

PTO Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 11, 2012

- 1) Welcome and President's/Vice President's remarks (Susan Goetcheus/Amy Cooper)
 - a. Our next PTO meeting is Tuesday, January 8.
 - b. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with the Holiday Craft Fair, including Lori Pescatore who organized it, Sarah Forney who ran the kitchen, Jessica Callahan who coordinated the pie sale (we sold every one), and Emo (Elizabeth) Orrell who ran the very popular photo booth. We will do it again next year.

- 2) Fit Girls Program (Tami Harrah, Peirce School Nurse)
 - a. Tami has been a school nurse for 18 years and worked at summer camps, including a girls' overnight camp. She has a passion to empower girls – thus her interest in bringing the Fit Girls program to Peirce this year. The program is already in place at Dallin and Bishop.
 - b. Fit Girls is a program for 4th and 5th grade girls. The girls meet for an hour twice a week for 8 weeks. They start with a 12 minute run/jog/walk and work up to 35 minutes by the end of the 8 weeks. They also have a weekly theme and read and discuss books with strong, smart female protagonists. This encourages reading and reinforces messages of empowerment. The program culminates with the opportunity to run a 5k race. (For more information, go to <http://www.fitgirls.org/>.) 90% of our 4th grade participants last year returned to the program this year, and all but 2 participants ran the 5k.
 - c. What Tami needs in order to start a Fit Girls program at Peirce:
 - \$400+ to purchase the curriculum. (Tami would run the program as a volunteer.)
 - A license to use the facilities.
 - A lending library with recommended titles. She has already spoken to Mrs. T about having a selection of books in the library devoted to Fit Girls.
 - A place to run where she can see the girls at all times. The school yard is too sloped and already used by Mrs. T after school. Maybe the playing fields at McClennen or by the ice rink would work. We would have to contact the Recreation Department.
 - One or more parent volunteers to assist, depending on the number of girls who join.
 - d. Should Peirce's Fit Girls be organized through KidZone or should it be done independently? KidZone did it last year, and they are good at organizing. However the girls pay tuition and that tuition is lost – it does not return to the program. Additionally, the girls have to pay for their T-shirts and to enter races. Ideally the program would be accessible to all, and not just those who can afford KidZone tuition. At the same time, requiring a small tuition reinforces the commitment on the part of both the child and the parents.
 - e. Another question is liability. Arlington Public School employees may be covered, but parent volunteers and facilities may not be.

- f. Susan suggests that we put out a feeler in the Daily Bulletin to gauge how many might be interested (include start/end dates, tuition amount, Tuesday and Thursday availability).
- 3) “Opening the Door to Our MCAS Data” (LeiLanie D’Agostino, Director of Data Integration for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, Arlington Public Schools)
 - a. LeiLanie wants to address the feeling that “we didn’t do so well” on the MCAS. A new accountability measure, Progress and Performance Index (PPI), is replacing the former measure, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). PPI measures individual student growth as well as progress toward reducing achievement gaps among students.
 - b. The key question: Is Peirce making what the state finds to be acceptable progress? The answer: Yes, in some areas. Our combined scores are great. However our High Needs students tend to struggle, and we did not meet our targets for improving their scores. (High Needs students are those with disabilities or IEPs, those from low-income families who qualify for free or reduced lunch, English language learners, and former English language learners.) Generally speaking, we have high growth with high (and some low) achievement – so we are growing, even if we don’t yet have the numbers the state wants.
 - c. How is growth measured? Kids who score at a similar level one year are grouped, and their performance the following year is compared. We want to know how much a given student improved, relative to other students who had similar prior scores.
 - d. Question: What can we do to improve? We immediately start looking at where we performed lower than the state, and address those areas. Often children who are “on the line” in the Needs Improvement category can easily be bumped up into the Proficient category – a few points can get us there. We have the ability to break the scores down in all different ways to help us figure out where we might be going wrong, at a district, school, or individual level. Answers to specific test questions can be broken down according to gender, special needs, economic status, etc. We can find out if certain kids are having trouble with specific concepts, target those topics in our teaching, start introducing them earlier, etc.
 - e. Question: Are there consequences for not meeting our goals? The state does not penalize us (e.g., financially), but still we want to score higher, and know that we should.
 - f. Karen Hartley cautions against overdoing our focus on specific weaknesses, lest we lose sight of our strengths. Also, things change every year: the kids, the test questions, etc. Having implemented the new version of TERC last year, we will want to see whether our scores are affected. Also with redistricting, kids joining us from other schools, etc., we have grown in numbers this year, which might affect our performance. We do know that, MCAS aside, our kids are doing well in the reading program, meeting DRA benchmarks, etc. And our English Language Learners are moving through that program and not having to return. We are making steady progress as a school. At our next meeting we will have Kathleen Lockyer, Director of Special Education, to discuss the future of the co-taught program. We can ask her how we can better help

all kids improve. Also right now, the Peirce Advisory Council is looking at how we can push all students into the next MCAS performance category, especially in math. (The performance categories are: Warning, Needs Improvement, Proficient, and Advanced.)

- g. Question: Peirce has fallen in the school rankings. Is the co-taught program having this effect? Reply that these rankings are flawed because they do not compare like with like. It appears that over 30% of our kids fall into the High Needs category, much higher than at other schools. Karen notes that the kids who are not High Needs are still doing great. We will have another meeting after the holidays for discussion of the MCAS.

4) Peirce School Committee Representative Jud Pierce

- a. This is Jud's third year on the Arlington School Committee and second year as the liaison for Peirce and Dallin. He wants to let us know what's going on with the School Committee and find out our concerns. Thanks to the override vote, the School Committee can now focus on FY14, hear what the principals need, be able to give them those things, and gradually add back what was lost.
- b. What are your priorities, what do you see as the top 3 needs? Some current issues:
- New Nutrition and Wellness Policy to be in place by the end of the school year (though guidelines were already up in August 2012). Jud doesn't want to take the policy beyond what the law requires. For example, he wants to allow exemptions for bake sales and curriculum-driven events (e.g., colonial day, international celebrations). He will be presenting the issue at the 12/20 School Committee meeting. Come to the meeting, watch on ACMi, or e-mail him with your thoughts. Massive surveys on such issues are not feasible, but the committee is very welcoming of input.
 - Our school libraries do not have books to support the new Common Core curriculum, not enough non-fiction reading materials for example. Also, many of our books are old, out of date.
- c. Question raised regarding this year's school calendar: With multiple early release days and conference scheduling, it is very difficult for parents with kids at different schools and for working parents. The interruptions in school days must be difficult for the teachers as well. Jud says that this year may be something of an aberration. The professional development required to implement the common core is extensive. In the future, perhaps some professional development could be done over the summer or weekends, or during early evening hours. Also, 900 hours are no longer enough to implement the curriculum. We might start school on the Tuesday (rather than the Thursday) after Labor Day. He also believes that we need to increase the length of the school day. Regarding parent-teacher conferences, Alicia Coletti suggested that conference hours could be grouped together over fewer days, and more evening hours could be offered. She estimates that two school days and one evening might be sufficient.
- d. Further concerns were raised regarding our libraries: We need professional librarians to guide the kids too, not just more books. Right now the 40 minutes devoted to library every week could be

better spent. Karen says that a librarian/media specialist is on her “urgent” list, and that we will discuss this issue and other needs further when we address our School Improvement Plan.

- e. Jud’s contact information is on the district website. He encourages us to call or e-mail him with concerns.

5) Other business and announcements

- a. Budget update was handed out. Treasurer Lori Pescatore noted that we are doing well and should not have to carry over expenses.
- b. Joy Spadafora, our PTO Directory coordinator, asks for a contribution of \$5 towards a gift for Josh Lobel, the volunteer who does the PTO web directory. They are getting him some Adobe software as a thank you for his hard work.
- c. Lending guidelines for PTO property: Our PTO owns games, tables, a coffeemaker, a popcorn machine, canopies, and other items that PTOs from other schools, or members of the Peirce community, might want to borrow. Unwritten policy/understanding is that someone on the PTO board should be approached first, and that the borrower would replace anything that gets broken. We may not want to loan our new speaker system, as it is especially valuable and fragile.
- d. The Assistant Superintendent and the Director of Special Education will be at upcoming meetings – these will be publicized once scheduled.
- e. Carl Elder needs volunteers to help watch kids during the teepee presentation on 12/21.

6) Questions

Upcoming dates:

Friday, December 14	Cookie decorating after school
Monday, December 24	Holiday vacation begins
Wednesday, January 2	Back to school
Tuesday, January 8	PTO meeting