

Parents Association General Meeting, January 22, 2009

Prior to the report from administration, the minutes from the previous general meeting were approved.

Ms. Chory announced that the ELA exams for grades 3, 4 and 5 took place the previous week and the exam for 6th grade was taking place the next day. She reported the enthusiasm and civic awareness that students displayed on inauguration day. She thanked parents who are making connections with science programs and reminded parents of the upcoming Science Fair on February 11th from 5:30 to 7:00. She announced the dates of the winter recess (February 16-20), the next SLT and PA meetings (February 25th and 26th, respectively) and the middle school talent show on February 27th.

During the question and answer Ms. Chory was asked if there was going to be a Town Hall meeting as had been mentioned as a possibility at a previous meeting. Several questions were then addressed to Ms. Chory about the OASIS after school program. The main concerns that were raised were the fact that the program is required to vacate the school building no later than 6:00pm. The program has a building permit until 6:00pm and after that the security guard is no longer at the school. The contingency plan for children whose parents are running late is for these children to be taken to Fivo's Pizzeria by program staff. Parents raised objections to this plan and asked why the program could not be given a 10 or 15 minute grace period since there are other instances in which the building is used without the presence of a security guard. Leonisa Ardizzone stated that she had spoken to representatives from other schools in which OASIS operates and found that in these schools the principal had granted a brief grace period to the program. Another concern that was raised was that the children in the OASIS program have to wait around 45 minutes in the auditorium after the end of the school day before they can go to the cafeteria and begin program activities. This arrangement is hard on the children who get fidgety and bored and on the staff as well since it is hard for them to find ways of using that time constructively. Ms. Hozumi replied that it was a given since the beginning of the program that space was going to be tight since there is also after school programming sponsored by the school going on at the same time involving 80 to 120 kids in the elementary and intermediate schools in addition to the 40-50 kids in OASIS. She stressed that the administration was making efforts and taking steps to accommodate the OASIS program. In answer to a parent's question as to whether OASIS would continue the next academic year, Ms. Hozumi replied that if it did that there would need to be significant rescheduling and revamping. Another parent stressed the value of the OASIS program for parents because of its flexibility and the fact that it is at the school which makes the children feel safe. Francesca Di Mauro stated that perhaps another meeting was needed to discuss the various issues related to the OASIS program.

In answer to other questions, Ms. Chory informed the audience that the paperwork for the playground renovation through Out2Play has been approved so the work will begin soon. The renovations to the library were supposed to begin at the end of January. However, the administration has not yet received the official three week notice so the end of February seems like a more realistic start date.

A parent asked about the possibility of using the parent list-serve, or e-group, as a way of communicating with the school. She suggested that general concerns could be posted on the list-serve and that the parent coordinator could collate the questions and obtain the answers which could then be posted back on the list-serve so that all parents could receive the benefit of the information and not just the single parent making the inquiry or expressing the concern. Ms. Chory replied that this was a conservation that needs to be had but that at the moment teachers and administrators are not allowed to register on the group. The e-group moderator, Judith Michael, clarified that receiving and channeling questions and concerns to the administration was not the list-serve's original mission and that, in addition, there are 141 parents on the list-serve so it does not reach the majority of parents. Francesca Di Mauro ended the discussion by saying that there would be discussion later on in the general meeting on "who to go to for what." She thanked the administration for rearranging faculty and staff schedules so that all of the children could be in the auditorium to watch the inauguration. The administration officials left the meeting.

Committee reports ensued. Tory Frye spoke for the fundraising committee and reiterated that the committee has moved to an event-based system in which the committee provides support for efforts and initiatives that are managed by parent volunteers. Upcoming events include Movie Night on March 6th (title TBD) and Schoolpalooza. Holly Gould, co-coordinator of Movie Night did not have an update and

none of the Schoolapalooza coordinators were at the meeting. A parent asked where the funds raised by Schoolapalooza will be directed and was told that there had been a blanket vote the previous year such that the funds could go to any one of a number of purposes. The funds raised by Movie Night have not yet been targeted.

It was announced that Kathy Brito will coordinate Picture Day next year and that it is not considered a fundraiser anymore but rather simply a school tradition. The PA membership was informed that photographers had been interviewed and that the decision was taken to stick with Irving Simon. Kathy Brito stated that she will ask Irving Simon to provide five photographers next year to make the process smoother and that she plans on meeting with him to discuss some changes in procedures and set up she'd like to see. Parents were informed that next year retakes will only be allowed for children who are absent on picture day and for 8th graders (seniors). The option for parents to buy only the class picture will be discussed with the vendor.

Tory Frye announced that a group of parents, including herself, were thinking about possibilities for a spring fundraisers, such as a back to school carnival or a "touch the truck" event in which a city department, such as Fire or Sanitation, brings a truck and kids can touch and otherwise examine it. Anyone interested in participating was asked to contact her so that they could be added to the list of parents.

Ruth Lilienstein-Gatton and Jeanine McAdam gave a report for the grant writing sub-committee. Ms. Lilienstein-Gatton reported that the chances of getting a grant for the second grade video project were not looking good. She added, in her capacity of Class Parent Representative co-coordinator for the Intermediate School, that a CPR letter will be going out the following Monday. She announced that money has been received for the kindergarten gardening project. The funds, in the amount of roughly \$3,000, were raised by Jeanine McAdam who has obtained the funding from the same foundation for the past few years. Stacey Linden is recruiting parents to run the program. Suggestions were made that volunteers be obtained for the summer months to keep the garden in reasonable shape and that the gardening project be made a specific committee or part of the Environmental Committee in order to provide continuity so that the wheel does not constantly have to be reinvented. Incorporating the gardening project into the PA could also have the additional benefit of helping kindergarten parents feel more connected.

Susan Saar gave a report for the Nutrition and Health sub-committee. The Out2Play renovations – for which Scott Stringer provided significant matching funds – will likely begin in February and the work will be done one section at a time in order to not bump OASIS. Ms. Saar announced the next Family Yoga Night on Friday, February 6th and spoke of an online fundraiser that is taking place for Bent on Learning, a non-profit organization that provides yoga in public schools. Last year, the Intermediate School received yoga as after school programming and this past fall the 4th grade students received yoga instruction through Bent on Learning. An application has been submitted for next year. A collection of yoga mats and blocks were given to the school by Bent on Learning and Susan Saar plans to use these items as incentives to encourage parents to make online donations.

Susan Saar reported that the sub-committee meets with the kitchen staff once a week to try to get kids to taste things and give feedback. The head of the kitchen, Maria (lastname) has been using the new steamer creatively and the salad bar continues one day a week. Ms. Saar is trying to organize groups of two to four parents to come to the school and taste some of the cafeteria food once a month.

Amy Ogata gave a report for the Environmental Committee. The committee is aiming to have the canvass bags ready and available for sale by February 13th to capitalize on Valentine's Day. The bags will probably sell for \$10.

Chris Kapetanos reported on his attendance at the January 9th meeting of the Community Education Council that took place at P.S. 48. Students, administrators and staff gave testimony relating to the DOE budget. Mr. Kapetanos testified for P.S./I.S. 187 to the effect that school enrollment has increased, rather than decreased as the DOE contended through its presentation of statistics. Robert Jackson, the City Councilmember for District 6 has announced that he will vote against the budget and the CEC drafted a resolution against the budget arguing that it does not take into consideration capacity and facilities. The CEC still does not have a quorum and it also needs a president.

Francesca Di Mauro reported that a breakfast for class parent representatives and teachers took place and that teachers expressed their appreciation for the program and their wish to continue it in the coming year.

The next order of business was reports from parent working groups. Judith Michael, reporting for the Intermediate School/Student Council Parent Support Group, indicated that she, Denny Chern-Kelk, John Kelk, and Ruth Lilienstein-Gatton along with Ms. Chory, Ms. Hozumi and Ms. Robinson met with the Student Council Executive Board to talk about their fundraising ideas and how the parent group can help. The student representatives have a lot of ideas including a car wash, an afterschool art club, a poetry slam and a school newspaper. Currently the Student Council raises money through Heart Grams on Valentine's Day, during Spirit Week and by charging admissions and running concessions at the Intermediate School Music and Art Festival. Funds raised are targeted to the 8th grade trip. There was a brief discussion of ways in which the Student Council could help the PA, such as helping with bake sales, with Spaghetti Dinner and with the 8th grade graduation.

Chris Kapetanos offered his opinion that the most efficient fund raising mechanism for the intermediate school was selling candy and asked if that might be reinstated. It was quickly determined that the decision on whether or not to allow this activity was not within the PA's decision making purview.

The Parent Art Working Group did not have anything to report. The Science Working Group is meeting soon with Ms. Capolla to solicit input as to what teachers are interested in doing. The group is working to bring a "touch a brain" workshop to the school.

Francesca Di Mauro next reported on the status of the wish list. Ivelisse Suarez-Levine has contacted the administration and asked them to contact teachers to ascertain their priorities. On February 6th, teachers will receive a presentation at a staff meeting on "e-chalk" which is a web hosting program that caters to schools. Through e-chalk teachers can, among other things, post homework and receive email. Teachers will be asked to consider an e-chalk subscription as a wish list item. The membership fee, which would include manuals, is roughly \$3,000. Nicky Rosen stressed that e-chalk is very user friendly and that she is willing to be trained to maintain the site.

The last topic of discussion was the "where to go when ..." flow chart developed by Leonisa Ardizzone. It was presented to the administration that suggested and requested some changes but otherwise approved it. The flow chart will be distributed to parents once the changes have been made. It outlines the individuals to whom parents should go to initially when they have questions or concerns and then whom they should go to if they don't receive satisfaction.

There was discussion of what is perceived among some or many parents to be the inherently unsatisfactory and onerous nature of the administration's mechanism for addressing concerns – i.e. on an individual basis. It was noted that the parent body of the school is increasingly activist and that the movement toward organizing cannot be stopped. It was also noted that the tide is moving in favor of parental involvement and engagement as seen by policies and programs put into place by the DOE.