

Peirce School
Strive to shine: as a student, as a friend

PTO Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 5, 2014

- 1. Co-Presidents' Greeting – Cris Martin and Angela Snyder**
 - a. Introduction of PTO Board, Teacher Rep, Committee Chairs, and all other attendees.**
 - b. Recap of last month and thank you to volunteers:**
 - i. Family Dance – Liz Katzman, Jessica Markowitz, and DJ Adam Markowitz
 - ii. Book Fair – Jessica Callaghan
 - iii. Pumpkin Decorating – Anne Dixon
 - iv. Bottle Rockets – Jocelyn Willett
 - v. School Grounds Clean-Up – Dorothy Schuette

2. Principal's Remarks – Karen Hartley

Karen will submit the latest Peirce School Improvement Plan to the Arlington School Committee on November 20. All school principals go to this meeting.

The School Improvement Plan is put together by the Advisory Council each year. It lists three goals for the school, related to the Arlington Public Schools' three district-wide goals. Past goals have addressed concerns such as communication, technology, MCAS scores, and professional development. Once approved by the School Committee, the School Improvement Plan goes on the website, and the Advisory Council starts working to implement it.

There were a number of parents who volunteered to fill this year's opening on the Advisory Council, so for the first time we will need to have an election. Two more seats will come open next year as well.

3. Special Guest – Carolyn Shediak, Math Coach at Peirce

a. Background

This is Carolyn's 16th year in the schools. She taught kindergarten and second grade at Stratton. Her new role this year is as Peirce's full-time math coach. Arlington's math coach program is only two years old. Last year there were a total of four math coaches; this year there are six. Peirce, Stratton, and Thompson all have full-time coaches. Bracket and Dallin share a coach. Hardy and Bishop each have a part-time coach.

b. Role of Math Coach

The job of math coach is different from that of a specialist who might pull kids out of their classrooms to give them extra help. The math coach's main job is to work with teachers – helping them meet Common Core requirements, finding teaching materials, assisting in professional development, analyzing assessment data, and determining how teachers can support the kids who need more help and provide enrichment for others.

When the schedule permits it, students participate in additional math activities during their Flex Block period. This gives them extra math time, outside of their regular math block, a couple times a week. Teachers flexibly group kids at different ability levels. Carolyn helps them plan appropriate reinforcement and enrichment activities that the kids will practice in their Flex Groups.

c. Common Core math.

Many parents don't get Common Core math and don't understand why we're doing it. Carolyn asks parents to be patient and not to teach their kids to solve problems the way they themselves learned, because that undermines what's being taught at school. Programs such as Kumon and Russian Math teach math the easy way, using the same algorithms we learned as kids. But the Common Core wants kids to get a deeper understanding of numbers, number relationships, place value, etc. Kids who go straight to solving with algorithms cannot explain their thinking and how they reached their solutions. Common Core emphasizes depth of thinking, making kids better thinkers, and preparing them better for middle school math.

Question: How is depth of understanding balanced with the ability to solve problems quickly? Carolyn says there are some things we do want kids to be quick with, e.g. math facts. However in the early grades, we don't use flash cards for memorization, but rather lots of play with manipulatives. The more they see that $3+5=8$, the more they come to believe it's true (vs. merely memorizing a flash card with the fact written on it). There are many computer games we use as well, to "build fluency." These do make kids faster, but again, the point is not memorization. If they can get a quick answer to a simple math problem, they then can use that answer to solve more complicated problems.

d. How parents can help kids.

How can we help our kids with their homework? Be sure to look over carefully the math work your child brings home so you know what they're doing in class. When your kid asks for help with a homework problem, first, ask him or her to explain it to you. What is the problem asking you to do? How did the teacher show you how to solve it? Have your child draw a picture, putting the problem in context – this may trigger their memories of how to solve it. If your kid still has no idea how to do a problem, let the teacher know.

Two additional areas that parents may want to focus on at home are time and money. These topics have been removed from the curriculum as separate units, and instead are taught in the context of other concepts. They are not part of the Common Core standards, though teachers still try to squeeze them in. Practice telling time on an analog clock, and practice counting coins. Tons of other math concepts are used in the process.

e. Resources for Parents.

- i. A helpful book, available on Amazon, is *A Parent's Guide to Understanding Math Education in Today's Schools* by Catherine Kellison and Catherine Twomey Fosnot. The PTO may want to order some copies to lend to parents.
- ii. Matt Coleman, Director of K-12 Mathematics for Arlington Public Schools, will be holding Elementary Math Night on Wednesday, November 19 from 7-8:30 PM at the high school. All the math coaches will be there.

- iii. Reach out to your child's teacher. The TERC math program we use has informational newsletters that can be sent home to parents of third through fifth graders.
- iv. There are also many instructional videos online, e.g., if you Google, "how to draw a model of multiplication."

4. Committee Updates

a. Teacher Representatives – Colleen Lloyd

- i. The teachers love the idea of having Apple TVs, but right now, some are afraid to try them out. They want training. A full day (six hour) training session is recommended, but a three hour session would also be possible. What would the teachers prefer, and when would they want to do it: on a single Saturday or in two sessions, etc.? Integrating the training with class time may also be a possibility. Could we partner with another school to split the price of training?

English Language Learners would like an Apple TV for the extra cart in the copy room, and the music department would like a projector. Speakers that are compatible with the laptops have also been requested. Dennis Lowery from APS information technologies said he could do a mini workshop after school if the teachers wanted one.

- ii. The kindergarten playground is a mess and not very interesting. Are there ways we could improve it? Maybe add some picnic tables? The dirt is a problem too. A rubber surface would cost \$9000, whereas getting some loam and hardy groundcover (e.g., pachysandra) would run about \$500, and families may be able to donate plants. Perhaps we could apply for an Innovation in Education grant from the Arlington Education Foundation to make it an educational space for kids. Cf. the interactive musical structures at Bishop, or the Natural Playground at Tufts Children's School. (Of course it's hard to keep kids off long enough for plants to take hold.)

b. Fundraising – Molly Gillis

Molly was absent. The Annual Drive has already raised \$5000. Another request is being sent home this week.

c. Community Outreach – Jessica Callaghan

Jessica sent in the Coats for Kids registration and is waiting for posters to hang near the bins. This drive runs through January.

The Book Fair was especially successful this time around. What made the difference? Two explanations: First, the Fair was held during both the Dance and Open House – whereas usually it overlaps with just one. Second, having a good selection is key. Jessica and Mrs. T meet with our Scholastic sales representative to choose books, because the selection they sent us in previous years had been disappointing. Our community doesn't go for what Scholastic typically offers – we like more non-fiction and science. Now our Scholastic rep. orders books especially for us and drives them here herself from Marlborough. There were no complaints from parents about selection this time.

One thing to note, however, is that it has become increasingly difficult to find volunteers to staff the Book Fair. The problem started last spring and was worse this time around. This has been the trend with all our volunteer-run events.

Is there a way we can be proactive about staffing the Spring Fair and Family Dance – ways to get the word out and find more volunteers? Starting too early with our solicitations can lead to overload.

d. Hospitality – Erin Whalen

Pumpkin Decorating was a great success. We used up all the pumpkins. Cookie Decorating is scheduled for December 19.

e. Landscaping – Dorothy Schuette

Dorothy was absent.

f. Volunteer Coordinator – Emily Almas

Emily has been talking with Susan Goetcheus about setting up, on the Peirce website, a master list of volunteer opportunities. It will include current and upcoming events as well as ongoing jobs such as photocopying. The list will provide links to either SignUpGenius or VolunteerSpot as soon as those links become available.

g. Enrichment – Sherri Bulmer

A Puppet Show is planned for the Monday before Thanksgiving.

5. Budget Update – Lori Pescatore, Treasurer

Lori was not present. Jessica has two messages from her:

a. Holiday Craft Fair

The Craft Fair is November 15, a week from Saturday. Volunteers are needed to help set up, bake pies, etc. See Signup Genius. Come spend some money and get a start on your holiday shopping.

b. Peirce Pride Savings Bank

The Peirce Pride Bank opens on November 14, in the back lobby by the gym, right before school. The accounts are held by Cambridge Savings Bank, and the fifth graders act as tellers. Every Friday during the school year, kids can deposit money. There will be a presentation on the bank, as well as a penny estimation, at the Pride assembly on November 13.

Susan Goetcheus also sends word that the Peirce Directory will be available next week.

6. New Business/Proposals.

a. Help/support needed for upcoming events.

How can we communicate better with parents about upcoming events, and push for volunteers when we need them? Can we troubleshoot ahead of time?

Emily says it might be helpful to create a database of people interested in volunteering that we could target with e-mail, perhaps monthly, something separate from the Weekly Bulletin, e.g., “Here’s what’s coming up, and here’s the help we need.” Room parents could send it out, and

links to the sign-up pages could be included. Another option would be a monthly flier in kids' folders listing upcoming volunteer opportunities and referring parents to the Peirce website for links and more information.

Having signage could also help, e.g., easels by drop off that say, "We still need 12 volunteers for X." Maybe an Uncle Sam graphic, "We need YOU." This could be a quick, easy visual reminder. We could also try a notice on the bulletin board inside the school, as many parents come into the building during the day, especially with Mrs. T's. If the signage is catchy, the kids will notice as well and get excited about the events. Too often we just target parents directly, but the kids can also bring the message home.

We might also send out a reminder about our suggested volunteer hours, that every family volunteer at one event per year so we have 100% participation. E.g., a December e-mail could thank Annual Drive donors and ask, "Have you given your hour yet?" Quote studies saying kids do better when their parents are involved... Have a thermometer graphic showing progress toward our participation goal... Keep it simple listing just the next three events.

b. Jud Pierce, School Committee Member

Jud Pierce is Peirce School's representative on the School Committee. He is coming to our December meeting and would like to field our questions about both Peirce and district-wide issues.

c. Fundraising Opportunities

We are booked with fundraisers for now, but here are some ideas to think about for the future. Any other ideas?

- i. The Art Lounge – On Mass Ave. in Arlington Heights. They have artists who, in one evening, help you create a painting or some other work of art. They also offer drinks and appetizers. Angela spoke with them, and they are open to helping with fundraising, e.g. a ladies night or parent-and-me event with a portion of profits going to Peirce (cf. our Wilson Farm fundraiser). Even if we don't do an official Peirce fundraiser, small groups could go and ask that a portion of their tab be donated to Peirce. (<http://www.arlingtonartlounge.com/>)
- ii. Math-A-Thon for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital – Kids participate in the Math-A-Thon to learn about math and to raise money for St. Jude's. Each participant is given a Funbook with math problems to solve to earn pledge money. (<http://mathathon.org/>)
- iii. Common Ground restaurant – New restaurant in Arlington Center. They have a private event room and hold trivia nights and other special nights. (<http://commongroundarlington.com/>)

We raised the price of tickets at the Spring Fair last year. Perhaps we could offset the cost of participation in the Fair with a new fundraiser or Annual Drive dollars?

d. Lantern Walk

The Arlington Police Department has volunteered to help out with our Lantern Walk. Steve, their educational liaison, will be walking with us. The town issued us a permit to use McClennen Park.

e. Turkey Drive

The Turkey Drive is November 24. Donate frozen turkeys and other fixings for Thanksgiving dinner. It's a great way to help local families. The drive is run by the fifth graders, with the help of Lori Pescatore and Cheryl Banks, a parent and social worker at DCFS. We collect on the Monday before Thanksgiving, immediately before and after school, and typically get enough to help 30-35 families.

Upcoming Dates

Friday 11/7	6:00 PM	Lantern Walk (meet on basketball court)
Saturday 11/15	10:00 AM-2:00 PM	Holiday Craft Fair
Monday 11/24	before & after school	Turkey Collection
Wednesday 12/3	6:30-8:00	PTO Meeting