



# PTA

**Date of PTA Meeting:** October 29, 2019

**Location:** Thoreau Middle School

**Attendees:** Scott Aldridge\*, Yusef Azimi\*, Hala Bashandi, Mimi Chou, Missy Dixon, Natalie Duncan\*, Beth Eachus, Eric Fishman\*, Jill Gallagher\*, Kristine Griepentrog, Ginny Inglese\*, Donna Kakarala, Lisa Kelso, Andrea Kramer, Frangca Lee\*, Elmas Mehmed, Karla Mihalak, Regan Morgan, Ravi Myneni, Mary Louise Nicklas, Ravi Myneni, Wendy Pearson, Samantha Rayburn, Michelle Rios, Dawn-Marie Singleton, Irina Smirnoff, Kerrie Turner\*, Goht Vandenbrink, Lisa Williams \*indicates Thoreau Staff or Guest Speakers

Andrea called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m. The minutes were presented from the September 10, 2019 PTA meeting. Beth Eachus made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Kristine Griepentrog and the minutes were approved.

**Principal's Report:** Mr. Azimi welcomed everything and gave a special thank you to the PTA, on behalf of the staff, for the fall treats last Friday, October 25<sup>th</sup>. Everything was appreciated and well-received by staff. He then addressed the "elephant in the room", that a former Thoreau teacher was arrested. He recounted that background that three weeks ago a mother went through her child's electronic device, found inappropriate messages and brought the device to the school. Thoreau MS immediately notified the police. The employee is in the process of being terminated, with the revocation of his teaching license. The case is completely in the hands of the police. Mr. Azimi emphasized that he and staff greatly appreciate the outpouring of support that has come from the community. Additionally, he asked that we keep faculty and staff in our thoughts, as they work through the situation. He reminded us that "We have good people working here at TMS".

**Student Services:** Mr. Azimi moved on to the Student Services Report, in place of Ms. Aguilar, who was out sick. He alluded to his article from the prior month's *Thoreau Matters*, where he wrote about Middle School transitions, emphasizing that students in Middle School start to experiment with new behaviors, new friends, new language, etc. Much of that is a normal part of adolescent development during this awkward age. Their behaviors can sometimes be hurtful. Thoreau counselors developed a lesson to communicate with every student in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade about creating a welcome and inclusive environment, particularly how to we show kindness to others. He suggested that parents continue to have this conversation with their students about "what do you do when \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank w/ tough situations) happens?"

He then turned the report over to the Counselling Department to share the highlights of the lesson they shared with students. Eric Fishman (Wombats), Scott Aldridge (Penguins and Goats), Kerrie Turner (Ravens and Turtles), Jill Gallagher (Wolfpack and Hawks), Franca Lee (Wolfpack [AAP] and Hawks [AAP]) introduced themselves and shared about why and how they conducted this Counseling Lesson. They did this lesson to show students that words matter. They set up the classroom in a circle in the style of Restorative justice. Their three main objectives were:

1. How do we all contribute to a safe, welcoming school environment?
2. Reflect on how your identities shape your perspectives.
3. Discuss how assumptions can contaminate a safe space.

Students had the chance to reflect on their own cultural identities apart from Thoreau MS and how those identities impact the community at Thoreau MS. Mr. Fishman indicated that students participated enthusiastically and were very engaged with the materials, specifically regarding how students' assumptions can contaminate a space. Students expressed their feelings using the phrase "When you say \_\_\_\_ about my culture, it makes me feel \_\_\_\_\_".

Mr. Aldridge led parents through an activity they did with students to illustrate the nature of assumptions people make without being aware of them. Ms. Turner said students viewed a video of a student being bullied, then students were to indicate "what they will do to make Thoreau a safe and welcoming community". Ms. Lee stated that the timing of this lesson, at the beginning of the school year with every student, gives counselors a common ground from which to work from when meeting with students throughout the year. Mr. Fishman shared examples of words that students hear in the halls. He suggested to parents that this topic also might be good conversation fodder. He reiterated that the school counselor is each student's first line of defense in case of any trouble or question at school.

**PTA President's Report:** Andrea Kramer acknowledged and thanked Liz Kimball for getting the School Store up and running and thanked parent volunteers also for serving. She announced that Crosstown Hoops is being chaired by Alessia McIntosh and Sarah Espanol. Hospitality Committee has added Missy Dixon. Andrea thanked those involved with the Special Education Coffee and Conversation event, particularly Department Chair Ms. Seago-Blanton and her assistant, Ms. Conley-Baldwin and Assistant Principal Mr. Condill. Andrea had extra copies of the handouts from that meeting on-site. Lastly, she shared the good news of our participation with fundraising with Safeway Foundation. Pan Am Safeway participated in this in August on behalf of Thoreau; \$4582.96 was raised. The PTA is working with the Administration to determine how this money will best support the goals of Thoreau MS.

**Treasurer's Report:** On behalf of Treasurer Amy Vernon, Andrea Kramer presented this month's report, which was printed out for everyone to view. Membership and no-fuss fundraiser funds have continued to come in. Money has been paid for program expenses. Receipts have exceeded expenses this month.

#### **Committee Reports:**

**7<sup>th</sup> Grade Family Dinner:** Regan Morgan and Krissy Griepentrog, co-chairs of the committee, reminded everyone to buy their tickets for the event taking place Thursday, November 14, from 6-8 p.m. in the Thoreau cafeteria. In addition to Maggio's dinner, there will be a DJ, a professional photo booth and dessert.

**Dining for Dollars:** Missy Dixon reminded us of upcoming events: Wednesday, November 13 at Chipotle, 33% of receipts donated to TMS and Tuesday, December 10, at the Vienna Inn.

**Parent Presentation:** The remainder of the meeting was a parent education meeting, as was the traditional concentration of the PTA historically. TMS PTA has partnered with Club Phoenix for today's presentation. Director Natalie Duncan, After-school coordinator for Town of Vienna shared about Club Phoenix, a free after-school program located at the Vienna Community Center. They are about to start the Shuttle Bus program from Thoreau MS to Club Phoenix on Thursdays. Students must be registered in advance. Natalie introduced Ginny Inglese from Total Health Concepts. Ginny's presentation was titled "How to Handle Stress and Anxiety for Teens, Parents, and Family".

**New Business:** None

Our next PTA meeting and Parent Presentation "Getting to the Root" will be on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 6:30 pm, at Club Phoenix at Vienna Community Center 122 Park St SE, Vienna VA 22180

**Adjourn PTA Meeting:** Andrea ended the meeting at 10:58 a.m.