

PTO Council Meeting December 3, 2013 Waban Library

MINUTES

Attendees:

Dr. David Fleishman, Superintendent

Executive Board

Jennifer Abbott, Co-president

Frieda Dweck, Co-president

Theresa Fitzpatrick, Co-president

Jo-Louise Allen, SPED-PAC Liason

Sue Flicop, Secondary Rep.

Laura Holt, Health & Safety

Megan Reilly, Preschool Rep.

Andrea Steenstrup, Equity

Susannah Wardly, Horace Mann

Sarah Housman, Mason-Rice

Kim Thurmond, Mason-Rice

Tara Fitzgerald, Pierce

Megan Flynn, Underwood

Nancy Sweatt, Williams

Helen Haley, Zervas

Molly Owen-Kiristy, Brown

Sally Brickell, NNHS

Betsy Blagdon, NSHS

Lori Lass, NSHS

PTO Presidents by School

Natali Atri, Angier

Anabel Cable, Angier

Kirsten von Hassel, Bowen

Julie Pinto, Franklin

Other Attendees

Amy Stein, Social Action Committee

Chairperson, Temple Shalom of Newton

Suzannah Creeden, Mason-Rice

Maggi Alexander, Mason-Rice

Next Meeting Dates

Tuesday, February 4, 2014

Tuesday, April 1, 2013

Council Votes

Vote 1: Proposed PTO Council Grant - Bike Helmets - \$600

Each Newton Elementary School participates in a Bicycle Safety Training Program sponsored by the Newton Police Department. Officer Jo Gourdeau, Newton's Traffic and Safety Officer, goes to each school and takes the 4th and/or 5th graders through this program. The children ride their bicycles (or shared bicycles) around the neighborhood and learn, with hands on experience, the rules of riding on the streets.

Bicycle helmets are an integral part of the training program. It has been Officer Jo's experience that an average of 4 children per school come to the training without a helmet or an inferior helmet. It is the intent of the program to provide those children with helmets to use during the program and then take home.

Police Department funds do not adequately provide for the purchasing of those helmets.

To assist the Police Department in implementing this important program, it is proposed that the PTO Council allocate \$600 of surplus funds to purchase 60 helmets (4 helmets per school x 15 elementary schools), at an average cost of \$10 per helmet, for use by the Police Department.

The PTO Council Executive Board met two weeks ago and voted unanimously to adopt this proposal.

Call for questions - no questions. Theresa Fitzpatrick made motion to approve grant. Motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Vote 2: Proposed PTO Council Grant in the amount of \$500 to help the SPED PAC to subsidize the cost of a speaker on executive function

Recently, the SPED PAC and the Zervas Elementary School PTO jointly sponsored a speaker event featuring Sarah Ward, an expert on the topic of executive functioning. The SPED PAC asked the PTO Council to help the PAC subsidize its share of the cost of Ms. Ward's fee in the amount of \$500.

It is proposed that the PTO Council allocate \$500 of surplus funds to help the SPED PAC pay its share of the cost of this speaker event. The PTO Council Executive Board met two weeks ago and voted unanimously to adopt this proposal.

Question: How much was speaker?

Answer: Cost was split between Zervas and SPED PAC. \$1000 paid by Zervas. Additional printing costs of \$500 incurred. Questions about total cost incurred by event will be answered at the next meeting, but Council can move forward tonight to vote to allocate at least \$500 to SPED-PAC for their portion of the costs.

Helen Haley made motion to grant \$500 of surplus to reimburse SPED PAC for speaker. Motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Post-meeting follow-up: The speaker's fee of \$1,000 was paid by the Zervas PTO. The copying charges for meeting hand-outs totaled \$531. The PTOC surplus funds allocated here covered \$500 of these additional charges, and the Zervas PTO paid the remaining \$31, allowing the SPED PAC to save its PTOC budget allocation for 2013-14 on other needs.

Superintendent's Update

Meetings with PTOs and parents- At Underwood today. Good attendance at 3 middle schools. Good questions about social emotional needs. Testing. Technology question. Nice to have 2nd round of meetings as last year focus was on override. School Committee members joining conversation.

Planning for building projects – Cabot now invited into MSBA process. 3 projects: Cabot, Angier, Zervas. Working on getting Carr ready. It will be close.

Budget Guidelines - Still dealing with enrollment issues. Mental health discussions. Balancing priorities and have to make trade-offs.

Testing - Lots of new data with testing. PARCC replacing MCAS. This is a different kind of test --requires integrated thinking. Inter-disciplinary. Will be piloted in some schools this spring. ELA/Math in certain schools. Those schools were told last week (we didn't select them.) Down the road these test will be more high stakes (even for teachers), this is somewhat controversial. Communication about pilot will come Jan/Feb. Curriculum changes, including more non-fiction, coming as a result of Common Core/PARCC.

Admin searches - Countryside principal; Asst. Superintendent for Elementary, Joe Russo, retiring. Searches will start soon.

Question: Is it too soon to ask question about testing? Technology? Will we have enough? Talk for when it is rolled out 100%

Answer: We will have enough for pilot. Lots of questions and technology is only one issue.

Question: Curriculum is becoming more tech based, is there a plan to provide more funding?

Answer: Technology is in operating budget -competing with other things. Same with building needs. That's why it got neglected. Now that is solved a bit with the override, so now we need to look to ways to help solve tech needs. [NPS] Money went to help middle schools, and we see more tech in middle schools than in past. Looking into BYOD at secondary level. Certainly going to look to up the tech line item.

Question: Can you look into bond funding for technology? Other towns have done it

Answer: I'm not the person to ask. I have asked, they [City] don't won't to bond for shorter term items. I can certainly ask. You get the operating budget dilemma. Even small classroom space came out of this. I have asked [City] but not in awhile. I can follow up.

Question: Is there a need for more classroom space next year?

Answer: Yes. Lincoln-Elliot needs another space, but there isn't one. Also, they are close to being on the renovation list. Plan might be to move a preschool classroom, but

that requires construction. It will get better, but not until Angier is done and Zervas is done. Those will give more space.

Question: Will Mason-Rice get more kids because there is some space there?

Answer: Not likely, we are trying to keep it down, but we also can't put extra classes in Bowen. Kindergarten class for next year a little smaller.

Safety/Crisis Committee (Sally Brickell, Lynne LeBlanc, Betsy Blagdon, Lori Lass)

Typically, we would have our health/safety rep do a talk on crisis teams for schools. This year we've had some real crises, and the PTOs at the high schools have done an excellent job in handling the suicides and fires that effected their schools this fall so we have invited them to speak about their experiences.

NNHS (Sally) - Efforts should be directed by the principal. This is advice I was give years ago. We are there to support the principal. Contacted Jen Price to ask what she needed. NNHS brought in Riverside who helped guide services. They suggested an immediate support event. Working with the YMCA where another teen event had been planned, a community session was held there. Riverside helped to facilitated the discussion. About 30 people attended. PTO helped publicize, working with NSHS and middle schools. Important to let people to know what is happening, even if they can't attend. Communication helps let community know there has been a response. Condolence cards sent and donations made to support cause chosen by parents. PTO presidents attended visiting hours with family after asking a friend of family if this would be helpful. Also attended event at South. Bought food for faculty during a session to provide support for them.

NHSH. (Betsy) - 2nd incident made event more of a public health issue. Quickly learned about issue. Couldn't call death a suicide until the official cause of death was released. Parents were concerned and wanted to know a lot of details which PTO, School etc. couldn't provide. Parent of one of the girls spoke to other parents, and this was incredibly helpful. Immediate outpouring of other parents wanting to help. Set up dinners for family.

Fires: strange situation. Family at South didn't want much help. NSHS collected gift cards. NNHS/Day family needed everything. Donations went through school, not PTO, directly to family. Communication was with principal not family, and principal talked to family at length about needs. Communication approved by principal or came directly from principal. PTO helped with logistics.

Technology also really changed the way we could handle crisis. Go Fund account set up by parent. PTO didn't promote because it was optional, and they hadn't set it up. Went around on social media, and it reached it's goal so we didn't need to step in. Talk about the girls' deaths was also circulating on social media.

At school, some kids didn't want to talk about it. It was a balance to respond to the different needs. Some parents were also frustrated with response at school, but a lot of these frustration were addressed at the meeting effectively by the Riverside professionals.

PTOs gave feedback to principals and urged them to address certain issues. PTO did not respond to the concerns directly.

North incident - other schools sent flowers, etc. and the principal found that very comforting. Jen Price asked if PTO could do that in the future if there was an incident, and NNHS PTO did send a support message to Danvers.

Comment: Schools did a great job

David: South was a game changer.

Some take aways:

- Don't do something for one family that you can't do for another.
- Schools do some much that we may not realize. It's easy to second guess, but they really do so much to support the kids. Staff was really aware of kids that might have been at risk and were actively trying to support them even if it isn't always visible to the public.
- Let your principle guide you.
- All schools should have some sort of budget for crisis response.

Please note: The high school co-presidents who shared their experiences at this meeting wanted to thank Sue Flicop, Laura Holt, and Jessica Freier for their assistance in being prepared for and responding to these crises.

Social Action/Community Service (Amy Stein from Temple Shalom of Newton, Suzannah Creeden and Maggi Alexander from Mason Rice)

Guests invited to encourage a sharing of ideas about creating vigorous social action community at your school.

How do you choose an organization. (Amy) - Make sure the organization has a connection to your community. Group experiences allows for relationship building. Examples from Temple Shalom include:

- working at homeless shelter cooking.
- trip to New Orleans to help rebuild.
- Quilting group.

Choose project that fit with an issue that is of interest. This year they chose building project for family ready to move into their own home --getting all the items needed for the house. Add educational piece to build awareness about the issue. Members of the community then stepped

forward about the topic to help. Next year they are changing to a food/hunger topic. Also tried to convince other committees to help with theme.

What has worked well? Choose a few organizations that you can develop a relationship with. A few projects is better than too many. Once the organization gets to know what you can do, they can approach you with special needs.

How do you get people involved and keep them engaged? Building the relationships helps. Find people to be contacts for different components. One person helps with crisis response, one person is contact for food drive. Be Creative. Ask for pledges. Package a night together - make a meal with friends for the shelter than go out to eat together. Be timely and tie your actions to kids lives, e.g. Birthday Wishes in lieu of birthday present.

Mason-Rice: Families in Action/Kids Take Action - (Suzannah and Maggi) Club meets 14 times a year, k-5, helps build community and community service. Kids come up with their own themes. Animals, homelessness, etc. Kids learn about the issues and discover that they can make a difference through small actions. Look for activities that they can take action that doesn't involve money, although they also do coin drives, etc. Awareness raising videos -for example use of recycling bins. Try to do things during buddy time or when the entire school can get involved. Group keeps growing. They deal with real issues so they are very sensitive to how they talk about it.

Find things that your whole community is working on as a project. Opportunities for families to go together to do something. Find ways to get all the kids involved as well as families.

Question: What type of family activities do you do?

Answer: Hold a drive and than visit an organization. Walk for hunger. Collect items from a wish list for a family.

Question: How many kids?

Answer: 25-30 is what we can manage. Had to limit to 2nd-5th. 20 younger kids were interested. Parent volunteers and a teacher . When group is too large it is difficult to have the discussions of issues.

Examples of local charitable organizations that might be supported by PTO Social Action efforts include...

[Cradles to Crayons](#)

[Birthday Wishes](#)

[Gaining Grounds](#)

[Newton Food Pantry](#), [Centre Street Food Pantry](#), [Family Table/JF &CS](#) (and many food pantries in the metro area)

[Buddy Dog](#)

Local chapters of [MSPCA](#) (there is a great one north of Boston where you can take tours)

[Upper Falls Greenway](#) (or similar organization for cleanups)

[Pine St Inn](#)

[Waltham Fields Community Farm](#)

nursing homes (holiday singing)

[Project Bread \(Walk for Hunger\)](#)

[American Cancer Society \(Relay for Life\)](#)

[Jimmy Fund \(Kids PMC\)](#)

[The Second Step](#)

Bromley-Heath

[Child Witness to Violence at Boston Medical Center](#)

[Department of Children and Families](#)

Please note: Suzannah and Maggi are happy to meet with other PTO groups to share their experiences and KTA lessons. It is their experience that introducing the idea of giving (your time, talent, and treasure) and the power of each individual to make a difference, at the elementary age, helps to nurture a lifelong habit of giving. It also fosters a sense of connection to one's community and the world.

Discussion on Future of PTO Funding of Technology

Last year, the PTOC passed a resolution to try to find new ways to fund tech. One way put pressure on City to seek alternative funding sources is to stop/limit PTO funding of tech. Previously, we thought that this would hurt our kids because tech wouldn't be there. We've come to a point when this view has changed. Rhanna made a statement to the school committee. We wanted to make the statement because the initial Budget Guidelines had tech as a last bullet-point and funding came from surplus.

Tech is becoming more like books, chalkboard, etc. Inequities are growing, and it's time that technology be included as an equity item. We have a lot of work to do to make this change -- working out timing etc. looking at what schools are planning tech drives.

Open for discussion. Want to hear your thoughts.

Question: What would the equity # look like?

Answer: We don't know yet. This is something we will be looking at and need your help in getting all the data.

Question: Would it be something that could change as the "goal" changed?

Answer: It would be up to NPS to deal with that. It's becoming "core curriculum" and it's not OK for some kids to have it and some kids not to have it.

Comment: Just like it may not be bonded b/c it is short term, we also can't look to parents every 4-5 years to pay for the needs

Comment: Reason it wasn't included in the past was b/c NPS could help schools that couldn't raise the \$ themselves. Schools that could afford to would provide for themselves.

Question: When the SC changes the curriculum to use more tech, do they know how much it costs?

Answer: Leo is able to guide the needs/costs, but he is expecting \$ from the PTO

Question: What if the plan doesn't work? Where should the concern be directed

Answer: That's why we want the support of you and the schools. We want your feedback and your support to let them know that we need them to fund this. Also, direct those concerns to the Mayor. Tech funding isn't a huge % of overall city budget.

Comment: Public school means parents shouldn't be paying for core curriculum.

Council Votes *(continued from beginning of meeting)*

Vote 3: Andrea Steenstrup as new Equity representative

Motion was made by Theresa Fitzpatrick to approve the nomination of Andrea Steenstrup as Equity Representative to the PTO Council Executive Board. Motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Equity Report and Equity Policy

There are some changes to other aspects of the Equity Policy that we will be looking at, for example the mention of publishing centers. Some portions are out-of-date or need clarification. Re-establishment of the Equity Committee is needed.

We will rework and bring revisions back to the Council

Best Practices for PTO Budgeting and Finances

We will talk about Budget at the next meeting.

PTO Manager from PTO Today mentioned.

Administrative

- Need Equity report and additional info. Please ask your treasurer to send in the numbers. Now we have an Equity rep. and she can answer questions.