

PTO Meeting-January 9th 2012

Guest Speaker: Jud Pierce

Co-Presidents Remarks: (Janice Weinberg and Susan Goetcheus)

-PTO officers for next year: will have a more serious discussion in Feb to prepare for election in May. We are looking for new people to take over. Susan is willing to stay as co-PTO president, looking for candidate to be her co-president. In the future, the PTO will look to stagger the co-president terms so that one new person will come in each year.

-Mrs. T. wants to remind people that Peirce has credits at the Book Rack. You can return books to the Book Rack or to Mrs. T and those credits can be used for the Peirce library.

Principal's report on School Advisory Council and other activities (Karen Hartley):

-Priority is smaller class size and maintaining class size.

-Winner for the school poster contest- Avril Lynch. Theme of the poster was the school motto, "Strive to shine as a student and a friend." The art work will be hung throughout school. Posters will also be made of runner up art work.

-Margy Dunton left her administrative role as of Friday, January 6th.

-Next school advisory council meeting is next week (week of January 16).

Discussion with Jud Pierce, the Peirce school committee liaison

-Elected in 2010, half through term in school committee. Good news came with override in June, 2011 and will be looking to add back things that were cut from the school budget in previous years.

-Redistricting has been needed to be done for decades. Tried to be done in 2004, no success. Mandated to look at it again. The committee that meets monthly will give recommendation for a vote in June. Every school has a representative. Our representative is Cate Oranchak.

-Working on keeping kids healthy and safe in school, ex. head injuries, use of restraints in schools, class size.

Questions:

-Could you explain what a liaison does?

Response from Pierce: Liaison works with school and PTO to address needs/concerns of school. School committee meets every two weeks on Thursday evenings at high school. The liaison acts as a conduit between administration and public. All of my contact information is on the school webpage. My email address is: judsonpierce@gmail.com.

-How do you find out about needs at Peirce?

Response from Pierce: Coming to as many PTO meetings as possible. Informal coffee meetings as well. Has taken a couple of tours of Peirce and spoken with principal a few times, as well as the superintendent. His understanding of Peirce is that it has rated high in math and very high in English and language arts. Since math progress has leveled off, Peirce is piloting the program, Symphony math. (Progress benchmarks are measured by MCAS) . One goal is to identify kids who are struggling before they need IEP.

Response from Karen to issues related to performance standards: Grades K,1,2 has teacher coming in to working in work with students who are needing extra support in math. Peirce is looking to expand this to upper grades. Additionally, looking to hire math coach who work with the teachers to help with both kids who are struggling and who need to be challenged. Peirce already has 3 reading coaches to help with reading similar issues related to reading.

-Comment from parent: Kids who are not being challenged enough in school can be disruptive in class and as result, sometime end up leaving schools, thereby lowering test scores. It is important to challenge kids at upper end of the spectrum.

-Comment from parent: Institutionally, not enough resources to praise the kids who are excelling. Kids so often can be identified by what they are struggling with, but not identifying kids who are excelling. Identifying and feeding those kids are important

-Comment from parent related to Kindergarten fees in Arlington. Half day child should receive same benefits of the full day school. Currently, math is being taught in the afternoon, therefore meaning kids who are in half day are missing that piece of the curriculum. If curriculum is being taught in the afternoon, one should not have to pay privately for that. Additionally, have to sign up for full day before knowing what the fees are. As well, process of filing of financial aid is humiliating.

Response from Jud: Fee is less than what the state says it should charge in order to get grant (less than state average). Will be discussed in budget, as well as school committee on Thursday night and he will bring these comments back to the committee.

Response from Karen and Tara: The day would be rescheduled so no student would miss math.

-Question from parent: What are the K fees used for?

Response from Jud: It is used to offset the costs of full day. It can't go to other parts of the operation budget, but can't specifically answer what each dollar is spent on.

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“How We Challenge our Kids at Peirce”, a discussion with Karen Hartley and Tara Lamont

Every piece of legislation addresses closing the gap, meaning getting all kids to grade level. As a result, lost programs like ACE. Karen asked the teachers on how they challenge the kids.

Kindergarten (Tara Lamont):

- Kids are in reading groups, as well as using RAZ kids program.
- Writers workshop is using Lucy Caulkins.
- Math is divided in to three groups and divided between the three K teachers. Because group sizes are small, can differentiate within a group.
- For kids who excel at reading/writing: have separate Readers notebook.

The following responses were reported by Karen Hartley:

1st :

- Harder level math activities during math centers
- RAZ kids practice at harder levels
- Guided reading groups at higher levels
- Differentiated morning work

2nd :

- Think tank problems
- picking numbers that are just right for them in math (word problems)
- Higher critical thinking strategies.
- Reading/Writing- reader's notebook with figuring out and letter writing, figurative language, multi-paragraph writing, vocabulary development (sparkling word wall)

3rd :

A lot of the times, particularly towards the middle to end of a math unit, we will pair our higher students with our lower students so that they can demonstrate their knowledge of the subject matter differently (by teaching/explaining to peers who are still having difficulty). Students also have challenge packets readily available and some tough word problems too! Our top group in reading recently created a short play representing what would happen if we added another chapter to the story. After writing it, assigning parts, and practicing, the group performed it before our class.

4th :

One way I challenge advanced students is by letting them explore a concept before I've taught it. For example, while I was working with the majority of the class to learn the standard algorithm to multiply a one-digit number by a two-digit number, I gave a small group of students some problems with two-digit numbers multiplied by two-digit and three-digit numbers. I wasn't expecting this group to necessarily

figure out the steps, but allowing them time to discuss, try, and revise their approach on their own stretches their thinking. Once I had introduced the algorithm for a two-digit number multiplied by a two-digit number to the whole class, I sent this group to work on solving a four-digit number multiplied by a three-digit number. Usually these students thrive when given a challenging task!

Using Nooks and Kindles for literacy

Leveled word study literacy work

Leveled literacy groups

Integrating technology in many areas of the curriculum (Symphony)

Think Tank and Greg Tang Math for enrichment

Lucy Caulkins writing program challenges children at all areas of writing instruction

High expectations for all students

Individual projects to enhance topic development in content areas

5th:

One way that I challenge my students in math is that we use problem solving binders. They are an excellent example of how we can tier the level of difficulty for the wide range of abilities in our classroom. These are not computational problems, but are long and multi-step "thinking" problems. They force students to use a wide array of the math tools in their tool box, as well as use different strategies to arrive at an answer.

Nurse (Tami):

The students are encouraged to take care of their own little ailments with a "help yourself area". Instructions are posted above the table as to how to care for minor boo boo's (after the nurse assesses the abrasion) and itchy mosquito bites. This empowers the children to learn self-care. They feel very proud when they come into the health office and know they can help themselves, or they can show a friend how to get Vaseline for dry lips!

PS I am the only nurse in the district that allows this. I took this idea from overnight camp. The nurse was not available at all times, so the girls learned self-care.

Questions from parents:

Question from parent: Do you feel as teachers, there is a drive to have kids working on the same thing for the sake of not taking a risk. Ex. lots of time spent on phonics, despite some kids already knowing how to read. Another example, kids are tested on all the same level.

Response from Karen: State wants to know kids are performing at level. A small portion of the day may be making those assessments, however they are moving onto other topics. Also good to bring those questions back to the teachers. In terms of phonics, it has been proven to be successful.

Question from parent: What's available after school?

Response from Karen: Kid Zone. If there is demand around specific subject, ex., a math club, person who runs (Nina Coles) group would be open to hearing new ideas.

Question from parent: ACE enrichment (gifted and talented program for grades 3,4,5) is gone. What are other things are being done to address the gifted kids who may be bored during a typical lesson plan? Are there ideas at the town level, or specifically Peirce to support these kids? Could Peirce pilot a program?

Response from Karen: There are too **new** initiatives at Peirce this year (between Symphony Math, Greg Tang math, the math practice guide at 1st and 2nd and looking at implementing a new math coach and the inclusion only being in year two). It is better to focus on making those successful rather than having many programs exist and then not live up to their potential.

Question from parent: Could we use interns from Lesley? Could we build on those relationships?

Response from Karen: Students from Tufts who are working towards specialists degrees in the teaching field have worked for us in the past. We had one in the fall and no one coming in the spring. Sometimes they are used for kids who are struggling and sometimes for kids who are gifted.

Question from parent: Could we use students who specialize in technology or math as an intern?

Response from Karen: Would be open to having an intern.

Question from parent: Is there an expectation that teachers move towards math groups?

Response from Karen: Teachers are asked to move towards math groups. As part of the TERC program, often many of the activities involve smaller groups. This program has been used in Arlington since the 1990's.

Question from parent: How as parents should we handle from our children, "I'm bored?"

Response from Karen: As parents, talk to the teachers.

Report from Fundraising (Sarah Forney)

-Tuesday, Feb 7th –Wilson Farm Shopping Day. Will give a portion of each sale to the school.

-50/50 raffle-tickets will go on sale at the talent show, Friday January 27th. Raffle will be drawn at comedy show at Sons of Italy in March.

-Spring Fling dance will be April 27th.

Update on Redistricting (Cate Oranchak)

Cate Oranchak and Charlie Radoslovich are the Peirce representatives to the redistricting meetings. Open forum on redistricting will be on Wednesday, 6:30pm here in the library. There is a survey that can be taken. Another open forum will happen in Feb or March. Comments are encouraged. Peirce was to grow, we would need more classes. If we grow in classes, we could potentially decrease class size.