

**Central PTO December Minutes  
December 4, 2015**

In attendance: Heather Smith (President), Lynn Wellehan (VP Communications), Amy Polachek (Treasurer), Sara Ridder (Secretary), Trisha Kocanda (Superintendent), Beth Kauffman (President, Crow Island PTO), Kim Ronan (President, Greeley PTO), Jen Hayes (President, Hubbard Woods PTO), Karen Palasz (Co-chair Skokie-Washburne PTO), Heather Pigott (Co-chair Skokie-Washburne PTO), Jennifer Pehlke (School Board)

Excused: Dana Crumley (School Board), Jenn Weiler (FAN), Gina Mathews (FAN)

**Secretary's Report – Sara Ridder**

Heather Smith moved to approve the November minutes. Amy P. seconded the motion.

**Guest – Lori Morales on behalf of North Shore Edge Wrestling Club**

Lori Morales, a District 36 parent, joined us to discuss the possibility of endorsing the North Shore Edge Wrestling Club. She believes strongly in this organization and the void it fills in the community. The price for the club is very reasonable and it serves K-8<sup>th</sup> grade. The Committee discussed possible ways to highlight such organizations throughout the community and across the schools—while adhering to our policies. Ideas included spreading the word through personal emails, mentioning it at meetings, developing a separate communication to include these types of organizations and opportunities, or promoting it through community activities such as Screen Break.

**Superintendent's Report – Tricia Kocanda**

Tricia noted that Greg could not make today's meeting but will be in touch with us soon about financial issues and the Angel Fund.

Another Shared Vision session has been added to the calendar for early morning on Friday, December 11<sup>th</sup>. This time was selected based upon this committee's feedback.

The Board is scheduled to approve the levy this month. They will try to keep optionality given state changes to ensure our District finances remain healthy. This includes keeping the tax abatement option open.

The PARCC results are in. We have these for 65% of our students. The District only has access to our scores, as well as state and national averages. These will be mailed out to families on December 15<sup>th</sup>.

Alison Hawley is resigning from her position to focus on her research and dissertation. The Curriculum team has stepped up to continue the momentum. Betty Weir is taking the lead on communications. The department will, most likely, bring in a retired curriculum director to help behind the scenes. There is a good plan in place and the

District is confident about moving forward. The job will be posted soon so we can find a permanent replacement.

A search is also underway for a new Hubbard Woods principal. They are beginning focus groups to identify the key traits for this new hire. Hubbard Woods is a desirable place to be principal so they are anticipating a strong pool of candidates.

The out-of-date playground equipment has been removed in most places. Only a few final items remain. The organization that is removing the equipment is also storing it for us. In the meantime, research is being done to find good homes for the pieces. For example, Architectural Gardens in the city would like a piece for their museum. We are talking to the right people and developing a good plan. It has also been suggested that we involve Washburne students to research new equipment, legal aspects, etc.

### **School Board - Jennifer Pehlke**

The Tuesday, December 15<sup>th</sup> School Board meeting will be preceded by a STAR Workshop. Representatives from the company that administers STAR will be in attendance to take the board through the test and discuss what is supposed to be measured, how we assess student development and track growth.

The previous month's School Board Meeting included a workshop about the tax levy. In addition, the Kindergarten team presented results of the parent survey. Their research revealed general agreement that an extended day shouldn't become academic, but remain focused on social and emotional development. At this time, additional cost implications need to be investigated, such as how it impacts the principals' time, staff and facilities costs. Space is another critical issue. At Crow Island, for example, six new classrooms would need to be added. Because it is much more complicated and complex than originally anticipated and the board is committed to doing it correctly, they are looking past the 2016- 17 school year for possible implementation. A decision for the 2017-2018 school year will be made before the end of this school year.

### **FAN Report**

FAN is finished for the calendar year. They will join us in January to discuss next year's calendar. However, it was noted later in the meeting that there is an interesting upcoming panel on February 17<sup>th</sup> in Evanston about "The Future of Learning."

### **President's Report – Heather Smith**

Heather S. thanked the PTO presidents for their work at the schools and preparation for today's meeting discussion.

### **Treasurer – Amy Polachek**

Amy P. reported that the audits have been finished and taxes have been filed.

### **Communications - Lynn Wellehan**

Nothing to report.

### **Skokie and Washburne – Karen Palasz and Heather Pigott**

There is a push towards improving the STEAM areas at both schools.

### **Crow Island – Beth Kauffman**

There are still issues and negative feedback from parents about hot lunch, primarily related to the space crunch. The PTO continues to try to educate the parents that this is a volunteer-run program and they are putting significant effort into making it work with what they have.

### **Greeley – Kim Ronan**

Lunch issues are also a struggle at Greeley. There are many different expectations and perspectives and the PTO is constantly trying to communicate that they are doing their very best.

Bingo Night was held on Thursday, December 3 and was a huge hit. Attendees brought donations for the New Trier Food Pantry and a large amount was collected. The PTO runs and provides prizes for the event; it is not a fundraiser.

The PTO is doing work to understand what kind of STEAM space is available in the resource center. Careful research is being done, with visits to other schools to understand various models. Mary Ellen Schulz is the point person on this right now. The administration and faculty have interest, but this needs to be organized and corralled. The next step on this project is to form a dedicated committee for this. Two good examples of schools to visit were shared: Summit Elementary School in Oconomowoc, WI and Central School in Wilmette.

### **Jennifer Hayes – Hubbard Woods**

Hubbard Woods just finished their book fair. They are now working on the holiday gifts. The other big issue at Hubbard Woods is the principal search.

### **Discussion - Teacher Appreciation**

The Board shared how Teacher Appreciation Week is handled across the schools:

**Hubbard Woods** – Teacher Appreciation Week is held the week before spring break. Teachers like this because it is a slow, quiet week to celebrate. The PTO organizes something for them every day. Last year: Monday was massages and quiche from Three Tarts; Tuesday was fruit, coffee cake and Sprinkles' Cupcakes; Wednesday was notes and flowers from the kids, a thank you note from the PTO and a popcorn buffet; Thursday was bagels and cream cheese, veggies and dip. Friday is the culmination of the week with a catered lunch that brings all the teachers together. In addition, baskets that have been made by the classes are raffled to teachers. Kids can buy raffle tickets in their

teacher's name. The raffle raises about \$3,000 that, coincidentally, is also the approximate cost of the lunches the PTO provides for teachers throughout the year.

**Crow Island** – This year Teacher Appreciation Week will be two weeks before spring break. At Crow Island there is a raffle with a large number of prizes. Select 4<sup>th</sup> graders announce winners each day and, by the end of the week, every teacher has won something.

### **Greeley**

The PTO is currently discussing when to schedule this. In the past it has been held the week after National Teacher Appreciation week but may be scheduled the same week as the national event this year. Over Teacher Appreciation week the Greeley PTO organizes something for the teachers each day—such as flowers and cards. There is also raffle with gift cards and, at the end of the week, there is a luncheon.

### **Skokie & Washburne**

Teacher Appreciation falls on the same week as the National celebration, the first week in May. The PTO organizes something for the teachers every day, such as gift cards and candy. There are three days of hospitality events: on Tuesday breakfast is provided; on Wednesday the PTO brings popcorn; on Thursday the PTO brings lunch (from a restaurant selected by teachers). The PTO does not solicit additional money from parents for items such as gift baskets.

### **Next Month's Business – Heather Smith**

In the interest of time, Heather S. suggested that the conversation about Funds and Wish Lists be moved to January. In addition, at the January meeting there will be an update from the Calendar Committee.

*The regular portion of the meeting was concluded at 10:13.*

### **Central PTO Discussion with the School Board**

Following the regular meeting there was a discussion with Board Members, Kendra Wallace and Jennifer Pehlke. The board is working on connecting with key constituents and, as part of this effort, is seeking feedback from the Central PTO.

Board members asked: What are some things you appreciate about the school district this year? Responses included:

- Focus on progressive education, which is our history and foundation. The fact that we are flexible and can evolve with the generations. It is also great that we are beginning to be recognized publically for this.
- Idea lab (HW). This fosters thinking, creativity and analytical skills. Parent volunteers have helped spread the word.

- District putting focus on maker spaces. This is an area where we have been lagging. It is great that we are getting up to speed. However, need to expand these offerings to get other kids involved in and to maximize the utilization of these spaces.
- That the District is being visible, through efforts such as the Shared Vision discussions. In addition, Tricia is out in the community being active and the board members are out spending time in the schools and classrooms.
- Respect that the board meets issues head-on.
- The *Learners* publication that showcases the things we are doing right
- “The Big 5” priorities.
- Improved communication from the District. It is easy to access and read School Board Meeting notes.
- Appreciate that the District is advocating for our kids and that the teachers really care.
- Appreciate that the kids love to learn and enjoy school.

The board also asked: What are some things that concern you about the School District at this time? Concerns included:

- Facility and space constraints
- Our buildings feel dated. Temperatures aren’t well-regulated in the buildings. (Tricia noted that we do regular audits and upkeep on our facilities.)
- Playgrounds are falling apart.
- Appears as though we aren’t keeping up.
- Extra costs including lunch programs and busing.
- Lack of consistency across teachers
- No consistency of homework across grade levels. Some kids overwhelmed, other kids not being prepared adequately. Homework should “build” but this is not necessarily the case.
- Progressive education not always adequately reinforcing basic skills, such as math facts, grammar and punctuation.
- Weak instruction available in keyboarding.
- Computer sciences not strong. Basic coding not offered, and Coding Club was disbanded. Students dissatisfied with computer science classes at Washburne and many have dropped out. (The suggestion was made to bring in outside organizations to supplement these activities.)
- There is little time for recess at Skokie which is a significant change and adjustment from the grade schools. (Suggestion was made to scale down gradually on outside/recess time for 5<sup>th</sup> graders)
- While Writers’ Workshop has been positive, important aspects such as grammar skills are lacking.
- Need to publicize what we are doing right—that our kids enjoy learning and have a good social, emotional and academic elementary experience.

- Need to teach our kids to be thinkers. Maker Spaces at great step in this direction.
- Parents want a school district that is preparing our kids well for the future.
- Need clear understanding of how we hold ourselves accountable—across multiple measures.
- New leadership at Washburne has created a different “vibe.” Specifically, the Assistant Principal is more of a disciplinarian than we have had in the past. While discipline is necessary and students do need to be more accountable for their actions, there also needs to be a collaborative relationship, not just adversarial.
- Skokie music program makes kids choose between activities. This can be a hard choice for young kids and limits their opportunities. Suggestion was made to offer some music programs after school.
- Lack of theater options for kids, perhaps the schools could offer an after school theater production.
- There is a high turnover in administration. We need to hire and retain good people.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:18 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Ridder  
Secretary