

BCD Parents' Association Steering Committee Report, 2013-2014

The **BCD Parents' Association** is comprised of all current BCD parents and exists to build community among BCD's students, parents, faculty, and the larger community through volunteerism and parent involvement. Active participation on the Associations' committees and their projects gives parents opportunities to become better acquainted with one another and with the life of the school. The hope and expectation is that each parent will volunteer to work on a minimum of two school functions. Volunteer activities contribute substantially to the well-being and overall healthy environment at BCD.

The Parents' Association is organized by a Steering Committee (**PASC**), comprised of interested BCD parents that have been at the school for at least one year. All parents are welcome to attend the PASC monthly meetings to learn about any upcoming events the committee is currently coordinating for the BCD community. The **PASC** has built upon the vision, efforts, and accomplishments of past chairs, providing leadership that is thoughtful, well-organized, communicative, inspiring, and fun and it has worked very hard to focus their mission. We feel very confident in our success this year of supporting and facilitating events that promote a sense of community throughout the school. In a year that saw many changes, the **PASC** supported and facilitated multiple events that provided a positive moral to the entire BCD community.

In addition to promoting and organizing volunteer services at BCD, the **PASC** facilitates the process of choosing Class Parents and supporting them in their responsibilities throughout the school year. One member of the PASC is the *Class Parent Liaison*, a position whose specific role is to ensure direct and consistent communication with all class parents about promoting upcoming events as well as any volunteering needs throughout the year. This role was created two years ago and has proven to be quite successful.

Current members of the **PASC** are Ellen Boyd, co-chair; Suzannah Van Schaick, Co-chair, Stephanie Buchanan; Alex Ciejek; Mara Davies, Elise De; Megan Kane; Donna Kittredge (Secretary) Rochelle O'Gorman, Wendy O'Neil, Elizabeth Powell (Class Parent Liaison); Robin Seeley, Kristin Scheible; Matt Syrett (Treasurer); Renee Slonaker; Rob Slonaker; Bridget Wotkiewich and Amanda Weil.

Each member of the **PASC** co- chairs two or more events per year. Usually, two or more people will chair each event, with at least one of the chairs having run the event previously. This enables a 'Junior-Senior' dynamic with the 'Junior' becoming the 'Senior' the next year. It is in this way that our events run seamlessly each year- with room for fresh ideas, of course. Some events, such as Class Parent-Teacher Luncheon, Sports Swap, and Faculty-Staff Appreciation Week are solely PA events. Other events, such as High Spirits, Grandparents/Friends Day, Thanksgiving Soup, and Fun & Field Day are Schoolhouse events to which the **PASC** lends their support.

Activities the **Parents' Association Steering Committee** organizes or facilitates:

Class Parent—Teacher Luncheon (August)
High Spirits (September)
Student Photo Day (October)
Grandparents/Friends Day (October)
Community Campus Day (rescheduled for Sept 2014)

Sports Swap (Fall and Spring)
Thanksgiving Soup (November)
Holiday Gift Giving (December)
Library Book Fair (December)
Kevin Hirt's Alaska Day (February)
Faculty-Staff Appreciation Week (April)

Fun and Field Day (May or June)

Speaker/Salon Series (Fall and Spring)

We have cut back on some events to be able to focus and strengthen certain events that are BCD traditions. We also created a new sub committee this year - the Speakers Series Sub-Committee which is discussed in more depth below.

While we feel very pleased with our success this year, we continue to face the challenges of a fixed budget, a smaller parent population as well as a larger number of working parents that often makes volunteering challenging for everyone's very busy schedules. We have been very sensitive to these issues and hopefully have found ways to successfully manage them.

At the end of last year there was discussion amongst the PASC over the structure of the Speaker Series. Having big-name speakers is expensive and difficult to do more than once a year or once every other year. Less well-known speakers draw fewer people and are, perhaps, more appropriate for only the BCD community. Minimally, we wanted to have at least one speaker a year but would prefer to have two. Because we are committed to bringing high-quality speakers to BCD and work diligently to do so we decided to create a sub committee to the PASC specifically for the Speakers Series. This committee was comprised of Stephanie Iverson, Courtney McDonnell, and Wendy O'Neil. The committee added a wonderful addition to the Speakers Series titled the Salon Series. The idea behind the Salon Series is to provide an intimate evening off campus drawing on the parent body for speakers with expertise that would appeal to our parents and friends of parents. The sub committee organized two evenings, one in November at the home of Stephanie Iverson where past parent Dr. Maria Sirois an inspirational speaker, consultant, and licensed clinical psychologist who has worked in the fields of wellness and positive psychology for twenty years spoke about "Giving" and then a second evening in February hosted by Wendy and Tom O'Neil at the Lenox Club where current BCD parent Cynthia Wade, Academy Award winning documentary and commercial director known for intimate and gripping storytelling, showed her academy nominated documentary *Mondays at Racine* followed by a question and answer discussion and dinner. Both evenings were a huge success and one that clearly promoted a sense of community amongst all who attended.

The Spring Speaker was equally as successful with an evening presented by nationally recognized experts Marje Monroe and Doug Fodeman from Children Online who discussed the latest issues and concerns about our children's use of the Internet and cell phones. Berkshire Hills School District once again co-hosted the event with BCD and contributed toward the cost for the evening. This event was free and open to the public. Over 60 people attended and it was estimated that one-third of the audience were parents from BCD and two-thirds were from the outside community. Attendees were asked to fill out a form with the ages of their children, the schools they attend, and topics of interest for future lectures. Almost all the attendees expressed their thanks for hosting the evening on this important topic and hoped we would host more. A challenge for next year is how to get more of the BCD community members to attend.

We are also thrilled that we have reinstated the Parents Association blog on the School's website. We are hopeful this will be another communication tool to let the parent community know about any events coming up and any volunteer opportunities. Our hope is that by communicating directly with the entire school we will see an increase in understanding the mission of the Parent Association and a decrease in the incorrect impression that the Parents Association is a

membership of a select few or only for those parents available during the day. As stated above, volunteer activities contribute substantially to the well-being and overall healthy environment at BCD and the PASC is committed to providing these opportunities available to as many parents' schedules as possible.

Our budget is comprised of a line-item fee included in tuition and fees—each BCD family contributes \$50. This is a change from previous years, when the budget was made up of earnings from fundraisers and allows us to truly focus on building community without having to make any financial asks.

Going forward, the PA will continue to support and build the BCD community. Steering Committee co-chairs for 2014–2015 will be Suzannah Van Schaick and Elizabeth Powell, who has committed to a two-year term. Under their leadership, the PASC will continue to strive for more parent involvement through the many events the PASC organizes and facilitates. By continuing to have such dedicated parent volunteers and by convincing more parents that they too have valuable contributions to make, we will create an even stronger, more vibrant parent group.