

Westbrook PTA Budget Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:55 p.m.
2. 2017 – 2018 Budget Discussion – Jesse Nickelson and Karen Thornton
 - **Purpose of the Meeting:** This is not an official PTA meeting, but we want to provide an opportunity to review the new budget, outline what we're proposing and why it is included. Additionally, we would like put a couple of issues on the table to think about and to push some thinking forward as we look to next year. The reason for the meeting is to spur thinking and input from the membership and what we can expect for the next several years. Right now, there is a lot of change and sense of uncertainty. For example, the school calendar, if 2018 will look like 2017, and then what does this mean for 2019. Also, enrollment projections are a possible issue. The budget is based on this year's enrollment, but there is talk about enrollment dropping in some grades and increasing in other grades. WE will also focus this meeting on how we came up with the budget. Please ask questions, think about what's included and ask more questions. We will review all questions and post the budget the week the before the meeting in May.
 - **Current State of the Budget:** Treasurer Ed Valado provided information on where we are to date with spending. As in previous years, sometimes we work to make exceptions for one-time funding or changes to the budget. This year, Spirit Wear is an example because they needed to spend more upfront. This upfront invest will end up saving us money in the long run. Also, some events are slightly over/under but everything is close to what we projected before the school year.

In this year's budget, Erin Harcourt mentioned that a line was missing for Aqua Eagles. We will be able to include it for next year. It is important to note that Aqua Eagles has typically been funded from a grant through the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and it may be cut in the President's budget. Therefore, next fall we may need to determine if the PTA will need to fully fund Aqua Eagles. We will find out how much the current grant is, but we

will need to think long term about to pay for this program – if we no longer have the grant. In the meantime, we will call the Chesapeake Bay Foundation to get more information on the status of funding and the grant.

Everything else is currently in the budget is generally remaining the same. Ed and I have closely reviewed the budget and we did not see anything that would go up substantially, outside of extenuating circumstances like Aqua Eagles. A meeting attendee asked a question about the budget for the science committee and why it's \$2,500 budget is listed as a revenue. It is a reserve not a revenue/expense item.

- **Teacher Budgets:** A meeting attendee presented a question about how much is allotted for the P.E. allowance for Ms. Thai to buy equipment. Ms. Thai's allowance is not for small items like balls, but it is for larger items and equipment such as balance beams, etc. that support her curriculum. The items she purchases are not recess items. Equipment for her units. Funding for additional P.E. and recess items is an area that if we can review and consider. Also, Ms. Thai's budget has come down during the past four years because we previously didn't have a dedicated gymnasium and she needed to outfit the gym when it initially opened.

A meeting attendee noted that fourth grade teacher, Ms. Palmer was shocked at the limited amount of science supplies to use in the classroom. I don't think that's where we want to get into with FOWS but those are the things that can benefit other grades. I hope that the teachers have that communication to go through the avenues and the teachers know they can turn to a liaison. I hope that is being passed along. I am going to tell Ms. Palmer to give me a wish list. I want the teachers to know that we're here for them.

This is a great observation, it may be worth finding out. The teachers have only spent \$5,000 of the \$9,000 allocation. The PTA will send a reminder and reach out to Ms. Dahlem to determine the best way to communicate. I bet many of the new teachers may not know.

Meeting attendees presented the following questions and comments:

- Can they pool the money for something for the grade?

- Could there be a teacher liaison?
- Could we give a staples' gift card?
- but now Ms. Lane wanted it something to be utilized in that year or stay in the school.
- Can this also extend to long-term substitute teachers?
- I would like to see that come from Ms. Lane to advocate for her staff. We should not remind them
- Could there be a parent who reports into the room parent overseer and remind teachers to help teacher's get the resources to set up their classroom?
- Is there a work around, could a teacher liaison buy and submit a receipt?
 - If they really want something they can fill out the paper work. The PTA needs to reach out to the staff. If you're not using it then reduce. Just remind them.
- Is it difficult to see how much money teachers have left in their budget?

Caroline Smith volunteered to be the person to remind the teachers next year how much budget they can spend. It is not fair to put it on the room parents because they have other responsibilities, but it is good to open the lines of communication. A hybrid of approach is to provide a quarterly report on the budget to Ms. Dahlem or Kerry Lawrence. The teachers are given info in the beginning of the year, so they do know about it. I will meet with the teachers to give them the form. This is all good stuff and great ideas.

- **Media Center Funding:** A meeting attendee asked a question about the stipend that Ms. Stoll and Ms. Celano receive. Ed Valado stated that they have submitted any expenses and it has been an empty line for the past couple of budgets. To clarify, it is a stipend and they do not have to submit. They should just get paid. Ed will make sure she is getting paid since there are not any contracts for stipends.
- **Teacher Development:** Ms. Lane told us she didn't use the full teacher development this year and will earmark what wasn't used this year for

future teacher development opportunities. As a result, there is no budget ask for professional development for next year. A meeting attendee asked, do we know how much is left?

- **Budget Reserves:** One meeting attendee asked if, due to this, we have the capacity to absorb small risks? The professional development budget has already been transferred over to Ms. Lane and her budget, but we already have existing budget reserves. If we have unexpected expenses of \$1,000 here and there are fine, but 10 or so unexpected expenses could be problem. At this point, there is no need to increase dues to increase reserves. We are also trying to hold the family donation steady. For planning purposes, there are two enrollment counts, one at the beginning of the school year and one in October. And, until we have the actual enrollment numbers are just a guess.
- **Impact of Potential Federal, State and County Budget Cuts:** It is our goal to be fully transparent with you and the past presidents have done a great job with the budget, so it's been easy to track against over the years. Between Trump Administration and the Maryland and Montgomery County governments, it will be interesting to see what is in store for the MCPS budget. As a former D.C. Public School officer, when something is cut from the budget my first question is how long it will take to be earned back. So, when a school district cuts something we need to ask questions. The problem is that policy-related cuts are made with no thought about how to fund it again in the future. As a result, it will be a major investment to get back all the things we cut over the years. We need to be vigilant with watching Montgomery County and MCPS with funding. I think it will be fine, but is there something that needs to be added as enrichment or other programs or initiatives that we want to grow, we start those discussions and continue it with next year's PTA presidents. It's easy to walk in in September and to say we want to add something, but it's hard to fund it because it hasn't been budgeted. It's worth thinking about now because it will take the times to have that conversation. Erin Harcourt and Maureen Kramer are taking on the science committee and it will be interesting to see what comes of that. A meeting attendee asked if there are there things that

came up this year that we needed money for? Not from membership or from faculty. We asked directly and the feedback we got was that they feel very supported.

- **Principal Communication:** A meeting attendee asked if Ms. Lane required to send out a monthly newsletter and that they thought it was part of her communications strategy to send out a monthly newsletter. It is not a MCPS requirement. In fact, other schools do not send out newsletters. A meeting attendee asked if the PTA nudge for the monthly newsletter? We'll ask Ms. Lane about the newsletter.
- **Classroom Volunteering:** A meeting attendee commented that class size continues to be an issue, particularly for the current fourth grade which is bursting at the seams, and wanted to know if they could establish a some sign up for the teachers so that parents can serve as another adult in the classroom. This would allow the teacher and volunteers to do a lot more one-on-one with the kids. There are two things to think about and how do we solve the problem. First, Curriculum 2.0 and the question of the how do you use a parent effectively. We will also talk to Ms. Dahlem. Last year it was proposed that a packet for teachers to help volunteers in the classroom, but with some grades there has been zero volunteering in the classroom. Ms. Lane can't force her teachers to allow volunteers in the classroom. Some teachers have said they do not want volunteers. Additionally, there are other ways that parents can volunteer/help the school. Also, there are two levels of need. The incoming fifth grade is the largest group in the school, we could have had four classes. A meeting attendee asked what is the tipping point? We've suffered and we've seen it. The teachers are talking to us about how maxed they are, this seems like there should be an increased our opportunity for volunteering. Another attendee said the issue is needs based versus want based. Then there are teachers who can't keep up, kids with IEP who's needs aren't being met. Volunteering is teacher specific. What are the enrollment numbers to have a fourth classroom for the incoming fifth grade? Another body in the classroom would be so helpful, the students just need help with what they're working on. It's a needed resource for the students.

A meeting attendee offered that other neighboring schools the PTA asks for a lot of money, like Lafayette in D.C. They also ask for money for recess rangers and fund paraeducators. Another attendee said, that historically, in the younger grades it's more common for more volunteers. After second grade, it generally tapers off. At that point, they're older and they need to be more responsible. It's really up to the teacher. In a class of 28 kids you may have a teacher, two paraeducators and another adult. That is a lot of people in a room. When the students get in the 4th and 5th grade level, you need to have some more responsibility. But in the younger grades, parents in the classroom is important.

The enrollment size and the county class size cap is a whole different problem. Regarding parent volunteers, Ms. Lane can tell her teachers that the parents wants to be in the classroom, but is the teacher's choice. There may be a very valid reason they don't want you in their classroom. We have to respect the teachers and the administration. There may be a reason for less classroom volunteers, but we can't come in with a very confrontational stance that this is what the parents want. There may be something going on that Ms. Lane and the teachers are uncomfortable with, but I would caution making assumptions. She's not a command and control head of school. She empowers her teachers to do a lot, but I can raise the problems and start asking. My approach as a president is to bring the question to the table – do teachers not want parent volunteers? We will have the conversation with Ms. Dahlem and Ms. Lane and to be involved in the school classroom and field trips is important. These are the right questions to ask. I started this with, what is the kind of school we want? We'll try to move it forward, they need to define what they need from volunteers. If data points are quoted, can we produce the data points? I would ask that is shown.

Curriculum 2.0 is challenge, but it has come along and the concept is taking root. Teachers are grasping the concepts and expressing it better, with that in mind it is not going to be a reason for needed assistance in the classroom. Can we work with Robyn Miller Tarnoff? The parents want to be in a classroom to assist the teachers.

I think the other resource is engaged parents and we need to be respectful of professionals doing their job. As a teacher, I would be leery of having parents in the classroom. There are limitations, but if the teachers could find specific opportunities to help, that do not require Curriculum 2.0 training, we'd have a lot of people who want to help. This will be a work in progress. The relationship between parents, faculty and administration is an ongoing relationship. We will communicate the need and desire for help in the classroom, identify the needs, and how best to facilitate.

3. Meeting Adjourned at 9:15 p.m.