

Central PTO Meeting Minutes January 8, 2016

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), Gina Mathews (FAN)

Excused: Jenn Weiler (FAN),

The meeting was called to order 9:17.

Heather Smith welcomed the group and noted that we would also be discussing the topic of school directories.

Secretary's Report – Sara Ridder

Heather P. moved to approve the December 2015 minutes. Heather S. seconded this motion. The minutes were approved.

Superintendent's Report – Tricia Kocanda

Tricia informed the group that Shelly Sack, whose son recently died in the incident in Wisconsin, is an associate at Hubbard Woods. The school has shared information about the funeral services with the Hubbard Woods community and is helping the kids deal with the tragedy.

Tricia responded to the concerns that were brought up by some community members before and at the December School Board meeting. On the subject of the math curriculum, Tricia noted that this is one of the Big 5 priorities for the District. Now that the curriculum has been in place for three years they are evaluating it—and were working on this well before the conversation was raised in December.

This evaluation will cover all aspects of the curriculum, including our materials, programs and professional learning. The District is reaching out to universities to do this. Eileen Goodspeed, the Skokie Math Facilitator, has tapped into her rich national network to locate candidates. At present, the plan is to move forward with Dr. Miriam Sheeran, Associate Dean at Northwestern who, along with a researcher, will conduct this study. The goal is to have the report available by June so it can be used for summer planning, and have it formally presented in the Fall.

Other math initiatives include parent-focused education sessions at which the district will share and explain curriculum specifics. At least two of these sessions will be held at each of the buildings. The New Trier Math Department will also attend at least one. A comprehensive website is also in the works. This will be available the week before the board meeting so parents can visit it.

The District has also put supplemental resources in place, such as Gigi the penguin at the younger grade levels, online resources for practice and Number Talks.

Tricia emphasized that our kids are well prepared and do very well at New Trier and beyond. As part of this conversation, there is a parent night with Linda Jonke from New Trier, tentatively scheduled for February 18. This forum will include data about how our kids are doing at New Trier and include ERB data, which will be mailed home on January 22. This session will also be videotaped for those who can not attend.

It is also important to look at how our kids are doing beyond academics. This spring, the District is planning a panel with recent Washburne grads talking about their experiences. Tricia also stressed that our kids feel prepared. Every year NT freshmen are surveyed on how prepared they felt, and our kids rate their preparation level considerably higher than other township districts.

Tricia pointed out that our overall data is consistent. Where there are concerns, the District absolutely addresses them. She also stressed the importance of sharing the data in context to make sure the facts are presented with integrity.

Heather S. raised concerns that District families have on ERB data and noted that Linda's talk should help to calm fears.

The District is talking to administrators, principals, union leadership and teachers to make sure that teaching is not disrupted and that learning remains the focus across the school buildings.

Tricia praised the School Board for how they have handled this situation. They have been listening to the community. They have responded with a patient, measured approach.

Another topic has been the STAR testing. Tricia asked that the community keep the big picture in mind. The best gauges of our children's progress are the teachers. They have the most accurate sense of growth and achievement. However, tests such as STAR do play a role. Parents appreciate seeing how their child is doing on such measures and, as a District, it gives us a sense of the specific areas to target for improvement.

The initial process to select STAR was thorough and thoughtful. More than 40,000 schools nationwide use STAR. However, it has become evident that they don't have the proper systems in place to handle the data, as we need it. In fact, the District has been probing the STAR data since 2014 to address its own questions of reliability and validity. The District no longer has faith in them and the decision was recently made to switch test tools. Currently, the District is in the process of evaluating two the other two leading options to replace STAR; MAP and Scantron. The District aims

to have a decision by April, with implementation in May. Then, by next year we will have a full implementation of the selected test program.

The question was raised about how STAR differs from PARCC. Tricia explained that PARCC is a static assessment, wherein everyone gets the same questions. STAR is an adaptive assessment, which tailors questions based upon the responses given.

The Shared Vision is almost ready and will be presented at this month's Board meeting.

The principal searches are attracting a strong pool of applicants. There is also tremendous interest in the Curriculum Director role. These searches are on track.

School Board Report – Jennifer Pehlke

Jennifer explained the School Board's decision on the recent tax levy.

Going into the December School Board meeting, the Board was comfortable with the premise that under a higher levy, anything not used would be returned to the taxpayers. This would protect the District against funding uncertainties at state and national levels. However, after 16 community members spoke out about this topic at the December meeting the Board revisited their approach. The intention is the same, the District will use only what it needs. However, the mechanism for getting there is different.

President's Report – Heather S.

Thanks to everyone for working with the parent community and talking about these issues.

Looking ahead, we need to work on nominating for next year's board. Cynthia Fatta is heading up this process and we will need two people from this committee to help her.

In March, we will discuss our funds and the four organizations to which we donate.

Treasurer – Amy Polachek

Not much to report. Our major expenditures are over the summer for the Directors' Insurance policy. All payments for the website are up to date.

Communications - Lynn Wellehan

We met recently with InfoSnap, and will meet again with them in March or April.

Skokie-Washburne Report – Heather Pigott and Karen Palasz

STEAM continues to be a focus. Dave has great ideas on how to utilize and optimize the space.

Lonni Stonich from FAN met with both school principals to discuss how FAN can be helpful to District 36.

There are plans to hold a screening of “Most Likely to Succeed,” at one of the schools.

At Skokie, Kelly is working on rolling out parent workshops and parent coffees. Both principals want parents to feel welcome in the schools and hopes to encourage them to socialize with one another. The PTO is also working on bring staff and PTO closer together.

Crow Island – Beth Kauffman

The PTO website was recently hacked. However, it was fixed quickly. Hackers didn’t have access to any information, so it was decided that a communication to CI families was not needed.

Teachers received checks as holiday gifts. Specials teachers and associates were included as well. This was a big job for the treasurer, but all went well.

There was a holiday party that Friday. Kids made sandwiches for the Night Ministry.

The PTO is trying to figure out the best way to utilize parent volunteer time—so it is rewarding for volunteers and makes the best use of their efforts.

Greeley – Kim Ronan

December was relatively quiet. Held a holiday breakfast for staff, rather than a lunch as previously done. Parent volunteers covered morning drop-off duties such as working as crossing guards and bus greeters. There is definitely a new appreciation for what the staff does in the mornings.

In January the PTO will be getting ready for the parent party being held at the Winnetka Community House. It is a casual event—and not a fundraiser. Ticket price is \$100/person with cost covering party expenses. Entertainment will be a live karaoke band as well as a Dad band.

Hubbard Woods – Jen Hayes

Hubbard Woods staff received checks in gift bags as holiday gifts. This year, gifts were given to all staff, which was greatly appreciated.

Hubbard Woods will have a parent party in February. This is typically held at the Happ Inn.

FAN-Gina Matthews

Gina spoke about some of the upcoming programs:

- Linda Rosetti – “Women in Transition, reinventing Work and Life.” on January 12 at Gaffney(New Trier Winnetka Campus).

- Amy Cuddy - Presence: Bringing your Boldest Self to your Biggest Challenges” on Wednesday, Jan 27 at Cornog Auditorium (New Trier Northfield Campus).

Also, there will be an education panel on February 17th, most likely held at ETHS. This is going to be a wonderful event, featuring some very high-profile educators. It will be a valuable forum for parents, teachers and administrators.

Central PTO Business

Wishlists

Each school shared how they fund and manage their wish lists.

Greeley has an Enrichment Fund, of approximately \$9,000, which distributes grants to teachers at the beginning of the year. Teachers can use it any way they need but do need to submit receipt expenses for what was spent. Each teacher receives approximately \$200 for this and it is a good way for all teachers to feel like their needs are being met. There is also a larger pot of money that is allocated for bigger expenses.

Hubbard Woods also does teacher checks, but they are smaller without receipts required. Larger grants are awarded (approximately \$7,000) based upon the Wish List. Other parts are broken out for items such as cultural arts programs.

Crow Island tries to meet the needs of all the special teachers with their funds. Recently, funds went to purchase African drums for music. Other expenditures have included picnic tables for those classroom courtyards that were without. The goal is to be response to the teachers.

This year, the Crow Island PTO is also paying for the swing set, as well as a new dishwasher for the teachers’ lounge. Some funds also allocated to pilot standing desks for 4th graders. Overall, the Crow Island PTO spends between \$15,000 to \$25,000 per year.

Skokie & Washburne have a good amount of money right now. Typically, these funds are used to address ongoing requests throughout year. Each school has approximately \$20,000 to spend. This year, Washburne has a little more to spend because there were unspent funds last year. PTO is trying to make the process more democratic.

The PTO would like to support the proposed cafeteria remodel at Washburne and is especially interested in helping to make the courtyard an extension of the cafeteria.

Part of the remodel plans would also help to make the STEAM area more accessible to students.

School Directories

There was discussion about school directories—and the best way to utilize district-controlled information to make the process more efficient and less labor intensive for school PTOs.

Hubbard Woods - In the past volunteers collected directory information. This is a huge undertaking and they haven't been able to find anyone to take on this role next year. Several questions have come up recently: Do we still need a paper directory? Are PTOs making money with the directory? How can we utilize District-controlled info to help with directories? Could other school information be put into a different booklet in order to make directory development easier?

Crow Island – The directory process is also frustrating at Crow Island. It does not make any money and it is confusing for parents to know if they've paid for it.

Greeley - has difficulty getting a volunteer for this role. It has become the norm for the previous PTO president to do it as no one else volunteers.

Skokie/Washburne – Voiced similar frustrations. A large undertaking and no volunteers to work on it.

Questions were raised about moving more responsibility to the District since they have access to information. How can we use InfoSnap more in the process? Can InfoSnap self-edit function be used to help gather directory information?

We will need to make decisions about InfoSnap in March. Lynn and Lori Morales are the best contacts on this. It is highly unlikely that the District can create school directories but Tricia will look into options of what the District can, or can't do.

New Business

Heather P. raised the topic of acknowledgement receipts for PTO Donations

Jen Hayes brought up questions about Adventures in Learning and hopes that registration would be easier this year. Questions that were raised: Could there be an early registration for Winnetka residents? Ever consider breaking it into two sessions so kids could try more classes?

School PTO Presidents should remember to include Maureen Miller, who heads up District Technology, in their next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:02.

Respectfully submitted,

Sara Ridder, Secretary