

**Lord Byng Secondary School
Extraordinary Meeting February 8, 2010 –
Organized by Lord Byng Administration and PAC**

Re: Lord Byng school decision of replacing Lord Byng Symphony (LBSO) with Instrumental Chamber Music courses

Minutes

Location & Time: Byng Library, 6:00 pm

Attendees: Approximately 50 people attended the meeting.

School Staff in attendance: **Maria Taddei (Principal), Alec MacInnes (VP), Jim Rutley (VP) and Jon Hartley-Folz, (Byng Arts Coordinator)** – also, District representative – Lynn Green

PAC Executive members in attendance: Anne Denman, Sylvie Lefebvre, Brenda Rosenau, Michele Carrington, Daniel Chowne, Brenda Rosenau, James Chau
Secretary: Sylvie Lefebvre (in lieu of Monique Giard)

PAC introduction: PAC co-chairs (Sylvie Lefebvre and Anne Denman) extend a welcome to all parents and briefly introduce members of PAC executive who are present.

Principal's report on the issue: Ms Maria Taddei

- Change in program was a difficult decision

- School presents process for “ethical decision making”: this involved recognizing the issues/problems, gathering facts, identifying possible solutions & alternatives, assessing the impacts on students/ teachers & parents, making a decision & reflecting on the decision after the fact

- Main issue: symphony and strings compete with each other; symphony has approximately 25 to 30 players of which 10-12 are in wind, and 12-18 are in strings. Students must make a choice between senior strings orchestra and symphony as most students choose to “only” take 2 music courses each year. There are 47 strings students this year, but students are heavily influenced by whether or not a class, either symphony or strings, will be sponsoring a trip in any given year (i.e. Italy, etc.)

- School recognizes that cancelling LBSO will be a loss, but hopes that the introduction of Chamber Music courses will offer more cooperation between the departments and offer more independent learning for students.

- Spoke to VSB to see what other schools are doing – historically VSB decided to have strings & band programs rather than symphony so that individual programs would not compete with each other. U Hill offers symphony, but a smaller program, and they do not offer any strings orchestra.

Discussion/ question period - Parent Concerns are summarized below:

- Various parents expressed doubts that the new courses will lessen competition between string and band programs and questions the negative impacts of cancelling the LBSO on the community. Maria Taddei volunteered that when the LBSO was established, it was not a goal shared by all teachers, but rather the initiative of one of the teachers, which resulted in the competition that exists today.
- One of the parent at the meeting has performed with the LBSO on a volunteer basis, and he has witnessed discord between two departments (band & strings). He suggests that departments and teachers must learn to work together or leave the program. This parent questioned the direction of the program to offer chamber music instead of orchestra given maturity of students, need for coaching resources of chamber orchestra, type of music played, etc. (others in the audience with significant music teaching experience at UBC and elsewhere provided similar comments later in the discussion). While this parent is not currently a Lord Byng parent, he does reside in the area and would consider Lord Byng for his two children (9 and 11); the new direction Lord Byng is taking, however, is very damaging to its reputation.
- LBSO offers students a unique opportunity to be part of an orchestra, and chamber music courses are far from offering the same opportunity. Another member of the audience, a Byng grad with significant experience in teaching music stressed that one cannot take “the same excellence of an orchestra and bring it down to Chamber Music”. “It will simply not happen”. This (cancelling the LBSO) “will only water down something really fantastic”.
- Some parents suggested that teachers involved are not present at the meeting is a sign that they do not get along. School administration responded that a meeting like this one is difficult for all parties involved and that it was best not to have teachers be present.
- Much was said about teachers not being able to work together, and District representative stepped in to say that some of those HR issues are being dealt with.
- A number of people questioned why there was no consultation with parents, students and the broader community. Ms. Taddei indicated that courses get added and taken out without any consultation with parents or students on a routine basis, for example, Lord Byng is adding basketball courses to strengthen the physical education of the school without any discussions. Ms. Taddei also noted that the administration was now listening to people’s concerns expressed at the meeting.
- Members of the community at large indicated that school cannot expect the community to support the LBSO, fundraise for the LBSO, and then not consider community impacts when cancelling a program, especially since the reasons for cancelling the programs are related to departmental feuds rather than a lack of enrollment or funding.

- Students are suffering from the lack of cooperation between teachers, and many students are afraid of offending one of the music teachers. Also, the lack of cooperation between the two departments is scaring away some students to join the Lord Byng music program.
- Many parents suggested some options:
 1. There are 4 strings orchestra – the obvious option is to drop one or two while retaining the symphony.
 2. One option might be to encourage students to take 3 music courses – 2 strings and symphony and consider asking students to practice less for each orchestra.
 3. A number of parents indicated that students should not have to take “seniors” string to be part of “honours” strings. That way, students could take “symphony” and “honours strings” without having to take 3 courses (taking 3 courses is often difficult because students are academically minded and want to continue to take sciences, math and other academic subjects).
 4. Some parents indicated that their students do take 3 music courses, but department head Jon Hartley- Folz indicated that this is not the norm.
- Students will vote with their feet, and parents and community members indicated that choosing this direction will result in the demise of the high quality music program at Lord Byng, and ultimately the Byng Arts Mini school. Other private schools and academy of music are starting new programs (one member of the audience specifically mentioned a few), and Lord Byng will be left behind.
- Many parents gave testimony of their students having benefiting from the LBSO. Some of these students have younger siblings also in music who are looking forward to joining Byng Arts, and the symphony is a major factor attracting students to Byng Arts.

Summary:

- 100% endorsement for the LBSO and a similar interest to reduce, by one or two orchestra levels, the number of options that students are faced with.
- zero endorsement for the ending of the LBSO.
- Many perspectives on the reasons to continue with orchestra training for LB students.

Adjourn to March 23rd, 2010 at 7:30 PM