

Mamaroneck Council of PTAs Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 11, 2016
Central Elementary School

- I. The meeting was called to order. Attendees: Kim Tucker, Pam Buchmueller, Debbie Manetta, Pam Brandman, Jackie Emmet, Melanie Kraut, David Seigerman, Raquel Estes (Central PTA visitor), Ann Cox (Central PTA visitor), Melissa Perez, Krista Williams, Joanna Rodriguez (Central PTA visitor), Miran Robarts, Sarah Coady, Randy Spatz (Central PTA visitor), Jackie Shurslep, Melany Gray, Joan Capaldi, Liz Paras, Gail Julie, April Lewis
- II. Central Principal / Staff Presentation kicked off the meeting, with a presentation on their “Read a book, Share a book” program. Karen Russo and a few Central teachers spoke.
 - a. The program just started this year and it impacts all kids in all grades.
 - b. The Central AP was instrumental in writing and organizing the initiative. Last year they wrote a 5k grant from MSF to bring new and noteworthy books to the school – to refresh classroom libraries and match students with new books being published, and to try to keep up with the books coming out.
 - c. Reading specialist Elizabeth explained how these new books needed to come out of the reading room and into kids’ hands. Started with just picture books, which can be read in one sitting. The reading teachers divided the grades up and chose books for each grade level. Explained the program in terms kids can understand.
 - d. Each month they choose a book for each class and choose a way to “process” the book. Info goes in an envelope. At the end of the month they put all the info in an envelope and share with all classes in the grade so each class can see what the others have done.
 - e. First grade teacher presented and explained an interactive writing exercise generated by students and then wrote individual book reviews tailored to each student’s level. This continued a habit of writing other book reviews. Samples were shared. First grade was especially impactful in the growth of the students writing and the range of the work product, given the range of learning etc.
 - f. Third grade teacher presented on a book about Roget, (*The Right Word*) who created the thesaurus. She taught about an actual thesaurus – Synonym Rolls – with a cute cinnamon roll motif poster and the way they worked to expand their vocabulary and writing. Linked with the third grade’s writers workshop.
 - g. Wrapped up with offers to explain/ share more about the program with the other elementary schools if there was interest.
- III. Central PTA reps attending the meeting – Kim Tucker asked us to all make introductions and explained the reason we are asking board reps to attend.
- IV. The minutes from the March meeting were approved.
- V. The treasurer reported that there is a balance of \$9,835.53 in the account.
- VI. Board of Education Update – Melany Gray
 - a. Melany explained the rationale for changing the budget meetings to Tuesday evening sessions, asked if anyone missed the Saturday sessions. Everyone agreed that this new method was preferable. She deferred to Dr. Shaps to hold her comments.

- VII. Update from Superintendent's Office - Debbie Manetta
- a. It's time to gear up for district calendar creation. They would like to work with Google rather than the old eChalk system, as eChalk is changing their format and system. The new change will be a good development. They are working on trying to embed Google into eChalk, which can be done once the calendar is complete. There will be some changes in formatting.
 - b. Each school has access to their own Google calendar and all the district dates. The district dates come first, then MHS, key dates that might impact more people first, concerts, PACE shows, etc. We will still use school specific calendars. The building principals know this now.
 - c. A question was raised as to whether schools could see each other's data. Debbie can give "view only" access to everyone so that we can see every school calendar. This will take a little time to set up, but everyone agreed that this was important up front.
 - d. The back pages of the calendar with the names will be completed soon because the budget meetings are coming soon. Debbie asked that we all send our new board info ASAP. Please send in Word. Deadline was set for June 3, to submit all incoming PTA info. Printer will go last week of June, but try to get info in early so that we can minimize the last minute changes.
 - e. The PTC calendar meeting is June 3 - Incoming PTA presidents should attend this meeting.
 - f. Debbie also asked for attention to be paid to the abbreviations individual schools use to submit their info and to please be consistent.
 - g. A question was asked about setting up generic email addresses for the whole PTA, because people's individual addresses are being used for solicitations, etc. This may be a conversation worth having, in an effort to reduce the personal email info out there floating around. More to come on this.
 - h. Debbie also asked for photos for the calendar, if the schools have any.
- VIII. Update from Dr. Shaps
- a. Budget meetings have been low turnout and low interest because the story has been consistent, fiscally responsible, maintaining programs and managing enrollment. Mindful of the support we need from the community.
 - b. We are under the tax cap, but still challenges exist, particularly managing growth under the formula. Leadership is talking about how to generate interest and get them to vote. Have we engaged, will people turn out? 79% support the budget historically, one of the top in the county. We always want to know what people are thinking about it.
 - c. Thinking how to be creative when we have to think about the basics – teacher, class size, mandates, etc. As an example, we are trying as a district to have 10% of MHS students enrolled in computer science. We get calls from other schools as to how they can copy what we do. How do we find ideas / interests related to the budget?
 - d. Additional state aid was minimal (\$166k net positive). We didn't know how much but didn't think it was a lot, which was borne out. Don't see any large change for next year. Overall, the foundation funding stayed the same. Dr. Shaps mentioned a lawsuit gaining

momentum regarding how state aid is allocated and this could turn things upside down – stay tuned. Recent meeting with Latimer and his thinking is that there will be more support for aid and uncoupling APPR.

- e. Quick discussion of APPR and the struggles / negotiations for people in the room who might not be familiar. Leadership in this area have advocated a decoupling of the plan and potential loss of aid. Repubs opposed to the decoupling. We are working on the plan now.
- f. Question from group regarding the postponement of Next Generation Science standards for next year. We have been working with Helen Pashley on big ideas and Professional Development (PD) around science. Based on the standards we think will be adopted, we as a district are moving toward those goals. Not really impacted by the budget per se, and what we are doing will not change based on the standards being postponed. For example, our work with Sheldrake will continue.
- g. Computer science question from group regarding coding. Suggestion was made regarding bringing in computer lab as a special and making those TEs full time staff as a result. They always talk about the scope and how to bring this access more to the forefront given the 1:1 computing. We are fortunate to have so many talented TEs and have the ability to do all the PD we do regarding coding, etc. Advantages to adding a special would allow our teachers to have more planning time, rather than cutting into their PD time. It is a priority and next steps would be a further investment in teachers. Some TEs have more depth of knowledge and so a thoughtful approach is key. It's a "chicken or egg" problem – do we have the curriculum, and then the teachers to implement it?
- h. A follow up Gap Elimination question was asked – it was restored to full funding (\$365k) and a portion of it is allocated this year. The amount Dr. Shaps mentioned earlier (\$166k) is our share for this year.
- i. Question about a parent who has a deep computer science background - could we consider having our curriculum posted online? Dr. Shaps said that he would have to check and see what we publish now and think about the level of transparency is important. Publishing it in theory makes sense, and the effort it takes to go in and make timely updates. There is a requirement for teachers in the schools to communicate once a month re curriculum, but he will look into it with Annie Ward.
- j. Transition to a discussion regarding test opt outs – uptick at the middle school level, consistent with regional trends. Overall we are 7.5% roughly - consistent with last year, lower than most of the neighboring districts. A challenge is that a lot of parental requests came in at the last minute, so how to respond and react in real time is an issue. For example, security concerns in dealing with moving kids around, and the content protection. Also at the middle school level, some families opting out of some things and not others which may be required to graduate. Board of Regents is making efforts to bring about reform and accountability at the same time. We look at the tests and analyze them to determine how are we teaching based on the standards, or middle school placement, for example. 8th grade ELA has been a predictor for performance in

high school, one of the most difficult tests historically. Not directly impactful on accelerated math, but it does help.

- k. A question from the group was asked: can we communicate any of the above to parents? Most people don't know about a lot of these details. There is a difference of opinion as to how much we should get involved. For example, Dr. Weisman had sent an email regarding this and the blowback was strong enough that it was decided not to make an issue before it was one. Most of the feedback from Regents exams, for example, is that the students need to write about and explain math more thoroughly which is something we already focus on.
 - l. Circling back to APPR – we continue to focus on real time observations and feedback. Creating a framework on the scaling / scoring method for the current standards is something we are pushing back on, and cannot do effectively. The data collection is still happening, which sends a mixed message to teachers. They are already stressed about evaluations. The state is asking for things we don't want to do, but we will ask that the Regents be used as the 50% model, because that is allowed. They keep the database for all grade levels and combine them all and analyze and set standards based on that, rather than pay for a third party evaluator. We want to use this to our advantage.
 - m. Melany Gray noted that that we don't just talk about data and standardized testing all the time, particularly for the benefit of the Central parents visiting today who don't often hear what we talk about here and focus on.
 - n. Dr. Shaps agreed and responded that we do want to think about "counting" and to find things to "count" that make a difference. For example, how do we track the level of engagement at the HS? We track participation in lots of things and link to academic performance, and how if students are actively engaged, how will they perform? We found out that the higher level of engagement, the better academically they perform. Also, we found that the more students read, and check out books, we saw patterns in the data and that we needed to focus on what books are available and how librarians interact with our students. We audited our libraries and whether kids are reading at a higher level who might have more choice in book selections, and work on more choices for those students reading below grade level. We need to count and look at data but we need to come up with theories and how the data support those theories. We want to use this to be thoughtful about the classroom libraries and consistency among them. Also to try to figure out whether the resources are matching what we want to achieve.
 - o. Brief discussion of the lack of snow days and that we will have "extra" days off because we didn't have many snow days and how these decisions are made.
- IX. Budget meetings at school (David, Debbie, Melany)
- a. Discussion of vote and who will speak at the schools meetings. The overall number of voters tick down each year. People generally have an interest, but there's nothing dire here to push people to get in and vote. We send out info, but the most effective way to promote may be via friends and neighbors, so we may be limited in what PTC can do in communicating. We can't be too complacent. But the board can't promote a specific investment. There are good things in this budget, and we try to emphasize that as a

board. PTC can weigh in a little, we can frame it so that people will show up to vote yes, like saying that the PTA endorses the district budget. Low controversy years bring lower turnout, so bring things that people can be excited about. Blast this week and reminders coming. We will also stagger the emails the day of, as we did about the bond.

X. SEPTA updates – Liz Paras

- a. 5th grade read presentation on May 9, *El Deafo* by CeCe Bell. Brief review / explanation of the book. Liz had sent an email requesting checks and people are responding.
- b. Also, a debrief of the Building Bridges speaker: they had 90-100 attendees, and had hoped for more. They are wondering if the effort and expense is worth it. Please give feedback. Group Comments: MAS had a speaker the week before. Also, Dennis has spoken at some of the other schools so people might have felt they already heard him. This was the 5th year and he had more than the last two years. Suggested that the calendar is just too full? It is important to look at how many nights the kids have things going on and the calendar coordination is important. Should they switch to every other year or eliminate? Younger kids have trouble getting there at 7pm, winter scheduling is tough because of snow etc.

XI. PTC Co-op camp discussion for fundraising - Sarah Coady

- a. 75% of kids are lower socioeconomic status, lots of scholarships so lots of needed. Proposal for PTC to fund a part time librarian and storyteller for the summer for \$2500. This will help to stop the summer literacy slide. Vote to fund passed.

XII. PTC Presidents Update: Kim & Pam

- a. Report on the Advocacy Breakfast for the state PTA. George Latimer spoke on the GEA, tax cap allowances and unfunded mandates, regents, etc. Awards for Central – early bird membership award, MAS for good apple / Bronze level and early bird awards for membership.
- b. Call for budget signs, and discussion of stickers for dates for sticking on the signs. Confirm next meeting what we have and stickers we need.

XIII. Miscellaneous Updates / Comments

- c. (Melany Gray) Streamline the fundraising for the district – procedures in place for communicating the gifts the PTA makes for the various items they give back to the schools. The law is that there are two ways the schools are supported – gifts and taxes. There have been irregularities in booster organizations raising funds which also applies to PTAs. The goal is not parity across the district, but there should be processes followed and approvals given when needed. This goes back to raising money for sports teams when they were cut and opening the door for conflicts or discrimination among teams, for example. We will have a policy discussion in the fall, whereby PTAs will have the chance for input. SEPTA vets their grants, and it helps with checks and balances or details that might need to be considered for implementation.
- d. (Tina Maresca) Facility usage – A problem with sports teams and conflicts with schools using them at the same time. There needs to be better communication. Melany suggested emailing her with details and she will help figure out what is going on.

XIV. Adjournment.