

Notes from Panel Meeting of Bell Options Graduates

- Thursday, 1/16/20, at the Bell School Auditorium
- facilitated by Mr. Klein and Ms. Miller
- 20 Panelists, all of whom graduated from the Bell Options Program, most of whom attend a CPS Selective Enrollment High School (SEHS)
- about 80-100 people in attendance (parents across all grades, and some students)

Ms. Miller gave opening remarks:

- we started this event last year, it was Mr. Klein's idea
 - the kids really do come out for Mr. Klein (given the # that came this year and last)
- this event is good for parents whose kids are about to leave Bell, and for parents whose kids are soon to move into the upper grades at Bell

M. Klein mentioned that he wants the event mainly to be driven by Q&A from attendees. But he first asked each panelist **to briefly introduce themselves** and to say which school he/she attends, and what year he/she is in at that school.

Tally of High Schools attended:

- Payton – 9
- Lane Tech – 6
- Northside Prep – 2
- Amundsen – 1
- Whitney Young – 1
- St. Ignatius – 1

Tally of their current year in High School:

- Freshmen – 6
- Sophomores – 6
- Juniors – 6
- Seniors - 2

(Formatting note: generally, each new • represents the beginning of an answer by a given Panelist, and each ◦ is an elaboration of that same question from that same Panelist)

Mr. Klein asked **the first question** of the evening: what was **your biggest adjustment** in going to high school?

- coming from the Options Program, which was a tight knit group for 8 years, and then going to Lane... well, it was a bit scary at first, but I learned to like it.
- must manage yourself
 - can't rely on your parents anymore
 - must advocate for yourself

Mr. Klein then **asked the audience** for their questions.

Parent question: did the **kids who attend Payton** experience the same thing as the Lane kids who just spoke?

- yes, it was still an adjustment there
 - Payton is smaller than Lane, but it really is not that small
 - but, especially coming from Mr. Klein's class, we were taught to be a self-advocate, and so I felt well-prepared for that
 - by the 2nd semester of my Freshman year, I knew a lot more kids

Bell student question: how hard is it to **make new friends** in high school?

- it seems scarier than it actually is
- all schools have a freshman orientation
 - and everyone there is trying to make friends there
- joining a sports team helped me to meet and make new friends
- as a Freshman, a lot of your classes are required so you will be in classes with other freshmen and that is a good way to meet others
 - all Freshman are trying to make new friends
 - so in class, you can make friends
- teachers understand this issue too, and they will help this process

Parent question: academically, **how prepared were you** for high school?

- Freshman year was actually less work than 7th grade
 - but in Sophomore year, it is more important to be a self-advocate and an independent learner
- I am much better prepared than many of my peers at my high school
- my chemistry class is very much like my 7th grade chemistry at Bell with Mr. Klein
 - so, Bell did an awesome job in preparing me
 - and, Mr. Klein *made* you learn self-advocacy, which is important

Parent question: are there **more tests** in High School? Is that challenging?

- yes, there are a lot more tests
 - you'll get used to it
- yes, difficult at first
 - but teachers offer extra help
- it depends on subject
 - English and social studies have more in the way of projects
 - Math and science do have a lot more tests

Parent question: how do you **balance homework and extracurricular activities**?

- at Payton, you are *required* to go to a club for 45 minutes per day, so it is built-in
 - can also use this time to meet with teachers

- I do 2 hours per day of extra-curricular activities (rowing)
 - but I still get my work done
 - I feel it is very important to do extra-curricular activities and I highly recommend that everyone try one or more
- at Northside, Wednesdays are Colloquium Day
 - can do various things, even Yoga
 - and we have 50 minutes FlexBlocks, so we get time for activities
- you will not experience as much sleep in High School; I go to sleep usually at 10-11pm
 - but, teachers are rational/understanding
 - need to be good at your time management
- I get more sleep now in high school
- I play 3 sports
 - and, I still find the time to get homework done
 - I will also tell my teachers, who will accommodate you if you are crunched
 - but don't waste time
- in my freshman year, I learned how to manage my time
 - I got more sleep in my sophomore year
- consider the difference between schools that have block schedules vs period schedules
 - I like the block schedule, to get more deeply into the subjects
 - Payton, Northside, and Jones each have block schedules
- with the 8-period schedule at my school, not every class has HW each night

Parent question: how do you **balance you mental health and grades?**

- different for everyone
 - but for me last year, I took one class that had huge HW requirements
 - I didn't really like the subject
 - I realized that I needed to rebalance myself
 - I ended with the worst grade I've gotten so far
 - but it is the grade I am most proud of because I fought hard for it
 - lesson: prioritize yourself. School is important, but it's not everything, be healthy
- school provides counseling, teachers help too
 - talk to them
 - they can help you decide what classes to take
- teachers are accommodating, especially when you feel overwhelmed
 - with regards to tests, too
- if you know a class is a lot of work, and will be too much work for you, don't take that class
- High school gives you a lot of freedom of choice on class (after freshman year)
 - find out what you like

Parent question: how is **grade pressure in high school** compared to that is middle school?

- similar pressure
 - in high school, any given individual grade is less important, since you take a lot of classes over the 4 years

- High school is more stressful, because all of those grades go into your college application

A question from Mr. Klein: A favorite word in 7th grade is “stress”. How do you **feel about that now**, looking back?

- I feel that Junior Year in High School is like the 7th grade in middle school
 - but, in HS, rigor is harder, and it all matters so much more for the future
 - so stress is higher in HS
 - but, even if it doesn’t go your way all the time, it will all work out as it is supposed to
- dealing with stress in 7th grade helped me to handle stress in HS
- there’s no way around the stress in HS, so learning how to handle it now is good
 - but, you don’t have to strive for 4.0 GPA, etc
 - learning how to cope with stress and failure is much more important than being successful all the time

Parent question: did any of you **go to an academic center (AC)**? Did any of you question your decision?

- (in unison) No.
- I liked staying at Bell, helped me to learn how to manage myself
 - also, since at an AC not all classes you’ll take are Honors, your weighted GPA will likely be higher at, say, Payton, than at an AC
 - on the other hand, you can get to Trigonometry more quickly at an AC
- in my senior year now, I am in class with kids who went to AC’s, so we ended up at the same place
 - AP biology was hard for kids who went to AC, since they took biology so early
- 4 years of high school is a good amount
 - 6 years would be too much
 - would get a sense of burnout
 - also, I wouldn’t have been emotionally ready for HS too early
- agreed, burnout may be a problem after 6 years
 - Bell is great, worth it to stay here
 - Mr. Klein was a great teacher
 - I don’t see the point to going to an AC
- Bell will prepare you for HS
 - some AC kids regret going there
 - initially getting ahead in math is not worth it
- but, if you do decide to go to an AC, don’t think your Bell friends will cut you off

Parent question: do you **keep in touch with your Bell graduating class**?

- it depends, but in general, yes, there is a strong bond, it became like family
- I got together recently with some old Bell friends
- it’s totally up to you

Parent question: do you know **anyone who went to an AC** and felt it was a good idea?

- I know people who went and had a good experience
 - but it wasn't right for me
 - but remember, not necessarily all credits from the AC will transfer to another HS
 - you will be taking placement tests in that HS anyway
 - e.g., Payton will not put a freshman in a junior English class
 - so ask yourself, will going to an AC actually make a difference?
 - what is the purpose?
 - will it reduce stress?

Parent question: looking back now, what **advice would you give your 7th-grade self?**

- the HS entrance exam is different than MAP (timed vs. untimed)
 - familiarize self with that test
 - content isn't too hard
- don't stress about not getting into your "dream HS"
 - I wanted to go to Jones, and didn't get in, and initially felt very bad
 - I went to Lane and I am very happy now
- make high school "your own"
 - there is an opportunity to do so
 - so don't worry about not getting into the school you had in mind
- try to create a more positive culture in your 7th grade classroom
 - yes, stress can spill over
 - but don't snap
 - don't share your test scores
 - be aware of what you say; it is a good skill to have
- in HS, I take stressful things more in stride
- HS is a fresh start
 - I could be the positive person that I want to be
 - helped me in my studies, socially

Parent question: none of you said you would tell 7th grade self **to study less the Entrance Exam**. Why?

- I didn't prepare at all for the HS Entrance Exam
 - the sentence diagrams we did in 7th grade with Mr. Klein helped!
 - and that work was harder than similar questions on the Entrance Exam
 - no Algebra on it
- I didn't really study for it
 - prepare in whatever way makes you comfortable

Parent question: Is anyone from **Jones** here today?

- No

Parent question: how is the **commute** for you?

- I live in the South Loop, and I have a long commute
 - I get less sleep

- but after I got my routine down, it is OK
- if you really want to go to that HS, you'll deal with the commute
- Lane is nearby to me; I value that
- it is a big help to live close to HS
 - especially if it is a 50/50 decision on which HS to go to
- I live by O'Hare
 - I go to Lane, so it is the same distance as going to Bell was
 - the commute helps your maturity level, in being safe and self-managing
- I love the commuting
 - but winter can be hard
 - but my sister is the opposite; she prefers a short commute

Mr. Klein asked: do any attendees have questions about a specific school?

A Bell student asked: did you get into to **your top choice** of HS?

- I like athletics, and Lane has lots of athletics
- I wanted to go to Jones, ended up at Amundsen,
 - but I made it my own
 - teachers gave me accelerated work
 - if you can self-advocate, it doesn't matter what HS you go to

Parent question: are there **factors** at the time you chose your HS that **ended up not being important**, or conversely, factors you didn't consider that you later realized were important?

- I chose Payton partly because of Seminar Day, I love it
 - where you can choose topics
 - also, there's no pool at Payton, and I don't like swimming
- my older brother goes to Jones, I thought it was a great school, great music program
 - I am at Lane, and later realized that it has a huge number of classes, especially in music
- Payton is smaller, and has less choice of classes
 - e.g., only 2 Computer Science courses, compared to many at Lane
 - but one factor that was important to me is the diversity of students
 - Payton does have its issues, but it does have students from a variety of communities from across the city
- try to be less emotional in your decision and more objective in your evaluation of the pros/cons. For example:
 - Schedule: block vs period
 - Athletics: very good at one school, but I can make the team at the other
 - Size: larger # of classes vs smaller community

Parent question: can you describe the **block schedule**?

- I am at Northside, we have:
 - 4 classes on Monday and Tuesday

- Wednesdays are Colloquium Day
- classes flip am/pm on Thursday/Friday vs Monday/Tuesday
- I don't get HW everyday
- **Mr. Klein** commented:
 - it is similar here at Bell, we switch between morning/afternoon for science class
- I am at Payton, we have:
 - Orange/Blue days; the different classes alternate on those days
 - 90 minute classes are good, because there is less transition time, better for focus in each class
- I like Block Schedules, because then I don't have to carry as much to school

Parent question: can you describe the **extra-curricular activities** at your schools? Is there competition to get on the team? Can any 9th grader join?

- I like running, and the team is a great environment to get to know people
 - not very competitive in freshman year
 - Cross country is a "no-cut" sport, so there is not a tryout for the team and everyone can participate
- I love the extracurriculars at Payton
 - required for the last 45 minutes of each day
 - as freshman, can go to any club and check it out; they are welcoming
 - e.g., Economics Team, United Nations
 - academic teams *do* have tryouts
 - can also study at this time or get help from teacher
 - Lacrosse team is no-cut
 - sport teams are great because they have built-in friends and role models
- at Lane:
 - some sports teams are hard to get onto (e.g., soccer)
 - I play lacrosse, and didn't have any experience, but I got on
- one of the most welcoming communities is my football team
 - they are supportive and accepting
 - we share a brotherhood
- I play volleyball at Payton
 - I had experience in the sport
 - but I didn't go to Payton for the sports
 - 40 girls tried out for volleyball, and 18 made it
 - but many freshman teams are no-cut
- I am in the Whitney theater program
 - is a great program, very inclusive
 - is student-led

Bell student question: did some of you **take the AC test** and then decide not to go?

- I took the AC test, and I got into an AC
 - but I chose not to go to the AC

- I came to Bell for 7th

Bell student question: how much **homework** do you get?

- I am at Payton, and it varies by class and year
 - e.g., in math, we get HW every day, but it is optional and is 0% of your grade
 - if it helps you, do the assignments
 - we do get lots of quizzes and tests
 - in freshman year, teachers will help you more in teaching you how to do assignments
 - but you must manage your time
 - don't start assignments late
 - finish all of the assigned reading before class
- can also do HW at lunch and after-school at Library
- depends on the class
 - plan it, so you *know* what the HW will be
 - especially if you are part of a club/sport
 - how much HW are you *willing* to do?

Parent question: do you have more or less **group work** in HS than in Middle School? Also, what skills helped you the most to complete your group work?

- communication is the best skill I have learned for this
 - communicate what to do, who should do it
- for most classes that I have taken, if group work was assigned, it was still optional
 - you could still do it by yourself
- Mr. Klein helps you prepare for group work

Parent question: what **advice** do you have for 7th graders when they are **in a group** where you already know that some of the other kids in the group will be procrastinators, etc.?

- that kind of thing is just going to happen
 - you just need to communicate and work through it
- that's life, too
 - in your job, you will be working with people you don't want to work with
 - so, it is an important skill
 - if you find yourself in that situation, talk to that person, tell them that they haven't done their part of the work, and give that person the opportunity to do their work
 - need to do this
 - but, the whole group will suffer if that person doesn't do their work
 - sometimes, I just did their share of work
 - then, finally communicate to the teacher, and say that that person didn't do their share of work even after I reached out to him/her and was very clear in my expectations.

Parent question: how did you **decide which courses** to take?

- in Freshman year, most of the course are picked for you
 - afterwards, the counselor helps you to choose next courses

Parent question: did you **take AP course as a freshman**? Do you recommend that?

- I took AP Human Geography as a freshman
 - but, most colleges will not accept AP credit for that
 - so, do research on whether colleges will transfer credit for a given course
- I took the honors version of a history class and it was busy work
 - so, I now wish I has taken the AP version of it instead

Parent question: what **extracurriculars at Bell** helped you later in HS?

- I ran cross country here at Bell, and that helped a lot to get on the varsity at Payton
- I did Science Fair in 7th grade and that helped with the Alpha STEM program at Lane

Parent question: does your school have a **mentorship program**?

- Payton has a lot of different mentors
 - e.g., upperclassmen PALS for freshmen, in advisory
 - Clubs have mentors, too

Mr. Klein mentioned: while there is no student of Jones on the stage, there is a **parent of a Jones student** in the audience, **Michael Flomenhoft**. Can you say a few words about Jones, Michael?

- my daughter graduated from Bell last year and now is at Jones
 - Although no Jones students could make it tonight, lots of Bell kids go to Jones
 - the popularity of the given high schools goes in cycles
 - we were worried about the commute
 - but we are not worried about it anymore
 - classmates share the commute and make friends that way, too
 - you'll like the block schedule
 - also have AC-Lab
 - time for HW
 - teachers have their office hours during AC Lab and that is a great time to meet with them if you need help or have questions (self-advocacy)
 - Jones fits in with all that you have heard tonight; consider it.

Mr. Klein then asked former Bell parent **Grace Sawin to give some remarks:**

- I help people search for schools, from pre-K to College (<https://chischoolgps.com>)
- getting into a SEHS is a numbers game
 - what score out of 900 did you get?
- but really, high school is what you make of it
 - what did you do to make yourself stand out?
 - that is the opportunity to seize!
- so, be careful what you wish for

- how you stand out and make an impression is much more important than the name of the high school you went to
- what did you *do* at that school? did you stand out?
- you don't really want to be a run-of-the-mill student at a great school, if you could have been a stand-out top-of-the-class kid at another school
- regarding ACs:
 - completing the arc of K-8th grades is important, especially for maturity
 - my kids became leaders in 7th and 8th grade at Bell
 - one AC "advantage" that many people are attracted to is the extra AP courses you can take
 - but, the top-level universities do not accept many of those AP credits
 - don't burn yourself out for that
 - you might think that you are "padding" your transcript, but you won't be actually helping yourself

Ms. Miller gave some ending remarks: We strive hard regarding academics, but I care more about the students being good people. And I am *very* proud of the students, because I see amazing people here today. Also, thank you Mr. Klein for organizing this event.

Mr. Klein gave closing remarks to the Panelists and current Bell students: The students are too modest, and it is my privilege to teach you every day.

SIC

1/22/20