

Thoreau Elementary School PTO General Meeting - Minutes

Date: Tuesday, October 6, 2009

In attendance:

(Parents) Michael Clausen, Tracy Clausen, Christy Ehlert, Susie Greblo, Tim Gebhardt, Alexis Booker, Tasha Bremel, Sarah Larson, Katy Moritz, Jessica Carrier, Kim Zinske, Connie Roderick, Erin Wass, Elizabeth Goetz, Sam Glaze, Susan Wilson, Tom Wilson, Reyna Dominquez, JJ Wright, Cindy Liu, Annemarie Banas, Lauren Rosen Yeazel, Leah Sandholm, Shawn Krueger, Heide Pankoke, Peter Ferrazzano, Sharon Nelson, Monica Johnson, Anna Peterson, Gina Hodgson, Robin Gray, Heather Allen, Meredith Rhodes Carson, Leane Tyska, Kristina Jasmin, Tommy Jasmine, Shanne Kriston, Elodia Romero

(PTO members/parents) Louisa Medaris (President), Sherri Stroebel (Vice-president), Kate Huntington (Co-fundraising), Clint Thayer (Web manager), Jenice Con Foo (Co-fundraising), Todd Castilow (Treasurer), Aphra Mednick (Co-secretary)

(Thoreau staff) Elizabeth Fritz (Principal), Joan Hanson (Teacher)

Announcements by Principal Liz Fritz:

1. Enrollment #'s:

- as of 10/6/09, there are 426 enrolled students, this is 50 more students than last year
- staff additions - 3 new positions (two new Kindergarten teachers and one new 3rd grade teachers)
- ELL has increased by 100% (40 last year, 80 children total this year)
- special education enrollment is down

2. Positive Behaviors Intervention Program:

- Joan Hanson (phys ed & behavioral intervention specialist) is leading this program
- implemented a three-tier system to identify and help children learn appropriate behavior, teaching the children and not assuming that they know appropriate behaviors (for ex. how to line up, bathroom behavior)
- check-in, check-out system, buddy mentors
- based on rewards and awards including “Positive Award Assemblies”, “Tico tickets”, “cool tools”, weekly “golden cone award” each week,
- other rewards - “Tico Ticket Store” in November where kids can cash in their Tico Tickets, UW student athletes coming for lunch
- Positive Behaviors Intervention Program is happening at schools in other states, within the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)

- Thoreau is leading the charge in the MMSD system

3. Instructional Teaming:

- assigns children to teams of teachers with support staff
- Three goals of instructional teaching, to (1) improve instructional differentiation (2) increase student achievement, and (3) decrease behavioral problems as documented by referral to the main office
- instructional teaching at Thoreau is in its 1st year and is a 3 year integration project
- components include additional staff development
- beginning on 10/12/09 all teachers will be trained to have a beginning knowledge of working with ELL students

4. H1N1:

- there have been positive cases at Thoreau
- teachers are teaching children best practices such as having children wash hands constantly and coughing into their arms
- parents are encouraged to have their children wash hands when they get home from school
- possible immunization clinic in future (possibly at Thoreau or other elementary schools in the district)
- When students go to health office with flu like symptoms, they have to stay at the health office. Students with non-flu like symptoms who need to go to the health office (ex. Bloody nose) are encouraged not to stay for extended time in the health office.

Parent question: How do parents know if there is an H1N1 case in the classroom? Assume that there is. Dane County is no longer testing and the school or teacher doesn't always know.

5. Questions & Answers:

Q. Do we have room for 456 students? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) We are almost at capacity, we always take children from our catchment area, and it is possible that the boundaries would change if needed but that is not indicated at this current time.*

Q. Will there be a choral concert this year? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) Not sure.*

Q. Things are being stolen out of moveable cubbies on the 1st floor. What can be done? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) I looked into purchasing permanent lockers but the cost is out of budget at \$19,000.00.*

Lunch & Recess questions/discussion:

Q. How is lunch working out this year? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) It is loud, but it seems to be working better. There are 7 staff members on the playground -2 less than last year, 1-4 parent volunteers, 1-3 UW students, 1 staff for special needs children. We are working with the children on teaching and following rules, some students are assigned to specific staff, and there is new equipment. We are still looking for more volunteers who are available at 12pm.*

Q. What happens when weather is bad? How will that be managed? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) We use playground on most days, sledding in winter time but space is tight.*

Q. I've been at recess since the beginning of the school year and it is very chaotic. There was one day when ½ the class was in tears because it was so chaotic on the playground. It was not a good experience for anyone and rattled me as a parent. There are not enough people to assist – kids need to go to the bathroom, kids are falling. Is staff supposed to be wearing vests? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) Yes. A. (Todd Castilow - PTO Treasurer) I've been looking at the [financial] numbers. I was ambivalent to the problems, but after looking at the #'s I realize that the school is doing everything they can with limited resources.*

Q. Could parents who are volunteers on the playground have training so they know what their role is, to be able to be more helpful? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) Yes, we can do that.*

Q. Could we add another lunch time? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) No. With the additional classes there are 15 extra PE sessions per week. We longer doing a class and a half so there is an additional gym class. We don't have the time or space.*

Q. Is part of the issue that there are big and little kids together? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) No. We have divided up the 4th & 5th grades. K and 1st graders are together and 2nd and 3rd graders are together.*

Q. Has this issue become worse due to the increase in numbers? **A.** *(Liz Fritz) The increase in numbers has contributed, but this is an ongoing issue. As the school year goes on kids get more comfortable with recess and lunch.*

Q. Things have gotten better. I notice that there have been some issues when kids are in line. Could teachers come out in different doors? This is when kids are engaging in difficult behavior. **A.** *(Liz Fritz) Joan and I are working on it*

and staff has been very receptive. We will review it and see what changes we can make to make it better. Joan will look into it. A. (Clint Thayer -PTO member) I started juggling in front of the kids in line in the morning. Kids started paying attention. Perhaps we could get creative about entertaining the kids. Things are getting better in the morning, less chaotic. A. (Joan Hanson-teacher) The days are starting off better then they were last year. All of the kids walk in together instead of children who receive breakfast going in ahead and missing out on a recess time. A. (Liz Fritz) Last year we served breakfast to 80-100 kids a day. This year we are serving 180 kids every day. All the children are starting the day on the same page, there is less separation. The teachers should be commended for their hard work and commitment to making this happen. A. (Louisa Medaris - PTO president) I will send out another request for volunteers and will let Mark Evans who is the lunch room and recess chair, know. We are ordering vest for volunteers on the playground. We drafted a list of rules for recess staff and encourage people to read it.

Announcements by the Thoreau PTO:

1. Nomination Results (Lauren Rosen, Election Committee Chair):

By-laws stated that the PTO board should be elected; 6 dozen forms came in with support for people already acting on the board. No other names have been suggested. Agreed that PTO board stands as is, no need for nominations. Executive board:

Louisa Medaris – president

Sherri Stroebel – vice president

Todd Castilow- treasurer

Kathleen Hoppe – co-secretary

Aphra Mednick – co-secretary

Jenice Con Foo– fundraising

Kate Huntington - fundraising

Clint Thayer– website manager

Tasha Bremel – general member

Laura Aguilar Omernik - parent liaison

2. Welcome & Introductions (Louisa Medaris, PTO President)

Welcome! Great to see so many faces! Board members have been hard working. Thank you so much to all of the board members, staff and teachers! PTO goal is to have many avenues of communication as we want to inform and involve everyone:

Friday Backpack Mail – *contact main office*

PTO Website, www.thoreauschool.org - *contact Clint Thayer, PTO Geek*

Email - *contact Louisa Medaris, PTO President*

PTO Bulletin Board - *contact Sherri Stroebel, PTO Vice President*

Parent Ambassador Info - *contact Laura Aguilar Omernik, PTO Parent Liaison*

Louisa is available for any questions or concerns.

3. Financial Update (Todd Castilow, PTO Treasurer):

- Refer to “Financial & Legal matter” handout – how we earn our money, how we spend our money
- We raised \$16,666.53 last year
- We spent \$16,359.43 (main areas of spending include: Academic Events, Teacher Academic Support, Scholarships, Community Events, Yearbook) smaller areas of spending include: Administrative Expenses
- main goal this year is to raise money for upper playground
- Bids for Kids (black tie event with silent and live auction at Nakoma Country Club)- not being planned for this year as no one has stepped up, it takes close to one year to plan, the slow economy would make it hard to get donations, less people would attend and spend money, however it is not off the table for the future, would need a committee, possibly piggyback it with the Winter dance, one clear advantage of Bid for Kids is that it reached out to people who don't have children attending Thoreau but live in school boundary, it should be noted that Bids for Kids runs every second year
- Bake Sale will bring in less money since there are no elections this year.
- Looking for additional fund-raising activities – suggestions include a Culvers night and thinking about ways to reach other demographics within the school
- MMSD is only allowed to ask parents to pay a maximum of \$40.00 per student/per year for field trips
- Picture Day – Kindergarten children whose families are unable to purchase a package will receive the basic package paid for by the PTO
Parent question: How does the community know about that? It would be helpful if on picture day children would receive a slip (like children who have purchased a package) communicating to them that they will receive a basic package. This would eliminate differentiating between children who are purchasing and children who are receiving packages. This year children were upset that they were not getting packages, and for being identified as such.
The PTO was not aware of this; we will change things for next year.
- The PTO pays for yearbooks for any 5th graders who need financial assistance.

4. Legalities (Todd Castilow, PTO Treasurer):

- The PTO is not an organization or incorporated, and not protected. We (PTO individuals) could be liable (for example, if a kid were to get hit by a car during the pizza social) for any damages.
- We are currently not tax exempt. Todd will complete (a lot of) paperwork to apply for tax exemption and write up by-laws. Todd will file, we don't need an attorney.
- At the next PTO meeting there will be a vote on articles of incorporation, the by laws, tax exempt status – announcement will go home in backpacks (articles of inc. will be posted on website, front office)

5. Fundraising Updates (Jenice Con Foo and Kate Huntington, PTO Fundraising Chairs):

- We need to raise \$17,000.00. Sorry that there have been so many fundraisers as of date. However we need to do most fundraisers in the fall so programs can be planned for the year.
- Entertainment book fundraiser raised \$700, so thank you! Current fundraising effort is Sally Foster Gift Wrap and cookie dough. Organic food fundraiser will be next beginning on October 23.
- Looking into a variety of fundraisers, concerned about parents experiencing fundraiser fatigue.
- Year round fundraising ideas – looking into SCRIP, Box tops, Thoreau cookbook for the spring (will look for donations from outside companies, advertisements to cover printing costs)
- Spring Carnival (March) – won't compete with the Winter Dance, will be a directed fundraiser for the upper playground, will require a huge amount of work by kids, teachers & parents,
- Approximate cost of playground will be \$40,000 (Chevy version) to \$200,000 (Cadillac version), still need to form a committee
- Charitable donation - dependent on tax-exempt status, will do a direct appeal
- Upper playground (Leane): not a formal plan in place, looking at updating the playground in different phases so that there could be changes made this year, committee members or anyone that wants input please attend a meeting at the Laurel Tavern on October 14, 2009 at 7:30pm.

6. Parent Ambassador Updates (Laura Aguilar Omernik, PTO Parent Liaison):
(Laura absent, update from Louisa)

- Volunteers are identified and will be contacted again by Laura Aguilar Omernik once classrooms have settled, hopefully very soon. If you are

on the list you will be contacted. Any questions, please contact Laura A.O.

Next PTO General Meeting: Tuesday, November 10 @ 7:00-8:15pm