

PTO Minutes
September 16, 2010
Peirce Library, 6:30 pm

Present: Karen Hartley (Principal), Susan Goetcheus and Janice Weinberg (Co-Presidents), Lori Pescatore (Treasurer and Hospitality), Andrea Canty and Cindy ReVelle (Co-Secretaries), Jane Ypsilantis (Cultural Enrichment) Pamela Baldwin and Sarah Forney (Fundraising), Carl Elder (Science and Math Enrichment - SAME), Jane Torregrossa (Library), Jessica Callaghan (Community Outreach), Marybeth Wall (Teacher Representative)

Introductions

PTO officers, committee chairs, and teacher representatives introduced themselves and described some of the initiatives planned for this year. Committee members invited parents to get involved.

Peirce Family Directory (Joy Spadafora)

- Joy is spearheading the development of the directory as she has done in the past.
- The PTO directory is parent-driven, so families should be encouraged to participate.
- The directory is for Peirce parents' use ONLY.
- This year, parents will register online and the directory will be available in electronic form.
- The directory will be put together with oversight by Josh Lobel, Ottoson's webmaster.
- There are some decisions to be made about which additional content to include in the printed directory, such as the "Stop, Drop and Roll" information.
- A small amount of advertising may be sought to cover printing costs.
- Parents will receive a form in folders soon.

Inclusion Model for Classrooms (Karen Hartley)

Principal Hartley made a brief presentation and answered questions about the new inclusion model at Peirce.

General comments

- Ms Hartley is very proud and supportive of the program
- This is going to be a big year for feedback.
- Ms Hartley feels we are doing it well and it looks like it's going well so far. She thinks by mid-year people will say it's very successful.

Background

- Most towns around us have opened up inclusion classrooms, and in the spring there was a Peirce site visit to the Haggerty School in Cambridge, as a model.
- A parent asked for some background including "What is an IEP?" and "Who are the students in the inclusion program at Peirce?" A summary:

- IEP= Individualized Education Plan. If child is struggling in school in any way, there is a core evaluation of where they are, academically, emotionally, and psychologically. An IEP may be put in place to provide the child with services, such as speech and language therapy.
- Children in the inclusion program at Peirce are from the former “Pathways” program housed at Peirce and the Hardy School’s program for children with language-based learning difficulties. These children may have a disconnect between their facility with spoken language and their reading and writing.
- Inclusion: Research has shown that kids learn better if not pulled out but included in classrooms together and learning from each other. Everyone benefits when kids are together in a group.
- The shift to an inclusion model is happening all over the state, and Ms Hartley is proud of the way it is playing out here. We have been able to have receptions for the families and a parent information night last spring. Ms Hartley would have liked more time to communicate, ideally in-person, to parents.

Concerns and Benefits

- Ms Hartley said parents who feel concerns about inclusion may envision a classroom in which all kids are doing the same work simultaneously at their desks. However, the model for a long time has been “differentiation.” This means assessment (which is happening now) and then individual and small-group work tailored to children’s needs.
- We’re now doing differentiation with a wider range of kids, but in classrooms with two teachers and an aide. Whereas before there was one Special Ed teacher for the school, now there is one at every grade.
- This was not done as a cost-cutting measure or to reduce staffing. In fact, with the inclusion model there is a lower student-to-teacher ratio.
- Because of its nature, differentiation looks different in every classroom.
- Ms Hartley has gotten a lot of questions about how children will get certain services – those are questions that should be emailed to teachers.
- Ms Wall reminded parents that kids on IEPs may only need them for something small.
- Parents expressed concerns about the high number of kids in some first- and second-grade “non-inclusion” classrooms without aides. They asked whether the teachers would collaborate across the two same-grade classrooms. Ms Hartley said yes, this will happen over time.
- A parent asked whether the ACE (Academic Challenge and Enrichment) curriculum is available, and Ms Hartley said it is, and that teachers working on “collaborative learning teams” might take on a project on how to challenge kids. Ms Wall noted teachers were able to do some work in this area last year using interns.
- In case anyone is concerned about MCAS scores, Ms Hartley noted that children on IEPs like those at Peirce may score quite high on the MCAS, but if they need to, they may take an alternative to MCAS.

Communications

- Parents talked about wanting to understand the inclusion model and to be able to explain it well to their kids. They asked about whether information could be included on the website (for parents) and in Open Circle (for kids). Ms Hartley said the information is best communicated in-person and encouraged parents to make appointments to see her.
- One parent said it's important from any communication to include the fact that statewide, 70 percent of children on IEPs have average or above average intelligence.
- Ms Hartley will ask Mark and Lori (district leaders in Special Education) if there is an established program that can help parents and kids understand and talk about inclusion. She also may add some links to the Peirce website that explain inclusion concepts.
- Parents asked whether the social worker could be involved in meetings to communicate about inclusion and Ms Hartley noted that the social worker for Peirce is only at the school one and a half days a week so this may not be possible.
- There will be a townwide inclusion committee, and last year's PTO Co-President Carol Greeley will be a member.

Update on Parent Volunteers for Extra Library Period/Replacing Gym (Janice Weinberg)

- K through 3rd grade only has one gym this year. "Second gym" is now unstructured time outside, with Librarian Jane Torregrossa. It is 40 minutes. Mrs. T. is willing to take children outside even in wintry weather as long as they wear boots, etc.
- Eight or nine parents have responded to the email that went out for volunteers. Janice will send out another message with exact time slots.
- Thursdays and Fridays are when the missing gym period would be. The gymnasium, however, is not always available.
- Some creative possibilities beyond physical activity include science activities.

Town Day – Sept 25. (Andrea Canty)

- Dre Canty is co-coordinator of town day
- There will be a Peirce booth with food, games and colored hairspray. Any parents who are interested and available are encouraged to sign up for a very short shift.

Peirce Verse (Susan Goetcheus)

- Krissy Delaney is in charge of Peirce Verse.
- The Verse will come out twice a month, and she is seeking volunteers to write up items
- Please get items for the next newsletter in by this Monday, Sept 20.
- Items can be emailed from the website's Verse page or left in the slot in the office.

Connect Ed (Karen Hartley)

- Peirce has signed up for Connect Ed. A "reverse 911" system that allows

distribution of key messages from the school.

- It's being installed now at the HS. Should be at Peirce soon.
- The system eliminates the need for Safe Phone volunteers and allows parents to be automatically contacted via the phone number they provided as soon as a teacher logs them absent.
- Parents and teachers noted it is parents' responsibility to keep the phone number on file up-to-date.

Peirce Website (Janice Weinberg)

- Check out the new website created by a PTO team. There is a lot of new information. Please let the Web team know if there is other information they should add.
- A notice may be placed on the website that contact information for PTO officers listed on the website is for PTO business only.

Treasurer's report (Lori Pescatore)

- Reminders:
 - o There is a reimbursement form that Lori can send to anyone who needs it.
 - o People making purchases for PTO activities may need tax-exempt form before you purchase something, unless it is a business with whom we are already established.
- The budget attached to this meeting agenda includes estimates based on last year.
- Added expenses this year include "software technology" and "social/emotional."
- The budget also pays for classroom supplies for teachers, field trips (each class gets \$300/grade), programs of the SAME and Cultural Enrichment committees, etc. Some expenses are grant-funded.
- In addition to the income shown, the PTO has \$30 K in a money market account to help ensure expenses can be covered.

Science garden (Dorothy Schuette)

- This project started a few years ago. It's a space right outside the school for the children to garden.
- Has been very successful and even survived this summer's drought thanks to parent volunteers.
- Often classroom teachers and parents have collaborated on gardening projects.
- Group would love ideas and help. Plans for this year include possibly using one of the extra library classes per month to weed in the garden.

Grounds cleanup (Dorothy Schuette)

Planning first cleanup of grounds Oct. 1 after school. Will do raking and weeding. Kids are welcome.

Meeting adjourned at 8 pm.