

Youth Commission
Wednesday, Sept 15, 2021
Zoom Virtual Meeting
6:00 pm

Members Present – B. Hernandez, S. Segura, W. Butler

Others Present – S. Smith, J. Zabala, H. Ulrich, N. Smet-Weiss, C. Bazik, J. Baez

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Zabala called the meeting to order at 6:09 pm.

Mr. Zabala stated that the Youth Commission would like to collaborate on a project with Berks Teens Matter.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

JOINT PROJECT WITH BERKS TEENS MATTER (BTM)

Mr. Zabala introduced himself and provided a brief background.

Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that Ms. Arias and Mr. Butler were BTM Youth Ambassadors in the past. She stated that she would love to hear everyone's thoughts about how to partner.

Ms. Bazik introduced herself. She stated that she supports this possible partnership.

Mr. Baez stated that he is the BTM Youth Coordinator and manages the Health Resource Center at RHS. He stated that he is willing to provide sex education in the classroom and privately. He suggested that members of the Youth Commission attend a Youth Ambassador meeting to brainstorm possible events. He stated that Youth Ambassadors provide peer-to-peer sex education both in and out of school.

Ms. Arias arrived at this time.

Ms. Arias stated that one topic that she would like the Youth Commission to address is reducing pregnancy rates. She stated that she reconsidered to

broadening to more comprehensive sex education to remove the stigma of teen pregnancy. She stated that she is also interested in addressing period poverty and equity and would like to collaborate with BTM.

Mr. Zabala questioned BTM's mission. Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that the new mission is to engage youth and trusted adults on healthy relationships and to refer those in need to necessary resources.

Ms. Bazik stated that BTM has recently gone through a strategic planning process and broadened their mission. She explained that the original mission was reducing the pregnancy rate in Berks County by 40% by 2022. She stated that the pregnancy rate has been reduced by 38%.

Mr. Zabala questioned if the project would be between the Youth Commission and Youth Ambassadors or Youth Commission and BTM. Mr. Baez stated that it can be both. He expressed the belief that the Youth Commission can bring change on a higher level and can be a voice outside the school setting. He stated that BTM has also started a men's group (members over age 25) to address toxic masculinity and spread this message to young men.

Ms. Smith suggested that Mr. Baez provide background information on BTM and the Youth Ambassador program for those in attendance who are not familiar with them. Mr. Baez stated that BTM began in 2015 and participates in the collective impact model to work with similar organizations that have the same goals. He stated that the programs are evolving and focus is shifting to equitable access.

Mr. Butler noted his hope that the Youth Ambassador program could begin in the middle schools. Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that she would love to see that happen and agreed that 5th – 8th grade students need better sex education. She stated that this idea is worth discussing and noted the need to consider the process that would be used to expand the program.

Mr. Butler questioned who would make the decision to allow this expansion. Ms. Bazik expressed the belief that school administrators would need to recommend the expansion to the Board and the Board would need to make a formal approval.

Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that PA has no requirements for sex education except HIV and STD information and abstinence must be taught. She expressed the belief

that other things that are taught depends on the teacher and principal. She stated that she was unsure what curriculum is being used in middle school.

Ms. Bazik stated that she has spoken with Senator Schwank and that Senator Schwank is willing to introduce legislation to change these State requirements.

Mr. Baez explained that parents can opt their children out of the use of the HRC and he may not address students under age 13. He agreed that what is taught depends on the teacher and principal.

Ms. Bazik stated that some middle school aged children are members of Olivet and receive Youth Ambassador education.

Ms. Smet-Weiss questioned what sex education the Commission members received. All stated that it touched on pregnancy, STD and abstinence. They noted that teachers dance around the subject and only provide anatomy. They noted the need to add much more including same sex education and gender identity topics.

Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that there has been no progress since she was a student. She noted her hope to have younger, powerful voices to speak about the need for healthy relationships of all forms.

Ms. Bazik expressed the belief that the School Board is a good mix to bring this message forward. She stated that they support the HRC and the approval now auto renews as long as the HRC meets its requirements.

Mr. Zabala expressed the belief that there is currently no structure to sex education. He questioned if the Commission should advocate for change and work to make political change.

Ms. Bazik noted the need for Commission members to determine how to move forward. She expressed the belief that there are many opportunities to partner.

Mr. Zabala expressed the belief that this could be the start of something special. He agreed that the Board needs to understand the next steps needed to expand sex education.

Mr. Baez stated that the best sex education is many small conversations rather than one big "talk". He stated that Senator Schwank has been a champion of

BTM. He stated that she is invested in period equity, LGBTQ+ issues, and improvement in sex education. He stated that healthy relationships are connected to sexuality and that sexuality is an emotional issue.

Mr. Butler expressed the belief that starting at RHS would be easiest since the HRC and education are already approved there.

Ms. Arias agreed. She stated that since Youth Commission members are close in age to those who attend RHS it may make students more comfortable talking about these topics.

Ms. Smet-Weiss stated that once a plan is finalized, BTM will heavily count on the Commission to get an audience. She suggested tying the event to period equity.

Ms. Bazik suggested tying an event to a Youth Ambassador program that is already scheduled.

Ms. Segura stated that she tutors RHS students and she believes that RHS currently has a no visitor policy due to COVID-19.

There were several suggestions of locations including Goggleworks, libraries, City Park, and RHS clubs or sports.

Ms. Bazik thanked all for wanting to partner. She stated that she looks forward to working together and left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Segura also left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Zabala expressed the belief that this will be a good partnership and suggested "Let's Keep Talking" as the name of the program. He stated that he would like to see the Commission work toward making State level changes. He stated that Rep. Guzman should also become involved.

Mr. Baez stated that the HRC is managed by Access Management and suggested that they also be involved.

Ms. Arias stated that she suggested speaking with clubs and sports because there is already a target audience. She expressed the belief that this is a pre-scheduled meeting or practice and is more convenient than having to go to another location.

She suggested that if another location is used that there should be an incentive to attend. She noted the need for the audience to be engaged and open to learn. She noted the need for the Commission to discuss next steps.

Mr. Zabala noted the need to work with RHS and speak with school leaders. He noted the need to increase peer-to-peer education. He noted his concern with how invested students will be. He expressed the belief that they may listen but their main focus will be on the club meeting or sport practice.

Ms. Ulrich suggested approaching local businesses for a gift to raffle off or for giveaways. She stated that it was nice meeting everyone and she looks forward to working together. She left the meeting at this time.

Ms. Arias expressed the belief that the students will be engaged if speakers are transparent and tell their personal stories.

Mr. Zabala suggested that Mr. Butler speak to the student athletes. He suggested working with clubs that have similar goals to begin in order to build community.

Mr. Baez left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Zabala noted the need for a long-term approach. He stated that he sees the value and importance of this project.

Ms. Arias suggested playing games such as bingo to make the presentations fun.

After a brief discussion about when the group should meet again, it was decided that the next meeting will be the regularly scheduled meeting on October 6 at 6 pm and then another joint meeting with BTM would be held on October 13 at 6 pm.

Mr. Butler questioned if the Commission could assist Ms. Smith with all her meeting responsibilities. Ms. Smith stated that once there are elected officers, it will assist her.

Mr. Zabala suggested that Commission members practice keeping meeting notes in the meantime.

Ms. Smet-Weiss left the meeting at this time.

Mr. Hernandez noted the importance of Commissioners completing their homework to keep ideas focused and moving forward.

Mr. Butler agreed and suggested that the next meeting focus on project planning. Ms. Smith reminded all that the Commission sets the meeting agendas.

Ms. Arias suggested that Commission members participate in BTM's "Let's Talk" series on Facebook Live. She suggested bringing topics to the next meeting that they would feel comfortable discussing and suggested that Commissioners participate in pairs.

Mr. Zabala stated that the Commission should be ready to present more details to BTM at the next joint meeting.

HALLOWEEN EVENT

Mr. Hernandez stated that he has been thinking about a safe Halloween event. He suggested inviting the Police Department to participate. He requested others thoughts.

Mr. Zabala stated that he would support this event.

Mr. Hernandez suggested inviting local businesses to have a stand and distribute candy and information to showcase their business. He suggested holding it on Penn St.

Mr. Zabala described a similar event held in Kutztown. Mr. Butler volunteered to research the event and contact the organizer for information.

Ms. Smith stated that the City Clerk has indicated that the office will fund a banner. She noted the need for the Commission to design it.

Mr. Butler suggested holding this event in the same area that was used for National Night Out.

NEXT MEETING

The next regular meeting of the Youth Commission will be held on Wednesday, October 6 at 6 pm at the Goggleworks Garden at Lauer's Park Elementary School, weather permitting.

A subsequent meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, October 13 at 6 pm via Zoom and will be a joint meeting with BTM.

The meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Smith, CMC
Deputy City Clerk