

**Mamaroneck Council of PTAs Meeting Minutes**  
**February 8, 2016**  
**Murray Avenue School Small Gym**

- I. The meeting was called to order.
- II. Murray Avenue Principal, Ms Jennifer Monaco, and Assistant Principal, Ms Rebecca Mintiens, welcomed the members of the PT Council. She explained the “ROAR” program at Murray Ave. In this program, whose acronym stands for “Respect, Open Communication, Acceptance, Resolving conflicts”, the students read a book around each of the themes every 4-6 weeks in a randomly paired “reading buddy”. Ties in with literary program at the library and especially effective for lower grade students.
- III. The minutes of the January 11<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved.
- IV. Board of Education (BOE) Update
  - At the next Board meeting, they will have a resolution to request for full restoration of State’s Gap Elimination. State Senator George Latimer is asking the community members to send emails to support this measure. David is working on a communication to the community to enable them to be informed of this issue and encourage to send a quick email. It will be shared by the District for their feedback and then sent to the community. (Gap Elimination is State funding that was temporarily suspended and the advocacy is to request full restoration of funding, which translates to about 400K this year.)
  - Also on the agenda is on recruitment of new personnel. A panel of three new teachers and two administrative staff will discuss.
  - Next BOE meeting will then discuss system challenges, school-based health care center and CORE summer program.
  - The budget for next school year will be challenging given the real tax cap of .75%. By law, the State budget should be passed by April 1, the realistic timing of decision regarding the availability of State funding is June.
  - Question was raised about the District calendar for next school year. It will be approved at tomorrow’s Board meeting. It was necessary to wait for the State-set testing dates to be determined before finalizing the calendar.
- V. SEPTA
  - “Behavior” has become a hot topic resulting in strong requests from the community to hold programs around it. This year SEPTA is offering a series of three workshops on this topic, featuring Frank LoCurto, the district behavior specialist. The first one was held on January 2<sup>nd</sup> and focused on “Understanding and addressing your child’s behavioral issues”. These workshops are intended for everyone – should benefit regular education kids as well. The second workshop is going to be on Feb 29<sup>th</sup> and will focus on

“Organizing your home environment to promote positive behavior”. The third workshop will be on April 14<sup>th</sup> and will focus on “Supporting your child within his or her wider community”. Additionally, on Jan. 27<sup>th</sup> there was a DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) Workshop with a panel consisting of Helene Fremder (Social Worker at MHS), Kelly Carrillo (Psychologist at MHS) and Katie Sawyer (Psychologist from the Larchmont Community Counseling Center).

- There will be a District-wide “Building Bridges Family Night” speaker on March 14<sup>th</sup>. The speaker is a regular at Central and Murray Ave schools, and by popular demand, he will be addressing the entire District plus families from outside the District. The cost of 700 USD will be fully covered by SEPTA.
- CeCe Bell, author of “El Deafo”, a graphic novel about a rabbit with hearing and social issues will be featured at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading program. To cover the cost of this event, support from PTAs will be requested.
- It was suggested that powerpoint presentations from these workshops should be made available, perhaps through SEPTA website. SEPTA is working to improve their website.
- It was shared that the Community Counseling Center holds its own workshops on similar topics. Behavior is a very important topic for all kids, blurring the line between special education and regular education students.
- Related to this topic, it was shared that in light of recent tragic incidents involving Fordham Prep students, Liz Clain, HS Principal, is convening a taskforce to address the issue of mental wellness of students. The question was asked if at-risk kids have access to safe space to share their concerns, and it was pointed out that in addition to counselors, there is an excellent social worker and other professionals at HS.
- It was suggested that identification of at-risk kids is the key challenge, as well as any effort to decrease the stigma of mental illness.

#### VI. Nominating Committee

- The following people have been nominated and will be voted on at the March meeting. The newly nominated candidates were acknowledged with thanks.
  - April Lewis has agreed to take the position of Secretary for next school year.
  - Pam Brandman has agreed to take the position of Treasurer.
- The current Co-Presidents are working to nominate the next President-elect.

#### VII. Update from Dr Shaps/District Communication

- The trip by the AP US Govt and AP Journalist students to the New Hampshire primary has been a great success. The students covered and reported their stories, but they themselves also became a story to be covered on national media.
- A wide range of achievements by our students this week -- the girls track team set a record in 4x800m; HS robotics team won a prize.
- Advocacy to create grass-roots pressure to get Gap Elimination restored will be appreciated; especially if we can reach beyond PTA community, that will be effective. It’s about volume, i.e. number of emails law makers in Albany get.

- Dr Shaps is in the process of finalizing the school budget for next year. With a tight tax cap and growth in student enrollment, fiscal challenges continue. The proposed budget will be presented on March 1<sup>st</sup>. As the situation becomes increasingly more difficult, it is anticipated that the community will be asked to vote to override the tax cap, as they have done so in other communities.
- Asked if the issue of full restoration of Gap Elimination is only impacting our own community, Dr Shaps responded all wealthy suburban were impacted. For State aid, the allocation is not always rational, e.g. our community is grouped to the Midwest region whereas equally wealthy communities on Long Island are grouped with NY City, hence eligible for more aid.
- Among the teachers who are retiring after this school year is the Principal of MAS. Search committee is now working to develop a set of qualities that we seek. Similarly, the Board is discussing the replacement for Dr Minotti, who is also retiring.
- The Board will approve the District's calendar for next year at tomorrow's meeting. The school will not open before Labor Day.
- The incidents involving Fordham students are indicative of challenges the kids face across the country and even in the world. The academic pressure is paramount. Also the sense of uncertainty is prevalent even among adults and definitely for kids. We strive to create the environment where kids can feel safe, and the way to do that is by coming together as community. Dr Shaps is planning to set a date in the future to start the conversation.
- A question was asked about the available help for kids who feel vulnerable. Dr Shaps responded in terms of help with academics/college, the counselors at HS are excellent and they are constantly advocating for the students. In terms of more general help, the HMX staff work with the Community Center and programs on "mindfulness" have been instituted.
- It was suggested that introducing the word and concept of "mental health" at early age in elementary school may eliminate the stigma, and kids will be able to cope better.

#### VIII. Co-President Update

- It was requested that if both Co-Presidents will not be able to make the PTC meeting, that they consider asking another PTA Executive member to attend, so there is a representative from that school.
- HMX Co-President reported that when they were revising the PTA by-laws, they had learned that the long-standing custom of charging less for teacher's membership was in fact against the PTA rules. It was also pointed out that a membership is for individual, not for a family. Some discussions followed on the merit of being part of the larger PTA organization, and it was agreed that being part of the PTA organization provides important benefits such as insurance and structure.
- Related to the discussion on PTA fees, it was raised that at some elementary schools, a different way to raise funds was being considered. Instead of holding fundraising events, the parents are asked to make one-time donation. When asked, at Chatsworth, the parents preferred an event, perhaps valuing the social aspect of it. At MAS, they are

considering something similar to Rye Neck District where families and businesses will be asked to make a donation and in exchange be given a sign to be displayed (“M”) on the front yard, etc. It was proposed that a District-wide fundraising effort may be more effective.

- MAS will hold its first-ever Spanish Book Fair on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. It was raised that there should be a more effective way to disseminate information about events at different schools. It was suggested that this issue should be brought to Debbie, perhaps to suggest that Tiger Tracks include information not only on HS but on other schools in the District. Also, a better use of Constant Contact may be explored. It was agreed that the topic should be further discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 11:07am.

In Attendance:

PT Council

Pam Buchmueller, President  
Kim Tucker, President-Elect  
Miran Roberts, Treasurer  
Keiko Tannenbaum, Secretary

Unit School PTAs

Tina Maresca, HMX PTA President  
Pam Brandman, Murray PTA President  
Melanie Kraut, Murray President-Elect  
Sarah Coady, MAS PTA President-Elect  
April Lewis, Chatsworth PTA President  
Liz Paras, SEPTA President  
Sandy Wu, SEPTA President-Elect

District

Nancy Pierson, Board of Education Representative  
Debbie Manetta, Director of Communications  
Dr. Robert Shaps, Superintendent of Schools

Murray Ave PTA Executive Board

Anne McCarthy  
Michele Metsch