

## **PTA Meeting Minutes**

Thoreau Middle School, Eagle Hall

Tuesday, September 22, 2016

Attendees: Beth Eachus, Barbara Rousseau, Laura Schmorow, Sarah Helmicki, Principal Azimi, Rebecca Aguilar, Adam McGeehan, Katie Cole-Kelly, Shannon Campbell, Jane Miscavage, Karen Cain, Susan Whittle, Wendy Pearson, Cathy Matchette, Carolyn Culhane, Angela Kiochandra, Kelly Sund, Michelle Alonso, Emily Korff, Virginia Wright, Stacey Leimbach, Gloria Karasick, Marla Grandolph, Melissa Checo, Ceci Campbell, Kavita Naimpally, Sonya Marsden, Fatou Diop Diallo, Amanda Barker, Carole Hamric, Lori Ebert, Melissa LeTendre, John Petro, Jeannie Church, Asya Alhassan, Erin Talbot, Rene Newman, Sarah Barry

The meeting was called to order at 9:37am. After a period of introductions, Sarah Helmicki presented the minutes from the June 14, 2016, PTA meeting. There was a motion to approve the minutes by Jane Miscavage. Susan Whittle seconded and the minutes were approved as written.

### **Principal's Report**

Mr. Azimi introduced himself to the group. He provided some statistics about the 2016-2017 school year. We have 902 students, the largest population of which he is aware, 65 teachers and 35 support staff. The school's renovation is nearly complete with an additional 70,000 square feet of space for a total of 180,000 square feet total for the school. With the additional space, he predicted that by the 2018-2019 school year, Thoreau would have more students to better balance the total number of students across our neighboring middle schools. The school will continue to have a small construction crew over the course of the school year to finish the remaining renovation work.

Mr. Azimi continued on to highlight some key instructional initiatives for the 2016-2017 school year: Block Scheduling, Steps to Success, and Project Based Learning.

Block Scheduling was implemented this year to better align the student experience to the elementary school years and the high school years. Additional benefits of the new schedule include: a reduction in the number of transitions for students between classes and increased instructional time during classes. Prior to block scheduling, Thoreau followed the traditional "fixed schedule" in which students went to every class every day.

Steps to Success is a 26-minute period that will be used to teach executive function skills, such as planning, time management, and organization skills. It will be approximately 1 time/week.

Project Based Learning was listed as another initiative but was not described with any additional detail at this meeting.

### **Student Services Report**

Ms. Aguilar highlighted some of the strategies and resources available to students at Thoreau. Thoreau offers interdisciplinary teams for English, Social Studies and Science.

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These teams of teachers meet weekly to discuss curriculum and student needs. Parents are invited to attend on an as-needed basis. Parent's first point of contact should an issue arise with their student is the counseling staff. Counselors also attend interdisciplinary meetings so are closely involved with each student's education. Ms. Aguilar also explained that there would be a focus on wellness for the 2016-2017 school year. She asked that if there were any other programs which parents want explored to please let her know.

### **President's Report**

Beth began her report by thanking all the volunteers who have been working hard beginning in the summer to get ready for the 2016-2017 school year. In particular, she mentioned Arathi Shreeram who ordered, organized, and distributed over 200 student school supply kits with her team. Beth also thanked Sandra Frederick who heads the Hospitality Committee who provided a delicious omelette bar and breakfast for the teacher workday before the beginning of school as well as chicken wrap dinners for teachers who could not make it home before Back To School Night. Beth also thanked Theresa Cochran who is working on the Thoreau directory as well as Lauri Mennel and Mary Ann Ressin for their continued work managing the school store and organizing parent volunteers.

### **Teacher's Report**

Adam McGeehan and Katie Cole-Kelly provided the teacher report during which they answered questions and highlighted the Steps to Success program that is offered to our students. They reviewed the concept executive function skills and showed parents links on the Thoreau website that parents can use to review lessons given to the students and to find additional resources. They encouraged parents to review the concepts at home and facilitate a parent/teacher partnership to help equip the students in these important life lessons.

Additional discussion followed that provided an overview of the SIS system including the difference between parentVUE and studentVUE on that system. Mr. Azimi also discussed the distinction between Google Classrooms and Blackboard and how parents can use these resources as well. A suggestion was made for a parent program to go into more detail on these Internet tools used by FCPS.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Laura presented the results of the 2015-2016 audit. She stated that the audit went really well, and that there were no significant issues that were addressed.

A motion was made by Wendy Pearson to accept the Audit Report as presented. Cathy Matchette seconded the motion. The Audit Report was approved as written.

Laura then presented the draft budget for the 2016-2017 school year. She indicated the current cash balance was \$18,572.38 with \$5000 designated for Post-Renovation projects. Some changes to the school year budget from the prior year were mentioned,

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including the decrease in income from rebates and increases in expenses such as an increase to the Principal's Fund and an increase to the Hospitality budget.

A motion to approve the budget was made by Cathy Matchette and seconded by Jane Miscavage. The budget was approved as presented.

Laura lastly asked that all parents submitting check request forms provide scanned receipts if submitting multiple receipts for reimbursement at one time.

### **Committee Reports**

Membership Jane Miscavage presented the Membership report. The committee has approximately two-thirds of the members that they projected. Reminders will go to parents shortly, once the Pay for School Stuff website issues are resolved. There is also a plan to approach teachers for membership.

Landscaping and Courtyard Ceci Campbell presented the Landscaping and Courtyard committee report for chair, Katrina Smart. Studies have shown that eyes on green space improve test scores enabling students to relax and recharge. The committee works to keep the courtyard nice for outdoor activities including the New Families Picnic and classes meeting outside.

With the renovation, there is also a second courtyard where we will incorporate bricks purchased as a fundraiser. Beth presented a design for the bricks in the courtyard. Bricks are still available for sale for \$50/brick.

Hospitality – The next event is in October. Contact chair Sandra Frederick if you are interested in helping with the hospitality committee.

Parent Programs – Marla Grandolph, chair of the committee, confirmed that our next program would be October 20. At the PTA meeting that evening, Ann Dolin, President and Director of Educational Connections, will present to parents tips for their students' academic achievement, how to best support your student in middle school and tools for block scheduling.

Marla also thanked all those who attended the viewing of Screenagers, a movie co-sponsored by Thoreau PTA and presented at James Madison High School on September 20.

School Store – Beth presented the School Store report. She encouraged parents to volunteer at the store. Currently the schedule is full through the end of October, but there will be opportunities in the future to volunteer there. Contact co-chairs, Lauri Mennel or Mary Ann Ressin, to volunteer.

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7<sup>th</sup> Grade Dinner – The 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Dinner will be held on November 17 from 6:30 to 8:30 in the Thoreau cafeteria. Chairs Lori Ebert and Melissa LeTendre shared that there would be an “island” theme, catering by Maggios, a DJ, photobooth, games and raffles. The price will be \$10 for adults and students and \$7 for younger siblings.

Volunteers are needed to help with check in, the photo booth, desserts/candy bar, and purchasing gift cards for the games/raffles.

This event is to build school camaraderie and spirit and will not be used a fundraiser. It is very popular, so buy your tickets early!

### **Announcements and Presentations**

Jane Miscavage presented on the Proposed Fairfax County Meals Tax. This referendum will be on the ballot in November.

The question presented in this referendum asks Fairfax County voters whether the Board of Supervisors should be authorized to levy a meals tax, at a rate not to exceed four percent (4%) of the amount charged for the taxable food and beverages. The Board of Supervisors has decided to dedicate the revenues to two purposes, which are specified in the ballot question. First, 70 percent of the net revenues would be dedicated to Fairfax County Public Schools. Second, 30 percent of the net revenues would be dedicated to County services, capital improvements and property tax relief. At the maximum 4% tax rate, a meals tax would generate an estimated \$99 million per year. For more information, please visit <http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/mealstax>.

Shannon Campbell presented information about After School Programs. There is no pre-registration. Programs will begin on Monday, Sept. 26. Session A will be specifically for academic needs, including homework, extra help, test retakes, etc. Session B will be for clubs/programs. These will be a variety of academic, special interest and athletic clubs. Session C will be intermural sports in the gym or the cafeteria. Late buses will be provided Monday, Wednesday and Thursday.

Beth ended the meeting. The next meeting will be held at Oct. 20, 2016, at 7:30pm.