

PTO Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 11, 2013

1) Co-Presidents' greeting: Amy Cooper, Elizabeth (Emo) Orrell

2) Principal's remarks: Karen Hartley

a. Evolution of the inclusion program

- In the past, elementary students with learning disabilities were pulled out of their home classrooms in order to receive additional help. For the past three years, however, this problem was addressed by Peirce's co-taught inclusion program. At each grade level, one of the two classrooms had a full-time special educator and teaching assistant, in addition to a full-time general educator. Kids from all over the district were brought to Peirce for the inclusion program, and we had six special educators on staff.
- The problem with this situation was that kids had to leave their home schools to come to Peirce. Arlington is a place that prides itself on its neighborhood elementary schools.
- Starting this year, each Arlington elementary school will have at least two full-time special educators on staff. Peirce currently still has four or five special educators, because we retained so many of the kids who came for the co-taught program in the past. But we have lost many of our additional TAs. The model is moving towards having more full-time speech and language professionals who go into the classrooms, rather than pulling some kids out and leaving the classroom teachers alone with the rest. This way, kids who need extra help do not miss crucial instruction in their classroom by being pulled out, nor do they have to leave their neighborhood school. Also, there are more highly trained teachers in all the classrooms, which benefits all students.

b. PowerSchool

- PowerSchool is becoming more and more useful. It has been a lifeline for parents at Ottoson to get information. Both Ottoson and the High School use it for grades, homework, tests, etc. For us at the elementary level, PowerSchool has mainly been used for attendance and AlertNow contact information.
- This year, parents will receive a reminder of their PowerSchool username and password for each child, so they can go online to edit their contact and emergency information. This reminder will be sent through the mail, and parents will receive an e-mail warning when it has been sent.
- There is more to PowerSchool now: You can opt in or out of photos and videos of your child, add directory information, etc. Eventually we may be able to have all the class placement lists available online (vs. waiting for them to be mailed out), among other things.

c. Curriculum Afternoon

- Another change regarding Curriculum Afternoon/Evening. (These are sessions where the teachers present general information to parents about what the kids will be learning, homework expectations, class rules, etc.) The teachers' new contract limits their evening commitments to three. We need to schedule individual parent-teacher conferences for two nights (in addition to afternoons) this fall, to help accommodate working parents. We also

want to make sure the teachers can be here for our Open House/Math Night in January. Therefore, curriculum presentations will have to happen in the afternoon.

- Curriculum information packets will go home beforehand, so parents can read through and ask questions of the teacher, or decide if they want to take time off work for the presentations.

3) Introductions and updates from officers and committee chairs

a. PTO Directory: Joy Spadafora

- The PTO Directory lists the contact information of any Peirce family who opts to be included – a great resource, especially for those new to Peirce. It arose because the information the office has about families is confidential, and parents wanted a convenient way to contact the parents of classmates etc. The Directory also includes the names of staff, room numbers, classroom lists, room parent and PTO information, a last name cross index for families with more than one last name, and other helpful information.
- Josh Lobel, Arlington Schools Directory Coordinator, oversees the database and is working with the School Department to integrate it with PowerSchool, so information for the Directory would come directly from PowerSchool once parents give permission.
- One issue needs to be worked out: Parents need a way to specify which personal information from PowerSchool they want included in the Directory, and which they want to remain private, especially where safety is at issue, e.g., if a parent is a therapist or police officer. (The old Arlington Schools Directory database allows this.)
- Don't miss your chance to be included in the Directory! Forms will go out as soon as we resolve issues with PowerSchool.

b. Treasurer and Fundraising: Lori Pescatore

- Lori has agreed to stay on as head of Fundraising, but has dropped her role as chair of Hospitality.
- Copies of the PTO budget were distributed. Some decisions have yet to be made about fundraisers. Our biggest spending: SAME/CE – science, math, and cultural enrichment.
- We have our Annual Drive soon, to kick off the year. Parents can use PayPal to make a donation this year. Beyond that, instead of selling stuff, we have fun family and community-building events to raise money. We'll be repeating our Holiday Craft Fair on 11/16, doing Flocking Flamingos, and holding a Trivia Night for adults only, date to be determined.
- No committee meetings except for the first get-together at Lori's house. If you'd like to help out with fundraising, contact her at: loripescatore@hotmail.com.
- We need volunteers for Town Day.

c. Community Outreach: Jessica Callaghan

This committee arose because the PTO was receiving requests from outside organizations to fundraise or collect for other causes in the community and beyond. We have 3-4 events throughout year, and try to avoid asking for money. Examples: Coats for Kids through Anton's Cleaners, Pennies for Peace, turkey dinners at Thanksgiving to be distributed through DCFS, books for More than Words bookstore in Waltham (also a social service

agency); Arlington Food Pantry collection on 100th day of school, Cradles for Crayons, etc. But we are looking for new ideas.

d. Hospitality: Erin Whalen

Erin was absent. Movie Night is Friday 9/27. Social & Hospitality also does Bingo Night, the Talent Show, a lunch for the teachers before school begins, coffee for the kindergarten parents this Friday in the cafeteria, Popcorn Friday, an ice cream social, pumpkin and cookie decorating. There is no committee for Hospitality; just go to SignUp Genius before the event to volunteer.

e. Enrichment: Carl Elder, Jocelyn Willett, Sherri Bulmer

- Largest part of the PTO's budget goes toward Enrichment. We bring in vendors to give presentations either to the whole school or to a grade or individual class.
- Examples: Bottle Rockets program in October, the New England Aquarium, the Museum of Science, painters, authors, historical characters (Helen Keller in October), The Power of One anti-bullying program in November.
- The job is mostly organizational early in year, and later involves hosting the vendors while they are at Peirce. Jocelyn is still collecting information forms from teachers about their preferences and how we can best coordinating enrichment programs with the curriculum.

f. Library Enrichment: Jane (Mrs. T) Torregrassa

- Mrs. T was absent. She needs volunteers to help during library class. There is a link to SignUp Genius on the Peirce website, and there is a meeting this Tuesday after drop-off for volunteers.
- The Book Fairs in October and May pay for library books. Scholastic is reasonable and has good programs for schools. We will kick off the Fall Book Fair at the Family Dance, Friday 10/18. Kids will also be able to attend the Fair during library class the following week, as well as afterschool. Volunteering to sell books during your kid's library period is a fun and easy way to help out. Look for links to SignUp Genius.

g. Safe Routes: Flynn Monks, Mary Alice Vallarino

- Mary Alice was absent. Flynn and she are looking for a third committee member. The Safe Routes committee encourages a walking culture and informs parents and the community about parking rules and safety.
- Events held to encourage walking. October 9 is International Walk to School Day, and they will need some help. There will be music on the playground, and kids will get something to pin up if they walk that day. Then in May, there is a Bike and Walk to School event.
- Another idea is to have a Walker of the Month, who could be profiled in the Peirce Bugle (5th grade paper) – what they've discovered while walking, what they like about it, etc.

h. Science Garden & Landscaping: Dorothy Schuette

Dorothy was absent. She maintains the Science Garden and grounds with the help of parents and students (cleanup days and summer watering). Classes do planting projects in the spring, and the Science Garden is incorporated into classroom curriculum in various ways.

i. Teacher Representatives: Alicia Coletti, Daniela Hurley

Ms. Alicia Coletti (absent) and Mrs. Daniela Hurley are the teacher representatives; they communicate the concerns and needs of the teachers.

j. Advisory Council: Cate Oranchak, Karen Hartley

- The Advisory Council is a separate organization from the PTO, required by the state. The group meets monthly and consists of three parents (this year: Cate, Monica Driggers, and Julie Goff), two teachers (Ms. Heather Dooley and Ms. Crystal Power), and Principal Hartley. Their job is to formulate educational goals linked to the District's goals, and a School Improvement Plan.
- Last year we met one goal of raising test scores so that at least 70% of students rank as either proficient or advanced, and less than 30% rank as needing improvement. We beat our goal in all grades and subjects, with up to 80% of students ranking proficient or advanced in some cases, thanks in large part to our math coaching.
- Our two other goals are improving technology and improving communication (e.g., with the earlier distribution of class placement and supply lists, etc.)
- Past goals include reviving the school motto, starting the PRIDE Assemblies, etc.
- Teacher block scheduling is another district initiative implemented this year. Block scheduling means that subjects are taught at the same time across classrooms within a grade. This makes it easier for specialists to visit the classrooms and not have to pull kids out. Each grade also has a "flex block" time during which kids who still do need to be pulled out, e.g., for occupational therapy, can leave the classroom without missing instruction in another subject. For other students, it can be used as an enrichment or challenge time. For the most part, Peirce was already doing block scheduling. We were able to keep our 40 minute lunch/recess and specials about where they were.
- No schedule set for Advisory Council meetings yet. Meeting notes are on the Peirce website. Meetings are open to everyone.

Amy notes that the PTO is happy for any and all help you can give, either on a committee, or by giving an hour here and there on SignUp Genius for events. And even if you can't volunteer, bring your kids and have fun. We have afterschool, evening, and weekend events, so there is something for everyone. Come when you can, and make the most of our great community.

SignUp Genius is a web-based signup sheet that we are using to organize volunteers for PTO events. Links can be found in the weekly Wednesday bulletin or on the Peirce website. You need an e-mail address to use it. But you can always just call the event coordinator to sign up if you prefer.

PTO meetings are scheduled, through the end of 2013, for the second Wednesday of each month at 6:30 PM here in the library. However, please feel free to approach the officers and committee chairs with questions at any time.

4) Upcoming dates

Wed. 9/18

5th Grade Science Camp Informational Evening for Parents (6:00-7:00 PM, Stratton School cafeteria)

Sat. 9/21	Arlington Town Day (10:00-3:00, Arlington Center)
Tues. 9/24	Early release (1:00); lunch will be served; Mrs. T's open
Fri. 9/27	Movie Night (5:45-8:00 PM, cafeteria)
Tues. 10/1	Curriculum Afternoon (2:45, repeated at 3:15, classrooms)
Tues. 10/8	Early release (1:00); lunch will be served; Mrs. T's open
Wed. 10/9	PTO Meeting (6:30-7:30 PM, library)
Mon. 10/14	No school; Mrs. T's closed
Fri. 10/18	Family Dance and Scholastic Book Fair (7:00 PM, gym and library)
Mon. 10/21 – Fri. 10/25	Scholastic Book Fair (library)
Tues. 10/22	Early release (1:00); lunch will be served; Mrs. T's open
Tues. 10/22 – Fri. 10/25	5th Grade Science Camp
Fri. 10/25	Pumpkin Decorating (2:15-3:15, cafeteria)

Find a date for International Night – early November or December?