

## **MINUTES OF THE EAST IBPA BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING — FEBRUARY 6, 2020**

**In attendance:** IB Coordinator Michael Boykins; Social Worker Alison Despard; President Ross Lee; Vice President Tanya Flores; Treasurer Steven Smith; Secretary Kirk Seminoff; representative Grishma Ajmera; parents Anthony Au, Sueanna Budde, Lorraine Choi, Lillian Le, Quang Le, Tina Morris, Kathleen Dang-Pham, Mini Siddique.

Lee called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

The minutes of the Jan. 9, 2020 meeting were approved (Flores motion/Pham second) without opposition.

Introductions were made to Despard, who was present to discuss mental-health concerns for students.

**Treasurer's report:** Smith's report included a list of individual contributions made before or during the school year, names excluded. There were 39 contributions totaling \$3,139.99 from a total of 32 donors (some parents divided contributions among multiple students). A donation letter sent to IB parents in December was effective, spurring 12 donations totaling \$1,529.99.

The ending balance as of the meeting was \$4,547.90. Smith noted that spending this school year has been just over \$2,000, and this is the first time in four academic years that contributions (\$3,124.59 after \$15.40 PayPal fee) have exceeded expenditures.

Smith said he had sent donation letters/receipts to donors from the 2019 portion of this school year, and explained the procedure for gaining those donors' names and addresses.

The report was approved (Seminoff/Ajmera) without opposition.

**Mental health presentation:** Despard, social worker for students with last names beginning with A through L, introduced herself and described her work at East. Among her duties are to investigate complaints of bullying, sexual harassment and threats. She talks about suicide prevention in classrooms and conducts presentations to freshmen to let them know about resources available to students. She also talked about school assets such as a clothing closet and food pantry available to students. Despard said East supports about 400 students through support and other types of groups. She has also worked with a mental health task force to break up the stigma of acknowledging mental health problems.

Despard invited questions from parents. Questions and paraphrased answers are given here.

*Do kids report bullying?* Staff encourages them to report bullying. She has somewhat seen an increase in reporting and the staff has become more receptive to listening to what problems students see in classrooms.

*Does the bullying group deal with bullies or those who have been bullied?* She believes students listen to other students better than adults, so if the group can get a good mix of students

who've been bullied to talk to some others who've been bullied, they seem to listen to the first group better than to staff.

*Is there a process in which a student sees another student struggling and not asking for help, can the first student report to someone?* Yes, the district has a program called Speak Up, with a phone number to call/text, which is anonymously sent to the district and forwarded to the school as needed. Despard said it's better to be safe than sorry and say something to someone when they notice a student struggling with mental health. East wants to empower students to have good communications skills and promotes a speak-up philosophy. Students also know they can drop a note in social worker or counselor boxes located at their offices. She said students have also emailed staff members directly, nothing that students are good at finding ways to communicate with staff.

Despard also noted that if a student logs into a school computer and does an Internet search for anything related to mental health, a filter flags the search and a report is forwarded to administrators. The student is pulled out of class.

*Do you have kids who come to you specifically because they're under certain pressures, or is it daily stresses?* There are students with multiple needs. Social workers encourages students who are having a bad day to come to the offices and sit. They have tables and chairs available and encourage them to sit and relax.

*Is there a difference between a social worker and counselor?* Both are equally qualified. Despard would be more than comfortable with a counselor doing anything she does. There is definitely different training in that social workers have to have licenses to be a licensed mental health professional. Boykins said IB students are loyal and more likely will go to him or IB Counselor Meghann Ewy, but they need to consider going to social workers. He said Despard is trying to get her face out there in the IB community.

*Are you seeing any trends or familiar issues?* Despard said she is seeing anxiety symptoms and is trying to break the stigma of mental health, but at the same time it's sometimes just worry and not necessarily anxiety.

*There's an extra level of pressure with the IB curriculum. Is a student depressed or overworked?* There's situational depression, which high stress can cause. Any mental health is not on a continuum. It's always moving.

*What is a good way for parents to ask students about anxiety?* Ask what's happening when the anxiety is happening. If you make a timeline of seven days, what's been going on in those days? They can look back and see what they've been doing, see a lack of sleep, an increase of homework and tests. Find out if there are friend issues, breakups, breakups of friendships, how they're eating and sleeping. All that impacts how the brain functions. Make sure they're drinking water, moving around and getting exercise. Be open to the student contacting social workers and administrators.

*If a student seeks a social worker, does the social worker have to notify parents? Only if the student shows an inclination to harm someone or themselves, or someone is harming them. Social workers will ask students if they have talked with parents about the problem.*

*Do students refrain from looking for help because of the stigma that “everybody’s going through this?” Boykins said yes, there’s a stigma. They’ll feel stupid for feeling this way and apologize. But students should feel that school is a safe place for addressing multiple problems. Despard said there’s nothing a student can tell social workers or administrators that would surprise them. They’ve heard it all. They deal with it differently based on student and family dynamics. If it’s bothering a student, it’s not petty.*

*Is there something attached to, “I’m grouped in with all these smart kids, I can’t show weakness?” They see that more with underclassmen, but not with juniors and seniors. They know they’re all in this together. It’s underclassmen that are still getting the feel for each other. There is competition, because they’re all smart kids, and that’s a transition.*

*Are kids self-diagnosing? We put it back on them, asking them what makes them think they have this problem? What does depression look like to you? What it looks like to you might be the same to them. Kids find what make them different and then want to find why that makes them different, and how to fix it. They don’t want to tell friends or parents. They trust the Internet and go about their daily lives. Usually they just need someone to talk to. She said they see some students on a weekly basis. She encouraged parents to contact social workers if needed and to keep them posted on possible problems.*

**Teacher requests:** English teacher Steve Maack requested \$200.91 to create a small library for students who might not be able to purchase books needed for the next seven years of IB Literature curriculum. Three copies of six books would be kept in the classroom. Boykins noted that students are encouraged to donate their used books at the end of school year, but next year begins a new curriculum. The downside of used books is annotations are already in the book and kids aren’t doing their own work. Pricing for the books was through Amazon, and parents asked if Watermark Books would offer competitive pricing. A motion (Smith/Budde) approving the amount, but suggesting Maack use Watermark if no more than 10 percent higher than Amazon, was approved without opposition. Siddique suggested communicating with parents that when they buy a book for class at Watermark, donating a second book would be appreciated.

Before adjournment, Flores suggested the board contact members who have been voted to the board but are regularly not attending meetings. She said she is willing to contact them through phone and email. There were no objections.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m. The next meeting of the IBPA board is at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 5 in the north library.

— Kirk Seminoff, secretary