

The Foote School PTC Minutes
December 7, 2016
8:30 p.m.

Attendees: Amy Sudmyer (Co-President), Melissa Castleman (Co-President), Christine Pakutka (Secretary), Jeannie Myer, Amy Sheehan, Iris Kaminski, Danielle Ginnetti, Bonnie Moskowitz, Cindy Leffell, Constance Clement, Lauren Goldberg, Beth Mello, Carol Maoz, Kossouth Bradford, Silvia Gee, Frank Kowalonek, Janice Dreier

Welcome/Attendance: Meeting called to order at 8:30 by Melissa.

The Foote School Association Nominating Committee chair, Constance Clement, presented three Foote School parents to be elected to the Association Nominating Committee. A vote was conducted to elect Amy Sheehan, Marc Chung and Andrew Rapkin to the committee.

Approval of Minutes: Motion made and seconded to approve November 9, 2016 minutes by Melissa.

New Business – Activity Calendar

All-School Social: Amy Sheehan reported that “Foote on Ice” has been scheduled for Sunday, February 26, 2017 at the Northford Rink, which is an indoor skating/hockey facility. The event will be held from 4:45-6:45. Pizza, baked goods and drinks will be available for purchase.

Additionally, a basketball clinic has been scheduled at Foote with Yale Men’s Basketball coach, James Jones and Yale basketball players. The event will be held on Thursday, January 19, 2017 from 5:30-7:30. Food and additional activities such as crafts, cookie decorating, and a Lego table will be available. Price for tickets will be approximately \$15.00.

Spring Auction: The auction committee is looking for someone to chair the procurement committee that is in charge of asking local businesses to donate items and services to be auctioned.

Diversity and Book Discussion, “Whistling Vivaldi”

“Whistling Vivaldi,” written by social psychologist Claude Steele, was selected as a staff professional development read in an attempt to raise awareness about the impact of stereotypes. The author gives language to the personal experiences we have all had with stereotypes. Kossouth explained how the author’s research found that as the result of being a certain gender or ethnicity there comes a set of stereotypes. Physiological tests have shown that the subsequent emotional stress and anxiety from being socialized into these identities cognitively compromise the

brain, limiting full access to all of your resources. The cognitive abilities of high achieving people expected to perform at the top are also affected because they are susceptible to the stress and pressure of high expectations. In the book, stereotype threat is defined as the feeling of anxiety in a situation where a person has the potential to conform to a negative stereotype about his or her social group. Though research shows that greater exposure to diversity fosters greater appreciation and respect for diversity it also shows that from the early age of 3 or 4 children do notice differences among peers. By the time these children reach middle school they begin to separate themselves. The author found that how you are feeling about yourself will have an impact on how you perform, causing an achievement gap. The author suggests that by recognizing and understanding stereotype threat, we could help to diminish the achievement gap between different races in the classroom.

One way that Steele suggests to combat stereotype threat is to develop a “critical mass” of people that share an identity. The author defines the term “critical mass” for genders or ethnicity as the idea that it is important to see a certain number of people around you that are similar. If students do not see enough people like them, they often become uncomfortable. Even adults are drawn to people who have similarities or share the same beliefs. Knowing the impact this has on learning in the classroom, Foote is trying to support these findings. One method has been a movement away from focusing only on the idea that everyone should have exposure to different cultures. Instead, Foote is recognizing the value of placing students in groups with other students that are like them to help create the feeling of security. The goal is for students to have a safe, nurturing environment where they feel respected regardless of any perceived differences. Foote likes to look at each child as an individual and develop an understanding of their background. However, this practice has been a part of what has created the achievement gap. Therefore, Foote still tries to understand each child but works to prevent what you know from affecting expectations.

Carol added that the book has been part of a learning process for Foote. The reading and research was one part of it, but discussion with families was another important part of the process. Additionally, Carol and Kossouth spoke to leaders of affinity groups at Yale and diversity conversations are happening in the classroom as well. Some advice they have heard from students has been to start having these conversations young to help students recognize that people and family structures are different. The Foote school has started scheduling their own affinity group meetings among students. Affinity groups create a safe space for students with similarities to share experiences. These affinity groups are a work in progress, as Foote will be reaching out to kids and families to determine student interests and needs.

Meeting adjourned at 9:45
Minutes respectfully submitted by,
Christine Pakutka, PTC Secretary