

CES PTO Minutes: December 9, 2009; 6-8pm

In Attendance: Leslie Colomb, Tracey Bellavance, Pam Ackerson, Karen Hunt, Kristin Allosso, Cathy Rahill, Roxanne Scully, Lisa Lillibridge, Dawn Moskowitz, Dawn Bates, Gwen Causer, Patrick Halladay, Krisitn DeVoe-Talluto, Jim DeVoe-Talluto, Robin Berger, Leslyn Hall, Sivia Jope, Sharon McConnell, Susan Marie Harrington, Jessica Nordhaus and Jenny Breckenridge.

Community Building: Tracey Bellavance and Pam Ackerson explained the kindergarten leadership for the January Humane Society program; each grade team is taking the lead on a school-wide community connection event (which will also have a focus at a school-wide assembly).

Pam Ackerson asked about potential grant support for LCD/Elmo carts for grade K-2 classrooms (the other classrooms received carts with funding from another program in the district).

There will be a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new ramp in the front of the school on 23 December, with a parent coffee hour to follow, and then the sing-a-long assembly. Silvia Jope, the Parent Involvement Coordinator, is seeking games for the parent education center in the lobby. Pam Ackerson offered to donate some old math manipulatives.

Leslyn Hall offered an update on the Safe Routes to School program. This is the first year of the noninfrastructure grant. We need to make a school travel plan. Current obstacles to walking/riding to school include some major arterial roads without sidewalks on both sides (sidewalks missing on parts of Locust Terrace, Pine, and Flynn, for example). Leslyn needs a group of volunteers to

1. Offer input on the next phase of the grant
2. Work with Local Motion to create a walkability map
3. Support Way to Go Week, the spring event

We brainstormed ways to get additional volunteers for this project (working via Class Parents, making a special solicitation via the PTO)

Fundraising Update: Sharon estimates that we will end up with about \$1600 profit from the book fair, slightly better than last year. Some of that will come in book credits (which can't be used in the library, but will be put to good use).

Jenny B. reported that the pizza sales generate \$400-\$450 per sale. People prefer the pizza from Bite Me, but Mamma Mia is much, much easier to work with. Future sales will probably work with Mamma Mia.

Cathy Rahill reported on the t-shirt project. This was done as a *fundraiser* not as a community-building effort (hence the price), but it is possible for someone to make a donation so that students who might not be able to afford the full price of a t-shirt can still get a shirt. Also, some t-shirts can be distributed by teachers as prizes or gifts during the year.

Roxane Scully reported on the *no frills fundraising letter*, which is simply a request for donations to the PTO, with specific details about where the funds will be used. There was some discussion of timing, and it was decided to send the letter in March this year (and again early next fall).

Jenny B. reported that Edmunds has a new sign out in front, provided by a CEDO grant. Champlain would also be eligible for the grant, but the deadline is December 18. Leslyn Hall offered to help with the grant application.

Betsy Rosenbluth (Sustainable Schools Committee) will be working on a school garden plot. There will be a SSC meeting December 15th at 7:45 am.

Jenny B. proposed that the step-up ritual be spiffed up a bit this year to make up to the 5th graders for the lack of a school musical this year. We discussed various possibilities, including a slide show and possible volunteer photographers taking photos. The 4/5 team will be included in future discussions.

Jessica Nordhaus led a discussion of community building that follows from the June 2009 PTO retreat. How can the PTO/parents contribute to our children's education in important and meaningful ways. Math Night is a good example of PTO contributions—over 300 people were in the building that nights.

We discussed what collaboration and good communication and partnership mean? Jessica passed out a matrix (provided by Valerie Wood-Lewis) from *Parent Partnership in the Early Years*. Each participant was invited to consider where on the chart s/he currently is, where s/he would like to be, where the school might view each participant. Comments addressed the following issues:

- It's hard to define partnership/participation precisely—changes based on the day, the teacher, the child
- Older children might not want too much parental supervision
- Partnership/contribution might not mean supervision
- Partnership might not mean each individual parent participating, but rather parent involvement across the school
- It's important to create a norm where each parent sees themselves supporting *the school* not just their own child
- We need to value the professional expertise of teachers. Partnership language can sometimes seem intrusive
- We need to find a good balance—teachers are trained, practiced professionals
- We need a breadth and variety of ways to be involved so that everyone can make partnerships that work
- The We All Belong Here project was a powerful collaboration. When kids are connected to the learning they're doing, when families can be connected, that's a good thing. It's important for adults to have relationships with many kids.
- Collaboration helps local knowledge flow into the school, especially when teachers don't live in the neighborhood.
- It's hard to communicate without time.
- Time is a major constraint for teachers
- It is sometimes hard for parents and teachers to communicate about what sorts of parent volunteers might be welcomed in the class (or not welcomed). Some parents felt surprised by what they read on report cards. Shouldn't be surprises. Parents want to hear from teachers before there are problems and not only when there are problems. Parents can always call for a meeting/conference, but communication should be going both ways.
- Class Parents might be a good communication tool
- Scope and Sequence planning might be communicated to parents more clearly. We

don't want to make demands on teachers that aren't reasonable

- Can parents volunteer their skills? How can teachers know what talents are available in the school community? Could we provide a directory of community skills and resources similar to the phone directory?
- Mr. Hajdun's Homework Night was very helpful in setting expectations and letting parents know how they could help.
- Parents value opportunities to learn a bit more about what's happening in class. Especially useful for older grade parents—there is less informal communication with teachers as children get more independent going to/from the classroom.
- A parent e-mail suggestion wondered whether a front-porch-forum-like electronic communication would help
- There is some interest in revamping the Blue Note (or former PTO newsletter) and perhaps a school newspaper
- Perhaps we could identify what would make teachers' lives easier?
- What if each team came up with one thing they wanted parents to do and that was passed on through class parents?
- Starting communications early helps.

Silvia Jope asked us all to be friendly to other parents, make sure to say hello and draw people in to conversation. Make sure everyone is welcomed.

Recess and schedules are set by the district. What is community role in setting school/educational policy?

Dawn Moskowitz noted that parents can be useful to the school beyond classroom-connected volunteering. Parents could lobby (at the district or state level) if we knew what was needed.

Roxanne Scully stressed that our efforts should only make teachers' work easier--not add more to their plate.

Leslie Colomb noted that it is important to continue this conversation. There is a need to review/rewrite the family/school compact (can be found in the school handbook)--might be a helpful vehicle for discussion and also produce a working document. January 5 she will present the gist of this discussion to the faculty; January 18 there is a staff inservice and Leslie has made time for parents and faculty to meet together to continue this conversation, work toward common collaborative goals that benefit our children.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Harrington