

2011-2012 PTO EXECUTIVE BOARD
COLFAX A.L.A.

MINUTES
MAY 1, 2012 PTO-EB MEETING

This meeting of the 2011-2012 Colfax A.L.A. PTO Executive Board was held at 6:30 pm at Shannon Ewing's house. Jenny led the meeting and distributed a written agenda and budget. Present were:

President Jenny Ganger
Co-VP Fundraising Tamara Dubowitz
Co-VP Fundraising Sukanya Srinivasan
Co-VP Communications Sarah Sirlin
VP Special Events Abbie Campsie
Volunteer Coordinator Mark Beck
Treasurer Shannon Ewing
Assistant Treasurer Ellie Monaco
Secretary Margie Minkler
Middle Level Teacher Representative Kipp Dawson
Lower Level Teacher Representative Tony Woods
Principal Adam Sikorski

Jenny opened the meeting by congratulating the new co-presidents-elect. Jenny will remain president until June 30. She individually thanked all the EB members for the specific things they had contributed to our successful year, then previewed the agenda.

1. Current Budget Report (Ellie) We are now getting requests for funds, including requests for some of the earned ice cream money. Ellie reviewed the fundraising figures, noting that the plant sale shows income of \$3325.77, but the plants have not been paid for yet. The actual number will be lower. On the expenditure side, we have money left over from Family Fun Nights (\$457.37.) Carnival is expected to cost more than \$600. Shannon stressed that the main point of Carnival is community building, not fundraising. (It originally made no money then made \$1000 last year, but making money is not necessary.)

Kipp recounted the incredible trip the 8th grade took to see a play at the August Wilson Center. They were welcomed and were able to connect with the center. The entire trip was a great experience for all kids, African American and all others. Also, the EB may be getting a proposal from student council with their plans to run a store selling school supplies, T-shirts and maybe student art work. The request will be for startup costs.

We need to clarify what expenditures have come out of enrichment. We previously voted to spend \$8000 on art supplies, but now a kiln is being donated from one of the schools to be closed. The art teacher would like to use the money for other supplies, such as glazes and clay. We were expecting to take the agreed upon amount out of enrichment, but it is more than what we have left in the fund. So where should it come from? We also need to review from which funds we have paid other recent request expenditures. Some of them should probably come out of enrichment. We will make adjustments.

What money is still left to be spent in this year's budget? The technology fund has \$1000. Adam is very interested in purchasing student response systems on which children can display and record answers in real time. Adam's wife is researching the costs, and so far has found them for \$670 per set. Each set includes 26-27 units (1 unit is used per child.) Ideally we would have these for all classrooms, but Adam is thinking of purchasing two. He will need to let us know by June 30 if he wants to purchase them this year. If he wants two, we can probably pull money from something else to cover the difference. Kipp thinks we could live with one. Adam's plan is to return current Ms. Seeley's room in the library to a technology center. It was built for that.

Money also remains in the discretionary fund. Adam worked out a deal with the bus company under which they were combining the athletes and after school program kids on the same bus. The bus costs have been coming out of athletics, so a lot of extra money is left in the discretionary fund. Adam wants to purchase "Study Island" as a replacement for Foresight, which has been eliminated by the district. Foresight provided a benchmark for determining how prepared students are for the PSSAs. Now students must take the PSSAs without this preparatory guide. "Study Island" is technology and state standards based. It tracks, prepares and assesses students in both reading and math, and would be very helpful for teachers and students. Alternatively, Adam could poll the staff on how to best use the money for student achievement. Should we roll over the money so no decision has to be made immediately? What about next year expanding the afterschool program that has been so successful, but is now limited in numbers of kids. If the program extended over a greater part of the school year and had more students, it would cost a lot more money. Kipp advises that with all the changes coming, including the switch from PSSA tests to Common Core and Keystone, maybe we should wait before purchasing a technology program that helps with state standards/test preparation. So, maybe we will roll over the remaining discretionary fund money.

In sum, we have about 20,000 left to spend this year, a lot of it in Adam's discretionary fund. But, by the end of the year when all requests have come in, we usually have none left. So we will wait and see.

2. Funding Votes for April 30 Deadline

- Ms. Stewart had presented two requests for reward field trips:
 - a) trip to Romp n Roll roller skating rink for a citizenship reward trip for 460 kids (cost of buses and \$10 per child, totaling something around \$5220;)
 - b) trip to Games N' At video game arcade on the Southside for mentors, mentees and 10 chaperones (cost for buses (\$500) and \$10 per person.)

Adam clarified that these requests come from the school disciplinary committee, which is chaired by Ms. Stewart. Our school uses the positive disciplinary incentive model, and as part of this model, the teachers and Ms. Stewart want to offer a reward to those students who have gotten all O's and S's for citizenship during all three report card periods. The mentor-mentee program involves the pairing of a positive mentor with a student with a concerning incident in the past, or one who the staff are concerned about in general. It is desirable to have them do something fun together at the end of the year. (Kipp mentioned that Adam's mentee is on the honor roll for the first time in Kipp's class.) Other schools with Title 1 money have abundant money at the end of the year for reward trips and choose the places proposed by Ms. Stewart. Adam did already talk to Ms. Stewart and explained that these options are financially unrealistic.

Ideally, Adam would like the PTO to support the ideas and present a realistic number to the committee; the trips may then be developed in this range. Maybe picnics/ cookout excursions in Frick Park would be good. Shannon remembers that Ms. Stewart was planning on having spirit days to raise money to help pay for these events, and the PTO supported the idea. Is that desirable? It is the principal's choice on rewards and traditionally we were behind them. Sukanya notes that we did give David a discretionary fund specifically in order to end the school's many nickel and dime fundraisers. But, this is a good example of small fundraisers/small donation requests that some parents expressly wanted. If the fundraising was done with "spirit days," it would not be overwhelming, and would offer the desired small donation fundraiser. So, let's consider a budget recommendation for them with the idea of a field day with a cookout (maybe three groups by grades.) Maybe we should give \$500 for the behavior reward? Maybe have a total amount for both and let them decide how to divide it? They can conduct "spirit days" to raise money if they want.

Mark moved to approve Ms. Stewart's proposals, Abbie seconded the motion, and all voted against it. Adam then moved to fund \$800 total for the committee to spend as they see fit "on positive incentives." Sukanya seconded the motion and all voted "yes." The committee may, of course, supplement with "spirit day" fund raisers. **EB Action: Declined Ms. Stewart's two fund requests, but voted to give discipline committee \$800 to spend on positive incentives.**

- Lori Goldstein submitted two proposals for the 8th grade:
 - a) field trip to the August Wilson Center, which has already been done;
 - b) field trip to the zoo including an educational scavenger hunt (Kipp confirmed the educational value of the trip.)

The 8th grade has all their field trip money and the balance of their ice cream sale earnings available to spend. It is unclear exactly what money they are asking for. Ellie will ask them to clarify and will email the EB for a vote if needed.

- Tony has some kindergarten field trip requests coming up, including a trip to the zoo, bowling and later, the Carnegie Library. The \$10 per student field trip money will be used for one of these.

3. Finalize 2012-13 Budget Proposal (Shannon/Ellie) Since our last EB meeting, Jenny reworked her budget ideas for next year. She gave everyone a working copy of the spreadsheet showing old, new (proposed ideas for next year) and actual to date budget figures. Fundraising remained as it was following last meeting's discussion, with a total fundraising expectation of \$38,210.

Under program expenses, we agreed to leave the discretionary fund at \$10,000, but will add the school supply line of \$2500. We will need this for teacher's requests even if Adam can afford supplies. People seem to like to donate supplies, so we will also ask for supplies in the August back-to-school letter. People can take advantage of the July and August school supply sales. We agreed to set the field trip line (for the \$10 per student money) at 7,400 because we are expecting 740 students. We will eliminate the P4P spending category and the School Clubs spending line and, instead, use the line of "enrichment grants and clubs/activities," allowing for more flexibility with random requests. The teachers do not wish to continue Food is Elementary, so it will be eliminated. They are hoping to return to the year-long program at the Clay Frick Mansion. Jenny proposed a \$3000 technology line, but, if possible, Adam would like this to be \$5,000. The PTO EB meetings line will be changed just to PTO meetings, the PTO playground insurance line will be changed to just "PTO Insurance." The spending of ice cream profits line is out. Abbie will check on the amount needed for "staff appreciation" and get back to us. Jenny proposed \$5000 for the teacher grants line. The idea is to give \$100 per classroom teacher. Per Adam, that would make it \$4,300. Shannon suggests \$4500 to be safe; Tony suggests keeping it at \$5000. We agreed on \$5,000. That puts the proposed expenses at \$52,700.

This year so far, we spent roughly \$30,000, and will probably spend \$10,000 more. We have \$50,000 in our account right now. Tamara suggests we move the sum we are not expecting to use next year to an account which earns interest. Sukanya will contact Colfax parent Patrick Bransome, a financial advisor, for advice. (Tony

mentioned that we would need to keep the money in an FDIC insured account, and these accounts only yield 1 %, so maybe it will not be that useful.)

4. Updates

- Communications. (Sarah) The newsletter submission deadline is 5/16.
- Events. (Abbie) *Teacher Appreciation Week* is next week. We will be putting nice things in the teachers' mailboxes. Mark reminded everyone that we need more volunteers to take on the teachers with no homerooms. Only 1/3 of them are covered. Melanie is helping with this. The teachers' lunch is changed to next Tuesday the 8th because of "RISE" obligations next Wednesday. Sukanya will be bringing cookie platters and donation baskets left from P4P. A lot of volunteers are doing nice things. *Carnival* will be Monday, June 11. Lots of people have volunteered and everything has been ordered. There will be an ice carving show by the cafeteria and a wild animal show that up to 300 people can attend at \$2 a ticket. Cultural tents will be placed by the Douglas Street entrance if they can't fit in their regular place nearer to the cafeteria; tables will be set up for eating and sitting in this area.
- Should we do something for the office staff leaving at the end of the year? Yes. Definitely for Diane, and we will give \$50 to Sandi Bails out of the supply fund.
- Volunteers. (Mark) Kindergarten Information Night is May 16th at 6:00. Mark, Annie Kurzweg and Diane will be reviewing the clearance forms and have them ready to go for that night. There is a new independent Volunteer Committee with the following 6 subcommittees: classroom/after school program volunteers, school tours, office assistance, bus arrival/dismissal, breakfast/lunch/recess, and calendar. We will be doing all we can to coordinate. Tony said that the PFT and staff appreciate this effort, and don't forget we want all the staff back! Kipp adds that the PFT is committed to getting all the money from the state back. The EB parents responded that the volunteer effort is not to replace the lost teachers, which can't be done. It is to do our best to help in the horrible situation of the budget cuts. If the efforts are in place, they could continue even when money is restored, making our school even better.
- Fundraising. (Tamara, Sukanya) The plants for the plant sale will be delivered next Wednesday. People will pick up their filled orders. We ordered extra plants so people may purchase them on site. The tile template created by Sarah for those graduating this year has been sent out to the 8th graders. Sukanya will apply for the PTO Today grant (Gabrielle Gonzales' name came up.) No word yet on Annie's Organics, Bon Appetite or Whole Foods grants.

5. General Meeting Plan The PTO will precede the PSCC at the upcoming general meeting. The PTO agenda includes elections of next year's officers, change to the

bylaws to officially add assistant treasurer as an EB member, approval of next years' budget, and Carnival. The PSCC agenda includes 1) any new news regarding cluster grouping/ class size/ classroom structure and 2) potential partnership with Pittsburgh BEATS. Tony asked if he or Kipp could give a 5 minute presentation on seniority, the teachers' union and A+ Schools. Adam agreed. Tony thinks there is a lot of inaccurate information out there. Because of RISE, the implemented teacher evaluation system, all teachers are effective, and so seniority continues to be a fair way to decide who is furloughed.

6. Officer Nominations/Elections

- Last year the EB intended to add the new position of assistant treasurer to the executive board. The EB wrote a change in the bylaws, voted and passed this change. However, a change in the bylaws requires a vote of the general PTO, and we did not follow the procedures of notifying the members of an upcoming vote to be taken at the general meeting, and then voting on the change at the general meeting following the notification. Jenny proposed we correct this omission at the upcoming general meeting, prior to the election. Everyone agreed. We will notify people that we will be taking a vote on this issue at the upcoming general meeting, and then at the general meeting, we will move to change the bylaws as originally intended to add the executive board position of assistant treasurer.
- Tamara asked if only one person is allowed to hold the other board positions. In the past it has been customary for there to be co-VPs in different positions, like co-fundraising VPs and co-secretaries. Per Jenny, we have had "co" positions in the past (often to get people to agree to be on the board,) but the bylaws only mention co-presidents, and this year it is the preference of the incoming presidents that only one person hold each position.
- Ellie expressed concern about the lack of transparency in the election process. We present a budget and try to make the budget transparent. We should also have a transparent election and nomination process. The potential nominations and the procedure should be discussed, like the budget, with the whole EB, and then with the whole PTO rather than behind the scenes, with both the EB and the general PTO unsure of what is taking place.

Jenny noted that for the first time this year more people are interested in being on the board than available positions. The most transparent way to proceed would be a contested election at the general meeting. Several agreed that people at the school, and those interested in the positions in particular, are not willing to engage in a contested election. So if we are not having contested elections, some procedure needs to be followed. Jenny believes the presidents need to be able to work with the board members so it makes sense for them to be active in the process. Margie explained that the bylaws do not provide for a selection process to be conducted by the incoming presidents or even the EB. The bylaws just say the EB should seek nominations prior to the election, and

then ask for nominations at the meeting. If people are in agreement that some procedure other than this open election under the bylaws needs to be followed, or that incoming presidents should have some special say in who is on the next board, shouldn't this be discussed openly with the PTO as a whole? A change in election process seems like something for the whole PTO to decide.

Ellie asked to know, as one example, how was the decision made by the incoming presidents that one person only should fill the board positions? A decision like this should be transparent. Shannon said that she and Abbie talked to Mark, Jenny and others and concluded that co-VP's and other co-board positions don't work well. Margie noted that the bylaws only refer to a co-president, not other co-position holders. But, the PTO has commonly elected co-VPs and other positions. Any one or any two people may run as co-VPs for any position, regardless of the incoming presidents' preference. On the issue of transparency, though, if the incoming presidents are saying they want only one person per board position, this is a change. And it is a change that, in essence, is a change to the election process and makeup of the board. Is this, again, the type of question that should be decided by the whole PTO? Mark thinks that the PTO should never have been electing co-VPs without having sought a change in the by-laws to expressly allow for this. If we are acting in a way not called for by the bylaws, we should always seek out, and should have in the past sought out, a change in the bylaws through a decision from the whole PTO.

In general with these types of decisions, Tamara and Tony stress that people want to feel like they are contributing. Some ideas from the group were: Could we have a suggestion box or some way for people to ask questions about how things are done? Should we discuss who is interested in the next year's board positions during the EB meetings? Abbie does not think this is workable- it would take three hours to include this type of discussion. Adam suggests that the problem could be helped by having the discussions about the next year's board earlier. Others suggested that in addition to starting earlier, we could have a separate meeting where information is gathered and ideas are discussed on potentially interested people. A slate committee could be formed from the PTO at large, and this committee could take on the roll of searching for interested people and resolving the situations of two people wanting the same position. Tony believes this would create transparency.

Secretary Margie Minkler