

PTA Meeting Minutes

Thoreau Middle School, Eagle Hall

Tuesday, February 20, 2018

Attendees: Principal Azimi, Rebecca Aguilar, Shannon Campbell, Fran Furr, Buck Condill, Beth Eachus, Sarah Helmicki, Laura Schmorrow, Stacey Leimbach, Gina Warner, Samantha Rayburn, Emily Korff, Jane Miscavage, Nicola Bartlett, Grace Obermann, Donna O'Harren, Michele Alonso, Stephanie Bollini.

Beth called the meeting to order at 9:42am.

Principal's Report

In light of the recent shooting event in Parkland, Florida, Mr. Azimi began the Principal's Coffee with the following questions:

What do we do at Thoreau Middle School to ensure student safety?

How does Thoreau Middle School address cultural issues like bullying? How is Thoreau Middle School proactive to prevent a similar event at our school?

In short, nothing much is needed to change at Thoreau as a result of the tragedy in Florida. Mr. Azimi stated that he is confident that he has a proactive plan in place to handle issues with students. The school is also kept locked throughout the day with access only through the front office. Mr. Azimi discussed a three- tiered approach for this safety plan:

Physical Plan: Mr. Azimi and his staff walk the building multiple times per day. These walks serve several purposes, but most importantly for the purpose of security. Unknown vehicles are noted. Doors are checked to confirm they are all closed and locked. All adults are required to wear nametags. Guests are required to sign in at the front office.

Professional and dedicated staff: Staff at TMS look to identify issues with students early; a safe and secure environment is required to ensure that teachers can teach students effectively. Most important is constant visibility so that students see staff taking an active approach to the school day, both in class and in between classroom sessions.

Counselors, psychologists, and social workers: these staff help students in need. While the recommended Standards of Quality (SOQ) suggest the ratio of counselors to students be 1:250, Thoreau currently has a ratio of 1:300. This is an extraordinary number. Commenting to the school board via the PTA is one way to help lobby for additional mental health professionals for students.

Mr. Azimi then had some of his staff describe their roles and how they proactively work with students who may need additional support.

Mr. Condill, the 7th Grade Principal, and Ms. Furr, the 8th Grade Principal, introduced themselves and described their roles at TMS. They consider themselves the first line of defense when students need additional support. Both assistant principals hold a weekly meeting with teachers and counselors. At each meeting, they discuss students who might need extra assistance. As needed, they will follow up with parents, the students themselves and their counselors. Since teachers really know their students, they often know when an issue arises with students. Teachers are expected to build relationships with their students. Teachers or staff can

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extend a personal invitation to students to stay after school for extra help. Both assistant principals also spend time with students at lunch, which is a key time to check to see if there are any students sitting alone or if there are unhealthy patterns for students that need to be addressed. On occasion, parents will email the assistant principals to alert them if there is an issue that the school can help monitor. In general, the staff at TMS look at the child from a holistic approach, not just from an academic perspective, but looking at the whole picture using a personal approach.

Ms. Aguilar described the perspective of the counselors and their role in the school. Counselors will dive deeper when an at-risk student is identified. They participate in the weekly meetings, but they also attend clinical meetings two times per month. Clinical meetings include a social worker, psychologist, Ms. Aguilar, and the counselors. In these meetings, the students who need the most help are identified. They also note when a student would need outside resources, if their issues require more help than what the school can provide. Often, if a student is in crisis, the family is also in crisis. The counselors have regular follow ups to check on each student that has been identified to ensure that not only has someone connected to the family, but also that the family has been connected with resources that can help them. By keeping track of all the students, it allows the counselors to see patterns among individual students and across grade levels to see a holistic picture of what is happening.

The current staffing ratio for TMS for counselors is near a tipping point. With the addition of the new students to the school next year, TMS anticipates that they will get a new counselor to help with the increased number of students.

Ms. Aguilar and the counselors continually look for opportunities for group counseling, especially if there is a parent request or some other implied need for help at a group level.

Lastly Ms. Aguilar said that there is a plan in place to help transition high-risk students when they leave TMS and enter high school. Meetings take place between the middle and high school staff for this transition to go smoothly.

Ms. Shannon spoke to the group about the after school program, which she runs for TMS. The hours between 3-6pm are the most dangerous for students. This is a primary reason for the after school program, which is thriving across FCPS. Every middle school has a counselor in a role to manage after school programs. Out of the 945 students at TMS, 876 have participated in the after school programs at some level (92% participation rate). The number of times that students have participated is over 14,000 times/events. That implies that almost all students participate 1 to 3 times/week. Relationships that students have with their peers, staff and others is what makes the program a success. Everyone is welcome. There are opportunities for all interests. There is something for everyone. It is a connection point for like-minded kids. If there is an interest that is not fulfilled, students have the ability to create their own or new clubs. Staff members generally run the clubs, but are with students at all times in case of emergency and to take attendance.

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Another program that helps ease transitions to middle school for students is the Excellence in Action program that is intended for all rising 7th grade and new to TMS 8th grade students. The Program's intention is to get students starting at TMS comfortable with the school.

A question arose about what was done to help students who do not have internet access at home. With the librarian, counselors and technology specialist, some students were identified who had this issue, but steps were made to close this gap.

Approval of Minutes

Sarah Helmicki presented the minutes from the January 23, 2018, PTA meeting. There was a motion to approve the minutes by Stacey Leimbach. Michele Alonso seconded, and the minutes were approved as written.

Student Services Report

Ms. Aguilar did not have any additional comments to make after the discussion during the Principal's Report.

Treasurer's Report

Laura Schmorrow noted that the budget is on track. The Hospitality Committee has made a request to get the most up to date report so that they can make plans for the remainder of the school year for teachers.

Committee Reports

Beth provided updates for the following committees:

Hospitality: The Hospitality committee provided a successful January event where they served Soup and Salads to teachers. It was greatly appreciated by all teachers and benefitted by an overwhelming response from parents. Then, 2 weeks later, provided a Valentine's event where coffee was served with cookies and sweets. Teacher Appreciation Week is a key event for Hospitality. Planning is already underway.

Directory: The directory is completed. However, we are waiting for printing by Navy Federal, our business partner. Since there is a new contact, everything is moving more slowly. Sonya Marsden has been instrumental in ensuring this project is completed.

Spelling Bee: The TMS Spelling Bee will take place on February 21. Fifteen students will participate. The winner from TMS will then go on to compete in the Fairfax County Spelling Bee on March 18.

Crosstown Hoops: This will take place on 4/6/18. There are 4 teams from each school. The National Anthem will be sung by TMS students and the Fairfax Falcons will perform an exhibition game again.

Courtyard: A plan for a Thoreau eagle mosaic is in place for the new courtyard. There was a local artist who submitted a bid, but her cost of \$8000-\$25,000 was high for the budget. There is a possibility for a robot to do a mosaic as a lesser expensive alternative.

Dine Out: The following Dine Outs are planned through May:

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February 22 – Fosters

March 18 – Lost Dog Café (Dunn Loring)

April 24 – Chipotle (Vienna)

May 23 – Social Burger

Box Tops: Box tops are due on February 26.

New Business

The idea to hold the TMS Auction online – as opposed to a live event was discussed. There was a consensus that this might be a good plan due to competing events in the spring. A suggestion was made for an auction preview night at the Crosstown Hoops event. Another suggestion was to advertise the online auctions to elementary schools whose students feed to TMS.

Beth ended the meeting at 11:08am. The next meeting will be held on March 20, 2018, at 9:30am.