and that divisiveness is not good for the community. She acknowledged and that she shared the letter with her staff and asked them to think through and reflect on the issues raised in the letter, and that some of the tactics of the letter felt that way.

The last comment of the meeting stated that the concerns expressed at the meeting reflect larger concerns and are not just coming from a small group of angry parents. Dr. Broquard urged parents to bring individual concerns to her and to work through the LSAT on broader policy issues. She also acknowledged that divisiveness will only hurt the Lafayette community and encouraged people to work together.

The meeting adjourned at 9:13pm.