

PTA Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Erin Harcourt, PTA Co-President, called the meeting to order at 7:31 pm.

Erin Harcourt, PTA Co-President, suggested we start off differently by taking a couple of minutes to allow everyone in attendance to introduce ourselves.

Approval of the Minutes

Davida Kales, PTA Secretary, asked if anyone had corrections or additions to the minutes from the February 2015 meeting. As there were none, the minutes were approved and entered into the record.

Principal's Update

Ms. Lane reported that PARCC testing will begin tomorrow, and continue through most of this month. The testing will come back again in April for year-end assessments. She said she hopes we don't run into bad weather, but if so the testing will be rescheduled. Ms. Lane emphasized that PARCC testing plays heavily for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. This is new testing for us, and it is technologically oriented. Students will test in their classrooms because they have Chromebooks to use (these arrived end of February). Those students in 3rd and 5th grades are using Chromebooks. And then there are laptops spread across the building being used by 4th graders. She encouraged that parents should just make sure their kids get a good night's sleep. Tell your children to relax. Ms. Lane expects a report to be sent out to parents post-testing.

Ms. Lane stressed that we have to get a handle on the school's parking problem. Her intention was to ask Officer Janey to come out on Monday, but we didn't have school due to weather. The parking problem is really dangerous. We are going to have to get assistance from the police. "I run the school, but not the streets. I can't write tickets, but the officer can."

Ms. Lane was happier to report that Kindergarten had their rescheduled AIR today. And she shared that 2nd grade will see their AIR return soon (within this month).

Thank you to those who came to our responsive classroom Parent Coffee discussion. Ms. Vogel will be sending out information about how we use the responsive classroom here at school, and some suggestions on how to use the language at home as well. Ms. Lane says she and the staff are excited with how it is going.

Ms. Lane explained that last year we had a successful Writing Night at Westbrook, but this year we are going to try and have more of an author celebration so that parents can hear more of what their children are writing. She is looking to plan it for the end of the school day rather than in the evening. Ms. Lane is hopeful you can

rearrange your work schedule that day if you are not already planning to be here to pick up your children.

Lastly, Ms. Lane emphasized that her goal, and that of all her teachers, is to always respond within a maximum of two business days to any emails received from parents. She explained that recently she broke her own rule on that, and so she just wants to emphasize that if you reach out to her, or a teacher, and don't hear back with a timely response, feel free to send a follow-up email. And please let them know in the office if you still don't get a response from the teacher. "Give us the benefit of the doubt, but please keep knocking on the door. It is our job to partner with you."

Treasurer's Report

Nan Hartman, PTA Treasurer, went over the budget. She pointed out that we are entering into the busy season with Carnival and other end-of-year activities. Nan suggested to Ms. Atkinson that she please let the teachers know they have their classroom budgets, and none are really spending any of their allocated money.

Nan announced that there is a new consideration among the Montgomery County Council of PTA: Currently we pay per person dues to them, and they are thinking of maybe having each school just pay a flat fee moving forward. She explained that would actually end up costing less for us. PTA Co-President Erin Harcourt added that it is an amendment to their by-laws, and so they have asked local PTAs to vote on it. PTA Co-President Maureen Kramer added it would save us some money. We pay \$1 per person now, so it would be a cost savings because it would end up being less.

Nan Hartman made a motion to make a change to the amendment to the by-laws for local dues. The change was approved.

Co-President's Report

Maureen Kramer and Erin Harcourt, PTA Co-Presidents, thanked many parents in our hard-working community.

1. Jennifer Thai on a successful Jump Rope for Heart event. Up to \$19,000 was raised for this worthwhile cause!
2. SGA for their work on Pennies for Patients. The collection continues through Friday. The Co-Presidents mentioned that next year we might try and have these two non-school related fundraisers at different times.
3. Room Parents – Valentine's Day Parties were a big success. Kids, as always, had a blast.
4. 2nd grade families – February Staff and Teacher Lunch was, as always, very appreciated. Thanks to Leyla Kenny for coordinating. There are two more of

these lunches to come this school year, which will be hosted by the 1st grade and Kindergarten.

5. Wellness Committee – Thanks to you, Wellness Week was filled with lots of fun: Jump Rope for Heart, Mindfulness Assembly, Vegetable Tastings, and a Cookbook Contest.
6. Janet Gaffney – Carnival T-shirt design contest entries are all in, however, still no reveal about winners is available quite yet.
7. Randi Vogel –The Parent Coffee on responsive classroom techniques was wonderfully informative

PTA Co-Vice President Leyla Kenny is working hard to line up Deborah Roffman as a Spring Speaker. Deborah Roffman has spoken at Westbrook before, and speaks at numerous schools in the area. She talks about sex and talks to us about how to have these conversations with our kids. Leyla is working on having her come on a Tuesday night in April, sometime after Spring Break. We will post the information once she is scheduled to come and speak.

Parents attending the PTA meeting suggested a smaller group setting at the start of the year for new parents, just to help understand the context of all the things being spoken about that those who have been at Westbrook longer understand.

PTA Co-Presidents Erin Harcourt and Maureen Kramer were really pleased with the good response to the Westbrook Parent Survey. A total of 117 people filled out the survey. Erin and Maureen pointed out that part of it was a communications question, so you do have to wonder if some didn't receive the survey. They said that they do think that a majority of our population receives information from the PTA via email, so we will continue to communicate this way. Results include the following: Facebook and PTA Patter are not as useful a communication tool, it seems. 80% of those who filled out the survey do volunteer, the rest do not because of time. Some would prefer a personal ask for volunteering, but do agree Sign Up Genius is so much easier, and the information is much easier to see. Some people said they were new and don't volunteer because they didn't think our asks were personal because it is just one big Sign Up Genius.

Discussion led to the fact that a PTA meeting is more personal. Erin and Maureen emphasized that the school can't give us personal information for all new students/families for privacy reasons, which is why the PTA has parents fill out a PTA form, and then we try to contact new families to suggest they make sure they are signed up for list serve, etc.

It was mentioned that we used to have a Mentor Program for new families be matched up with veteran Westbrook families at the start of the year. It worked for a year or two, and then fizzled. Cathy Stocker said we made a real effort to reach out to international families who didn't speak English as a first language. But it seems the scope wasn't defined well enough to make it work and last. Natalie Atkinson

suggested that maybe teachers could communicate more with the Room Parents in K to share information with parents.

One parent attending the PTA Meeting suggested a Mentor Program for the kids. A child who is new would really appreciate a play date suggested within the first week, rather than having to navigate and find their own friends when they are new and all is overwhelming. "It would be a comfort thing to help break in to the new situation."

Teacher Liaison's Report: Natalie Atkinson

K – Next two weeks is all about our AIR, "Opera Odyssey." We work with an artist from Millenium Stage and the Kennedy Center and transform a story we read in class ("The Gingerbread Man") and rewrite the story with characters from our three classrooms. The whole grade performs. We are also writing nonfiction books about animals. And in Math we are learning 2D and 3D shapes.

1 – Successfully completed their country research books and projects, and are now looking forward to their poetry unit in writing.

2 – They are working on writing a book review to recommend a favorite book to other readers. Students are working on making connections to the text through the characters or problems that they face. Students are also working on identifying what criteria make a good book, like illustrations, text features, interesting titles, etc. In math, students are working on telling time to the nearest 5 minutes.

3 – Getting ready for PARCC. They are starting a realistic fiction picture book in writer's workshop and are super excited to use their Chromebooks for research and writing. They are continuing with their fraction unit in math and getting into the concept of equivalent fractions. In reading they are finishing up their literature unit and will be moving on to literary non-fiction next week.

4 – Finishing up their advertising critiques and are excited to start making their own commercials using the persuasive techniques they studied. Students have been analyzing the point of view and themes of myths and fantasy stories in reading. In science, students are exploring the characteristics of matter. In social studies, they are moving on from Jamestown and into Plymouth and St. Mary's City. Fourth grade math is working on fractions. Compacted math has started the fifth-grade curriculum and is currently working on finding the volume of shapes composed of two or more rectangular patterns.

5 – Finished our biggest narrative piece of the year and getting ready to create book trailers with Ms. Stoll in Media.

Lastly, Ms. Atkinson said Mrs. Pickle asked her to share the Community of Caring Family Project. It is in March, and is called "Good Night, Sleep Tight." The project is

intended for the Montgomery County Child Welfare bureau for children who enter the foster care system. The project's goal is to decorate and fill pillowcases during the month with the following donated items:

- K – stuffed animals
- 1 – toothbrush/toothpaste
- 2 – brush/comb
- 3 – writing pad/markers
- 4 – soap/Purell/shampoo
- 5 – word find/puzzle/coloring book

Committee Reports

MCCPTA/Cluster Rep Update - Dana Rice

PTA Co-President Maureen Kramer spoke for Dana Rice while she attends another meeting for this. Maureen said she attended it last week, and there were a couple of major issues discussed:

1. Bus Depot. Buses are all stored in Rockville and various other places, but those storage depots are going away so they don't know where to park the buses. They want to move some schools around and knock a school down. So as it stands now they will park the buses at the High School. 10-20 buses would have to park at BCC every night, and warmed up very early in the morning. This would cause so many issues. For example, where will the bus drivers park their cars?
2. Budget concerns. There are issues with the budget from the state, as well as the County Council. BOE submitted their budget to the County Council, and are waiting to hear (at the end of the week). That is when we will receive our teacher staffing, which is subject to change. Our cluster reps are going to group together and hit our council members hard with meetings, emails, and more to ask for more money for our schools. We need our staff, and we need to put pressure on the council to give us more money. Staffing is a concern.
3. Roger Berliner is hosting a meeting this Saturday at BCC to discuss how we can grow smartly. How can we develop our neighborhoods and still have room in our schools? This is an excellent opportunity to express your views. The meeting will last from 8:30-4, but you do not need to go the whole time. From 8:30-12 there will be speakers, then in the afternoon there will be small group conversations. Should be very interesting. Food for thought: Currently MCPS's stance is that we don't place a child in a school until the child is here. So if we build all these buildings, the children will show up and we won't have the space in the schools. The builders are not thinking about this.
4. Superintendent Search – BOE is currently conducting a national search. Holding some public forums to allow people to identify what we might look for in a Superintendent. First one is tomorrow night, then one on Thursday night. Childcare will be available for those interested in attending.

Yearbook – Davida Kales

Yearbook Co-Chair Davida Kales announced that Yearbooks will start going on sale shortly. There will be an Early Bird cost of \$18, and after March 27 the book will cost

\$22. The final deadline for ordering the Yearbook is April 16. Yearbooks will be distributed during the final week of school.

Carnival – Beth Marans

Beth Marans, Carnival Co-Chair, took the time to explain to new parents what Carnival is here at Westbrook. She told everyone to mark their calendars for May 1. “All hands on deck needed for volunteering.” Look for emails coming from Cathy Stocker for volunteering sign ups.

There was a brief discussion about sending new families more information via email about Carnival in advance.

FOWS – Cathy Stocker

Cathy Stocker explained that FOWS is separate from PTA. She explained it is separate because it can pay separately for things from PTA. For example, FOWS raised money to pay for improvements during the renovation.

Cathy announced that tomorrow at 2 pm the ticket sales go live for Count Me In Parties. She urged people to plan ahead because parties do sell out.

Multicultural and International Night – Aditi Shrikhande/Judit Markarian

PTA Co-President Erin Harcourt spoke on the committee’s behalf. She announced that information was sent out on the listserv today about next Sunday’s Multicultural and International Night, from 5-7 pm, at Westland. 20 countries will be represented, thus far. If you are interested, you can co-host a table, just contact the chairs. They need volunteers who will set up, sell tickets, supervise arts and crafts projects, clean up, etc. A sign up genius will be sent out. SSL hours will be available for older students.

Artist in Residence – Chris Dixon Barone

Three AIR programs are starting. Kindergarten started today. First grade will start the week after Spring Break. Third grade will start the week of April 27. Final performance for the 3rd grade will be May 8. 2nd grade still has a few more sessions with their artist. Same is true for 4th grade. Thanks to Karen Baratz, the 5th grade students are getting a visit from Adventure Theatre’s Assistant Director. He is coming on March 15 to help with choreography for their 5th grade musical.

Skate Night – Kristin O’Brien

PTA Co-President Erin Harcourt announced that Skate Night is planned for March 28 at Cabin John Ice Rink, from 6:30-8:00 pm.

One parent in attendance at the meeting asked about snow shoveling on Glen Cove Parkway. She wondered if anyone is responsible for clearing that snow? The answer was that homeowners do it, but no one is responsible. It is county property, but unfortunately they do not come clean it.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:47 pm.

Upcoming Westbrook Activities/Dates

March 2nd – 18th – Kindergarten AIR

March 15th – International and Multicultural Night, 5-7 PM (Westland MS)

March 20th – Talent Show (Rescheduled)

March 25th – Potluck breakfast for Teachers/Staff hosted by 1st Grade

March 27th – No School

March 28th – Skate Night, 6:30-8:00 PM (Cabin John Ice Rink)

April 3rd-April 12th – Spring Break

April 16 – Principal's Coffee

April 13th- 17th – 1st grade Artist in Residence (Synetic Theater)

April 20th-24th – Earth Week Activities

April 22nd – Earth Day Assembly

April 23rd-24th – Kindergarten Orientation (No School for Current Kindergarten students)

May 1st - Carnival