

PTO Board Meeting Minutes

April 28, 2021 3:30 pm

Present via Zoom:

Ross Ingram
Natalia Duarte
Karey Kluesner

Also attending: Dave Lebel, Lee Ann Banycky, Melissa Morgano, Julie King, Alyce Edwards

BACKGROUND:

This was a special PTO Board Meeting to conduct Program Reviews of the major PTO-funded programs.

Colfax Garden (Hills, Banycky, Morgano),
Frick Environmental Center (Mlay, Morgano)
Frick (Grujich)
Colfax Musical (Edwards)
Chess Club (King)

We asked the lead(s) for each program talk with us on Zoom about the Program, so that PTO members (many who change each year) can better understand the Programs and be great advocates for those Programs with the rest of the Colfax parent community. This type of discussion is a common practice for nonprofits (the PTO is incorporated under the Pennsylvania Nonprofit Corporation Law), to evaluate funded programs on regular basis. The PTO had separately sent out a survey to teachers and parents on PTO-related programs and this was an opportunity to directly share that feedback with the teachers involved in these programs.

No write-up, slides, or formal presentation were required. We asked each lead to share what they wanted us to know about the Program and to touch on the following.

1. Name of the Program
2. How many years it has been going on (if you know).
3. What kind of feedback do you get from 1) students and 2) parents.
4. What, if anything, should change about the program (e.g., expand, extend to other grades, modify, scale back, phase out).
5. At what point in the school year does Colfax need to commit to the program.

DISCUSSION:

Colfax Chess Club: Ms. King gave an overview of the the program, which has been going on for at least 10 years and is run by Chess Master Jerry Meyers. The number of students each year averages about 100, varying between 85 (2019) and 160. Jitka Benedikova is the parent coordinator. Sign-up is on-line now, coordinated outside the PTO. The club meetings are held during lunch-recess which allows all students the

opportunity to join. Most kids at first miss being able to join recess but once they learn they are enthusiastic to play each week. The highlight is the tournament held at the Squirrel Hill Library – very professionally run. And the Colfax team wins every year! There are two 6-week terms, fall and winter. The PTO pays for half the fee and the school pays for the rest – the students do not have to pay. The program is also subsidized by scholarship money arranged by Mr. Meyers. While a new learner class is only formally offered for 1st and 2nd graders, if an older child is interested Ms. King has been independently teaching them the basics so that they can join the regular classes. At sign-up time parents are asked if they want to volunteer during the lunch time classes. The feedback that they get from students and parents is positive. Natalia Duarte provided the feedback from the parent survey that it was well received although there was a concern about not seeing information for sign-up in time. The issue of equity is on the mind of Ms. King and having better communication to all families at sign-up time is desirable. It was discussed that the PTO could potentially assist in the area of coordinating volunteers to help out during the lunch time sessions.

Colfax Musical: Ms. Edwards has run the musical for two years so far. The musical is for Grades 5-8. She has carefully considered whether that could be extended to 4th grade but has determined that keeping it with grades 5-8 is most appropriate. Chorus is for grades 3-8 (about 30-35 kids, also an after-school club) and they are included in the musical each year. A contract for royalties (~\$1K) for the selected play typically occurs in December. Rehearsals typically start in February. Last year there was about a month of rehearsals before Covid. Ms. Edwards was able to make arrangements to extend the rights to royalties for the 2019-2020 year to 2021-2022. Ms. Edwards receives an appropriate stipend for running the musical. In addition to the stipend, she rents a sound system and lights to ensure the audience can hear and make the presentation more professional for the students and parents. Parents are able to help with making costumes and Ms. Mitchell has made the programs in house, both saving resources. There is a small admission fee and other concessions to offset some of the expenses. The most recent play, Beauty and the Beast, was a great success. The feedback that they get from students and parents is positive. Natalia noted the uniformly positive comments from the PTO Parent and Teacher survey.

Ms. Edwards also noted that there are also Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra field trips in a normal year. There is no charge from the PSO and she has secured free bussing. Thank you!

Colfax Garden: Ms. Banycky spoke on the Program for Kindergarten students. She has been involved for about four years. There are 24 Kindergarten lessons in the curriculum involving the Garden. She had great praise for the professionalism and enthusiasm of the Grow Pittsburgh staff and program. The program is also very valuable from an equity standpoint, giving some children their first opportunity at understanding how food grows. The feedback that she gets from students and parents is positive and there are no obvious need for any changes. Grow Pittsburgh typically coordinates with the PTO President on payments and discussions on plans for the next year typically occur in the Spring. Natalia noted that this Program received the most positive comments of all programs in the PTO Parent and Teacher survey.

Frick Environmental Center: Ms. Morgano spoke about the Program regarding 1st grade. She has been involved in the Program for over 10 years. Colfax was the original school

at the start of this Frick Program. The Frick has a very professional and student-oriented staff. She has seen the Program improved from year to year. The 1st grade students visit the Environmental Center three times a year: once to the Meadow, once to the Stream, and once to the Woodlands. Each visit has three elements: classroom, tour/research, and stewardship. The program aligns with the Ready Gen curriculum. The cost is \$500/class. This program has a strong equity element in ensuring all students have the opportunity to experience the Environmental Center. She does not see any need for changes to this particular program, but did identify that the Frick has other partner programs that could also be valuable. The students have a wonderful time. Natalia noted the responses from the PTO parent and teacher survey was highly supportive of this Program. The Frick typically coordinates with the PTO President on payments; discussions on plans for the next year typically occur each year in the Spring.

The meeting concluded at 4:50 p.m.