

Minutes of the Parents' Association General Meeting, January 24, 2008

Administration Report

Ms. Chory announced that she has requested that February 5th be designated as a professional development day which would mean a school closing. This is because the Board of Elections has requested the use of the cafeteria for the voting machines which will make the normal movement of students and the provision of meals very difficult if not impossible. Ms. Chory has been in frequent discussion with the Board of Education and has offered alternate spaces but the Board of Elections has not relented. The use of the school as a voting place cannot be altered because the regulations would not allow it.

Ms. Chory then mentioned some of the highlights of January, including the 3rd through 8th grade ELA exams and the 3rd grade celebration of writing. She next announced events for February, including: the Intermediate School Movie Night, the 6-8th grade Talent Show (in which students have written and will perform the script), the Science Fair on February 13th and the February break. There are many new after school enrichment programs, including: FILL IN THE BLANK.

During the Question and Answer session several parents asked questions about the potential school closing on February 5th. In answer to various questions, Ms. Chory indicated that the school space has been evaluated three times and that space utilization requirements have changed because of the new voting machines. The auditorium used to be used but that is now not enough since 1,400 square feet are needed. The library was offered as well but it was still deemed insufficient. The school has to offer food to students and the gym cannot be used for this purpose since it is almost always in use and besides tables and chairs would have to be moved in, etc. The worse case scenario is that the children will have to eat in their classrooms though that will also be a challenge since there is a regulatory issue with transporting food to the 4th floor. Ms. Chory asked for parents' support and indicated that Administration will get creative if necessary. Parents will be notified as soon as possible about the status of February 5th.

Financial report

The Treasurer, Luisa Diorio, gave the bi-monthly report of the PA finances. She noted that the dues line item is still zero but that the dues letter is going out next week. She also noted that the Fall Fundraiser brought in less than the year before – roughly \$5,000 - but that the difference was partly offset by an increase of \$3,000 in revenue from the pictures sale. The bake sale at the 1st and 2nd grade concert brought in \$247 and the Box Tops are still being collected. Movie night brought in \$1,547 minus expenses which will go toward buying supplies for the new Elementary School art teacher. Ms. Diorio wrote the check this week. She also explained that the line item under revenues for bank fees was added to the budget because she is trying to make people pay for bounced checks to offset the losses that have been incurred by bounced checks which have not been infrequent. Christopher Kapetanios was invited to make an announcement by Ms. Diorio. He informed the membership that the internal audit that was approved earlier in the school year has still not taken place because they have not been able to get a third person on the committee as required. He indicated that the audit would involve securing and reviewing two years of activity from Chase Manhattan Bank and then putting the material together into a report.

Dues Letter

Carlos Brito handed out copies of the dues letter indicating that the due date would be amended to February 15th. He pointed out that the letter states that every parent is a member and that contributions are voluntary. A parent observed that the highest suggested amount was higher than in previous years and that the order was reversed such that the larger amount was listed first. Francesca Di Mauro explained that the fundraising committee and the Executive Board in general have been discussing the issue of how to frame the dues letter for the past few months and that everyone is aware that the letter's tone is stronger than in previous years and that some parents may be discouraged by it but that the Executive Board is willing to take that calculated risk in order to potentially raise more money and begin the process of cultural change within the parent body (i.e. that parents are expected and need to contribute more). Another parent noted that in her experience with fundraising that this type of effort – i.e. increasing the amounts requested – invariably angers some individuals, but the payoff tends to be greater.

A discussion ensued about the best way of collecting the dues and it was ultimately decided that the letter should be returned through the children's teachers. The letter will be slightly revised to specify that contributions should be returned by way of the students' folders. Another discussion began over the question of tax deductibility of contributions. It was noted by a parent that a contribution can be written off as a donation but that the school cannot provide a receipt. A question was raised as to whether it should be noted in the letter that contributions are not tax deductible and it was decided to leave the letter as it. Another parent asked if a lawyer should be consulted on the issue and Tory Frye replied by explaining that the fundraising/grant writing committee is looking into this matter intensively and that all of these issues will be addressed in the near term and concrete information will be disseminated.

Calendar

Marci Stringham then discussed the calendar of upcoming events, including Movie Night on February 1 (for which a flyer would soon be going out and the movie was still being decided upon), the Executive Board meeting on February 4th, the February 5th bake sale (status pending), the Science Fair on February 13th, the deadline for the return of the dues letter on February 15th, the School Leadership Team meeting on February 27th at 3:15pm, the next PA general meeting on February 28th and Family Yoga Night on February 29th.

The calendar for March is: March 4-5, 10-11 math exams (two grades will get an extra day, the grades are to be determined and parents will be informed when the dates are finalized), the Executive Board meeting on March 6, the Staff Appreciation Dinner on March 13th (which is a half day due to parent-teacher conferences), the PA general meeting on March 20th and the school tour on March 25th.

Donations of drinks and snacks were requested for Movie Night. Stevie Ray Dallimore urged families to attend. The movie will be PG 13.

The minutes from the previous general meeting were approved.

Stacey Linden spoke about the Election Day bake sale. She noted that whether or not it is to be held is pending depending on whether school is open or closed on that day. The possibility of having the sale outside was discussed and it was felt by some to be unfeasible because of the threat of inclement weather. The upshot seemed to be that the bake sale will proceed only if there is no school on that day since there would probably not be space to hold the bake sale otherwise. Parents will be notified once a decision has been reached.

Committee Reports

Francesca Di Mauro announced that the membership needs to vote on the purpose of spring fundraising activities. She proposed the broad categories of senior costs, classroom libraries and the wish list. Denny Chern-Kelk mentioned some of the fundraising ideas under discussion and consideration: Silver Moon graphics, Shaklee, a car wash, a cook book, a Spring Carnival, sale of basketballs and a talent show.

Susan Saar reported that the school did not get the Target grant. The funds for the Green Meadows kindergarten trip were raised by Tory Frye's "friendraiser." A workshop on friendraisers will be held soon and a flyer will be distributed to that effect. The school did receive the Parents as Arts Partners grant. The proposal for the Video Project is pending – 2 requests have been issued to Time Warner and one to HBO. The Donors Choose program is also pending.

The process of establishing a 501c3 is going slowly. Currently a pro bono lawyer is being sought to file the necessary papers. With regard to the Materials for the Arts program, most of the pieces are now in place – the account is set up and the shoppers and drivers have been lined up. Denise Rosa is going to work on getting a list of wanted supplies from the teachers.

The Strategic Planning committee is meeting every other week. Parents were encouraged to join in the effort, particularly if they had knowledge about how other schools have navigated this process.

Denny Chern-Kelk reminded parents that a vote was needed to proceed with any spring fundraising planning. A motion was raised, a vote was held and it was approved.

Susan Saar then briefly gave an update on the Nutrition and Fitness sub-committee. She explained that district officials are trying to get more kids to eat school food and with that in mind are trying to come up with some food choices that will appeal to kids. January was Oatmeal Month and on February 11th, the 100th day of school, there will be specialty items involving the number 100, etc. February 27th will be African American Appreciation Day and there will be barbeque. Parents with any suggestions to the cafeteria were referred to Denise Rosa.

Christopher Kapetanios, co-chair of the Environmental Committee, told the membership that some brainstorming was needed on how to deal with dog poop on Fort Washington between 187th and 190th streets. He raised concerns about the unsanitary nature of this situation, noting that kids are stepping in it. He noted that there used to be a piece of gate between the garden path and the sculpture that acted as a barrier but that it is now gone.

Francesca Di Mauro reported that the School Leadership Team is working on the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. As part of that process a survey will be administered to parents, students and teachers. These surveys will be self-evaluation tools and will be sent out in about a week. Parents will be encouraged to fill out the survey through Class Parent Representatives and a table at the Science Fair. It was noted that the SLT's survey is different from the one that will be administered later by the BOE. Administration be taking more active role and stance in encouraging parents to complete the surveys because the response rate in the recent past has been low.

Jim Corona mentioned that the school now has a gym teacher because parents resoundingly indicated last year that one was wanted. The gym teacher is evidence that that Administration – through the SLT - is responding to what parents want.

The closing piece of business that was discussed was the wish list. Francesca Di Mauro announced that the wish list funds will be administered differently this year for several reasons, including the fact that there is less money, it will be more expedient and the wish to try something new. Wishes will be fulfilled by grade and department rather than by teacher with a preference for field trips. Ms. Marrero has sent a memo to grades and departments. Certificates for each grade and department will be awarded at the Staff Appreciation Dinner.