**Central PTO Board Minutes**

**Friday, September 11, 2015**

**Heather Smith’s Home**

In attendance: Heather Smith (President), Amy Polachek (Treasurer), Lynn Wellehan (VP Communications), Sara Ridder (Secretary), Trish Kocanda (Superintendant) Dana Crumley (School Board) 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), Dana Crumley (School Board President)

The meeting was called to order at 9:12

**President – Heather Smith**

Heather welcomed the group and introductions were made. It is hoped that everyone has transitioned at this point or has made arrangements to do so. Heather outlined the purpose of this board: to bring all of the PTOs together to discuss central issues that affect all of the schools. It is also a valuable forum for communication between the schools.

The Central PTO funds four organizations with donations of $500 to each. These include: FAN, the Alliance for Early Education, Erica’s Lighthouse, and Haven. The question was raised whether the Central PTO also supports The Winnetka Public Schools Foundation. According to Heather’s records we do not, unless there is excess money at the end of the year as was done last year. It was asked if the individual PTOs should also be donating to FAN, Erica’s Lighthouse, The Alliance, and Haven when asked. It was suggested they respond they already support these organizations through the Central PTO.

**Secretary’s Report – Sara Ridder**

Nothing to report

**Treasurer’s Report – Amy Polachek**

Amy distributed insurance certificates to each of the PTO presidents. She requested the PTO Presidents reach out to their Treasurers to pull together materials for the audit. This information will be needed in October when the audit is scheduled.

The Central PTO has a couple of annual financial commitments. These include the $2,000 we donate and $5,500 for all of the PTO audits, which are handled by the Central PTO.

**VP Communications Report – Lynn Wellehan**

Send Lynn anything you need posted on the Central PTO website. She will work on updating the Board List on the site.

**Superintendent’s Report – Trisha Kocanda**

The current student enrollment is 1,725. This is approximately 40 students less than last year and something the District is watching closely.

The staff had a successful opening day and kicked off the new professional learning model, “Winnetka University.” This will be a focus for the year wherein staff members can tap into the expertise of our teachers who will be teaching classes aligned with District goals. A key theme for the District staff is “innovation” as we continually look at new ways to add value to our students.

The new leadership teams at Washburne and Skokie have gotten off to a great start. The District also welcomes Jeff Kerr as our new CEO and Kate Hughes, our communications and community representative.

This year, the District is focusing on 5 key initiatives:

1. Kindergarten – a feasibility study to examine extending the kindergarten day. Study conclusions estimated in February or March.
2. Science/Technology Tinkering Space – following the successful prototypes at Hubbard Woods and Skokie, the District is looking for ways to expand these opportunities.
3. Winnetka University - as outlined earlier
4. Math – revising the curriculum
5. Reading – finalizing the curriculum

The PARCC test has collapsed its window from 2 to 1. However, the state has now added a mandatory science test for grades 5-8. The specific test to be used has yet to be determined.

Moving forward, Kelly requests Board’s assistance in three areas:

1. Bullying prevention plan – In accordance with state guidelines, the District is developing a plan. Each PTO President was asked to solicit a volunteer from their school to serve on this committee. Forward names to Trish or Beth Martin, the Director of Student Services.
2. Lice – Lice has already made an appearance in the elementary schools. In the past schools have taken different approaches to handling this and the District is working to put a consistent policy in place. Under the proposed plan there will no longer be random lice checks at the schools and parents will not check on picture day. Instead, if a teacher sees a child with symptoms, the nurse will be notified and check the child. If the case is confirmed a letter will be sent to the class parents notifying them of lice in the classroom, informing them that the nurse will check all children in the classroom and giving them the option to opt-out of the check for their child. Current legal policy is that the child needs to be free of live bugs to return to school. Board members suggested it might be good to let the entire grade know, not just the classroom. Kelly will take this into consideration.
3. School Directories and Access – to be discussed during the business portion of the meeting

**Dana Crumley – School Board President**

Dana reported that the Board is working extremely well together. They have a retreat coming up and they will also be focusing on the five focus areas that Kelly outlined. It was emphasized that if parents have issues they should share these with Kelly. Board members are happy to listen, but Kelly has the ability to resolve problems.

**FAN Report**

Heather shared upcoming events including a presentation Thursday, September 17th by Dana Suskind, MD on *Thirty Million Words: Building a Child’s Brain*.

**Crow Island – Beth Kauffman**

In celebration of Crow Island’s 75th anniversary the school is planning a party in Crow Island Woods on Saturday, October 3rd. This will take the place of Crow Island’s annual parent party and the entire community is invited to attend. Fundraising efforts in conjunction with the anniversary will support the school’s Stewardship Committee.

Beth asked about funding to fix up the teacher’s lounge. It was suggested she look at how Hubbard Woods did this four years ago when they updated theirs.

Additional discussion was held on how the schools should handle outside organizations (scouts, etc.). It was concluded that the schools should not include any messages from these groups in their communications. Beth suggested that the three grade schools send one another their newsletters to share ideas.

**Greeley School – Kim Ronan**

Building on the “Dream Green” initiative, the school has built an organic garden on the playground and is aiming to continue that theme throughout the school, including working on the inner courtyard. Another big topic at the school has been the lack of air conditioning in some of the rooms. Trish shared that there are heat relief plans in place, and the district is currently meeting with the engineers to determine what else can be done.

**Hubbard Woods – Jen Hayes**

This year Hubbard Woods started an online payment system through PayPal and received 91% participation. Jen also reported on the success of Hubbard Wood’s new Idea Lab. The school is planning two events in conjunction with this: the Global Cardboard Challenge on October 3 and Idea Lab Night on November 10th.

Hubbard Wood’s 100-year anniversary was celebrated with a student-focused birthday party on Tuesday, September 8th. Additional plans are in place to study and celebrate the school’s history throughout the year, culminating with an event on May 3rd.

Hubbard Woods has installed a new garden on the playground, which was donated by the O’Toole family. The PTO is undertaking the upkeep of the garden.

As part of the 100-year celebration, Jen anticipates a need for a photo-release policy. She asked that the District consider implementing measures to include the schools for photo permission when they get this for themselves. Trish will look into this and work with Heather on a resolution. For this year, Jen will need to implement a temporary measure.

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

Back-to-School nights were a success with positive feedback on the new formats that moved the evenings along more quickly.

At Skokie, Kelly is looking for PTO support on new furniture that accommodates different types of learners. At Washburne, Dave is still evaluating school needs.

Skokie has received a grant to fix up the garden and they are working on plans for this. They are also piloting a composting plan

Parents are questioning whether or not they gave to the Annual Appeal and can find this information on InfoSnap. Last year the appeal was down $10,000.

Other items that Heather and Karen noted include the second annual parent party on September 19th in Crow Island Woods with a Mexican fiesta theme. Social Dance starts tonight (Friday, September 11th) and will be preceded by a pizza party to make sure it is an inclusive format. In addition, a New Family program, led by Anne Grote, has been a great addition to the school. This has increased the sense of community across the school.

**Central PTO Business**

There is a need to better share information between the District and schools to ensure the schools have needed contact information for directories. Schools received the initial data download but not subsequent ones with newer registrants. Also, it was suggested that the District inform parents if they register late they may miss some school communications.

When compiling the student directories, there have been issues with how non-custodial parents are listed. Would be helpful if the District could develop and communicate a guideline for collecting this information. There has been a recent instance where a parent used the directory to promote a business. The District has a strict policy against this and this is communicated on the directories.

There was discussion about removing the option to donate to the individual school PTOs through InfoSnap when parents are registering. Parents are often confused about if they have donated and likely to give less at this initial registration. There was consensus to leave the Central PTO donation, and omit the others.

Additional conversation followed about how schools collect PTO donations. Some ask for a significant one-time donation, others supplement smaller requested donation with additional fundraisers.

Items noted for further follow up include: How each school is using its funds, developing picture-release procedure across all schools, holiday gift/teacher appreciation practices, wish lists, lice protocol, bullying committee (volunteers needed), composting issues, how schools keep records of donations and acknowledge gifts, and tracking school supply purchases.

The next meeting will be on Friday, Oct 2, 9am, Skokie School Curriculum Room

The meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Ridder, Secretary