

# Thoreau Elementary School PTO Board Meeting

Meeting Name: Thoreau Elementary School PTO Board Meeting

Date: September 9, 2009

Place: Thoreau Elementary School Library

Meeting was called to order at 3:38 PM by Louisa Medaris. Introductions were made by all present.

Meeting Minutes:

- Playground Update: Ms. Fritz (school principal) spoke about the progress towards upgrading the "upper" playground (the playground nearest the front entrance of the school). She compared the outcome of a completed playground to various types of cars--we could end up with a "Chevy" type of playground that would cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000-\$60,000, which is what Crestwood Elementary School opted for. Or at the upper end, we could try to get a "Cadillac" playground, which costs closer to \$200,000, but has the benefit of being ADA compliant, which means that for our students in wheelchairs, they can also enjoy the playground. As Ms. Fritz also pointed out, our school is the designated elementary school in the area for special needs students, and will continue to be so for the foreseeable future. This makes the desire for a handicapped accessible playground one that should be shared by not just the principal, but also by the playground committee, the parents, and the Thoreau community as a whole, so that all future students can enjoy a place to play, which is the intent of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act).

We currently have only \$7,700 set aside for the playground, so Ms. Fritz thought that we may be able to do the playground in stages, i.e. Stage One being the blacktop, fencing, and just one piece of play equipment. In talking with the playground companies, she also said that they are great about coming about with designs and options, and that they would happily provide drawings that could be displayed for parents and students to give feedback, as the 4th and 5th graders dearly love their wall ball and need a say in what is being done. Everyone agreed that with fundraising at a standstill, much more money needs to be raised, and if an ADA compliant playground is to be built, we need to find out if there are funds available from other sources. Kennedy School is one resource, since they just built such a playground, and Leah Sandholm will talk to someone she knows who let her know about possible scholarships, etc. Finally, Jenice said that she felt asking parents and others related to the school for a direct contribution was something that should definitely be considered. When there is a definite timeline in place, this is something that can be done. All these items need to be followed up on and the money for this project needs to be flowing in. Louisa will get names to Jenice to get people moving on this item.

- Jenice then spoke about the Entertainment Books, which go home this week. There has been some question about the distribution of these, but as many have pointed out, we will try this as a fundraiser, and if it does not work, we will not use it again. Todd reported that he has already received a \$500 check from Entertainment Publications, on 9/3/09, though they did not specify what this amount was sent for, as we have not sold any books as of this time. There was some speculation that it was a signing bonus. Sally Foster owns this

Entertainment Book project, and may have been quite aggressive in promoting the project.

- Jenice then went on to discuss that the recent PTO email described the working of the Entertainment Books, the Homegrown Project, and the Gift Wrap sale, and that the general feeling is that three projects in the first three months of school is enough, as we do not want to overwhelm families. At the same time, we do need to increase to increase revenue, and need to better promote SCRIP, Henry D. Coffee, Box Tops and Target. (Before the meeting there was discussion of gift cards for Octopus Car Wash also.) Jenice speculated when we might fit in a Thoreau Cook Book, though she felt it must be after December.
- In a further discussion of SCRIP, a few ideas were discussed. SCRIP is an excellent program in which anyone may purchase gift cards from a large listing of retailers. The idea is that individuals look at their own spending habits and simply pre-purchase gift cards to use in place of the cash they would use that month at the stores they normally shop at, such as their grocery and department stores and gas stations. They can also buy these cards as gifts for others, of course. For whatever reason, Thoreau families seem unaware of the ease of the program, and last year we raised only \$2,000 on the program. By comparison, Chavez raised \$14,000. One way that they promoted their SCRIP program was by pre-purchasing popular cards, such as Woodmans cards, in small amounts such as \$25, and selling them on Friday afternoons. This was one suggestion that was made to try at Thoreau. Todd suggested that we make use of yet-to-be-appointed Parent Ambassadors to promote the program. They could activate a calling tree, making sure that each family gets a thorough description of the program, and answering any questions that they have about how it works. This personal touch would possibly encourage people to give it a first try. Finally, everyone felt a simplified promotional form that goes home in backpacks was definitely called for, and that it would need to be translated into Spanish also.
- Laura G. talked about Box Tops, and that the collection of these have fallen off each year for several years. It was suggested that competition between the classes would perhaps encourage kids to bring these in. If teachers provided a box in each classroom, and at there were a set date for a count of Box Tops, with a prize at each grade level, for example. No decision was made however.
- Louisa said there is still no chair for Sally Foster.
- Laura O suggested a December and June survey that asks families their opinions of all PTO activities/spending. Everyone agreed this was a good idea.
- PTO Treasurer Todd made a presentation, showing charts he made that showed where our money goes. These charts will be posted online, emailed to all those on the PTO email list, and posted on the school bulletin board. He reported that looking back over the past four years and at a projection of the next year, things are not looking wonderful. If things stay just as they are, he projects a net **loss** of \$4,000. Which would mean we would need to dip into the playground project fund. We need to control expenses. Todd made several specific points:
  - With about \$9,500 in the bank, we actually only have \$2,000 available in immediate discretionary funds for new project requests.
  - The project from 2 years ago, Bids 4 Kids, is currently defunct, as no one volunteered to pick it up last year. Someone would need to get moving on it now in order for it to happen a year from this coming spring. It happened in conjunction with Cherokee Heights School in the past and raised quite a bit of money, but was a lot of work. Kate suggested that it might be able to be scaled back to a smaller event, and Jenice she could

contact Mark Evans, who runs a local record label and is skilled at fundraisers, as a possible person who could help with this.

- Direct Donations are down, and we need to ask parents for these. We could develop a cool thank that kids would like.
  - Entertainment Book as a resource was discussed previously
  - General Mills Box Tops can be a great source of revenue and need to be increased
  - Gift Wrap sales have declined greatly each year
  - SCRIP exists under 2 types, and can be quite profitable, needs to be promoted
  - Directory saved money last year, can be paired again with Cherokee. Laura O. promises to bring it in on budget and encouraged all committees to be frugal
  - 5th Grade Graduation was extremely expensive last year and must be contained this year to a budget. Over \$1200 was spent last year, and possibly this was because DVDs were burned for each graduate.
  - Todd reported getting a \$40 check from something called "One Course" but no one knew what this was or why he received it.
  - Todd also reported getting income from the safety belts from Lisa. The crossing guards purchase their safety belts.
- Louisa reported that the only planned Bake Sale would be during the Garage Sale, but wondered if we could plan another one, perhaps tied to the sale of the Cook Book. If the Cook Book came out at Mother's Day, there could maybe be one then. No decision was made.
  - Laura O. asked what "other" cultural events were, and we learned this category covered such visitors as Irish Dancers, Children's Opera, etc.
  - Kathleen inquired about the idea of a "Fun Fair" as it had been highly profitable in schools she had previously worked in. She will follow up with the Fundraising committee.
  - Hispanic Heritage Week is Sept. 15-Oct. 15, but there is no one doing anything special for it at the school. If anyone wants to step into the role, they would be most welcomed.
  - Laura O. will be sending out emails to those who are to be Parent Ambassadors/Liaisons, and in the classes where no one volunteered, she will try to find someone to step in.
  - Clint, the webmaster, was not present.
  - Fall Picnic, Book Fair and Open House are under control and email has been sent to everyone on these matters. All families have been notified about them in the Oak Leaf.
  - Chairs are still needed for the Transportation Committee, and the Lunch and Recess Support Committees.
    - Transportation Committee gets the word out to everyone that there is free transportation available to any Thoreau family that wants to attend any Thoreau PTO event. We have an account with a Madison cab company, and will make arrangements when notified that they are needed.
    - Many volunteers signed up for Lunch and Recess, and need to be contacted that they can and should be coming in to help. There are only 2 lunch/recess periods, so K-1, & 4 go to one period together, while 2-3, & 5 go the other. The problem is particularly with the first period and the

K-1's with 4th graders being trampled, and the need for more adults out on the playground. Leah is taking additional names for this, and for Library volunteers. In past years there were 3 lunch/recess periods. Joan Hansen is lead administrator for Lunch/Recess.

Important Announcements:

- The PTO Today Website was pointed out, <http://www.ptotoday.com> and an article was handed out "Is Your PTO a Clique?" We will be discussing this article at the next meeting.
- The PTO By-Laws were handed out, and these will also be discussed at the next meeting.
- Louisa sought permission to add several present to the PTO Board mailing list. Some declined, due to the heavy volume of emails, and others accepted.
- A discussion was held about times of PTO Board meetings. We want to make sure that meetings are held at times that are inclusive to all. They should not be only after school, which shut out those who work full time and cannot flex their schedule to attend a school day meeting. It was therefore determined that the next meeting will take place on **September 28 at 6:00 PM. The meeting place is yet to be determined.** Louisa will determine this and let everyone know the location.

Number of Attendees:14

Names of Attendees:

Laura Aguilar-Omernik--Parent Liason  
Jenice Con Foo--Fundraising  
Kathleen Hoppe  
Todd Castilow--Treasurer  
Leah Sandholm  
Tasha Bremel  
Kate Huntington--Fundraising  
Liz Fritz--School Principal  
Louisa Medaris  
Sherri Striebel  
Jone Kiefer--Staff Rep.  
Jason Durocher--Staff Rep., Translations  
Cindy Johnson--Staff Rep.  
(illegible)