

PTA Advisory Meeting: March 5, 2014

Minutes

Attendance: S. Pepper, A. Wasserman, C. Slattery, G. Margolis, C. Bellino, R. Camean, D. Stark, M. Wasko, A. Kierney, R. McCauley, K. Mullooly

I. Snow Days

- a. **Current Status:** Mr. Pepper began the meeting with a discussion of the current status of snow days. The district has used 6 snow days to date, resulting in the extension of the last day of school by 2 days and the removal of 1 day of spring vacation. The last day of school is now Wednesday, 6/25. Both Tuesday, 6/24, and Wednesday, 6/25 will be half days. School will be in session on Monday, 4/21, formerly a vacation day. As of now, a full week of spring vacation is still intact; school will be closed on Monday, 4/14 through Friday, 4/18.
- b. **Additional Days:** If additional snow days are required, the original plan would remove days from spring vacation beginning with Monday, 4/14, and proceed through the week towards Friday, 4/18. There is strong feeling, however, to try to avoid disrupting this intact week of vacation. The HTEA has recently sent out a survey to staff in the district to inquire about the viability of half-day sessions on Saturdays if needed.
- c. **How the Call Is Made:** Mr. Pepper also made clear many of the challenges of deciding whether to close school or try to stay open. The safety of students is paramount. Roads and parking lots must be clear, and the district is responsible for clearing and making safe over three miles of walking paths. Over 600 students are “walkers,” and the district must also consider whether students would be walking in roadways if local sidewalks have not been cleared.
- d. **Potential Change:** One idea to reduce the amount of school closures is to change the district’s delayed opening schedule. The delayed opening is currently a 90-minute delay. It could be made longer, such as a two-hour delay. This could become the “norm” for a delayed opening. The State requires four hours of instruction time (not including lunch/recess time) to count as a full day.
- e. **Two Different Schedules:** It is important to note that our school district schedule of days in session and days closed for the remainder of the school year is NOT the same as Whippany Park High School’s schedule. Families with students in both districts should be attentive to these differences.
- f. **Snow Day Homework?:** The use of technology to assign work to students during snow days was discussed. Math and language arts textbooks are accessible online now for almost all grades, and some nearby districts are already making use of this technology. This could be a methodology that teachers take advantage of in the future.

- g. Delayed Opening Traffic: Finally, the topic of traffic in and around the schools on delayed opening mornings was raised. Each of the elementary schools has some difficulty with a traffic line at morning drop-off, and this is exacerbated when the district has a delayed opening. Principals can brainstorm some ideas. The idea of using staff members outside to help move the car line along more efficiently is possible although it would have to be addressed contractually to make major changes. The Township Committee has a new sub-committee to examine “safe routes to school” and will be holding public meetings soon. This issue can, perhaps, be raised with this sub-committee.

II. New Board Members

- a. Mr. Pepper introduced the Board of Education’s two new members, Glenn Yannotta and Dan Breen. Mr. Yannotta was appointed by the Board to fill the opening left by the resignation of Tom “Ace” Gallagher. Mr. Breen was elected to a regular three-year term in November. Both new members have impressive professional backgrounds and records of service to the community, and the Board is looking forward to working with them.

III. 2014-15 Budget Information

- a. 2% Cap: Mr. Pepper gave an overview of some of the challenges in the upcoming budget. The State imposed 2% cap is going to be virtually impossible to stay under for next year’s budget due to a significant increase in students and the need to add staff and provide highly specialized programs for some students; as a result of prudent budgeting the district does have some “banked cap” funds available. While it is a little early in the process, due to the increase in commercial ratables the district will most likely see a decrease in the school tax levy. “Banked cap funds” are funds that the district has been able to put aside for the past several years when budgets have come in under the 2% cap. Again because of the “banked cap funds,” even if the budget is over the 2% cap, there will be no need to vote on the budget.
- b. Enrollment: Because of the construction of residential housing in town, the student population is in flux and difficult to predict. Many of the grade levels at the three elementary schools are on the borderline of being 2 or 3 sections (or in some cases 3 or 4 sections or even 1 or 2 sections).
- c. Contract Negotiation Year: The HTEA (the union representing almost all of the district’s employees) is also negotiating a new contract this year. Because negotiations have just begun, there is still some uncertainty about the influence of the new contract upon the budget. This is true for every new contract year, but it is another factor which makes this year’s budget process a challenge.
- d. Public Meetings: Mr. Pepper announced the schedule of upcoming meetings pertaining to the 2014-15 school budget. The Board of Education will conduct three meetings, and Mr. Pepper will make presentations at each school’s PTA meetings over the next several weeks. Mr. Pepper also presents to the town’s senior citizens.

- 3/11 Board of Education Special Public Meeting @ 6:30pm
- 3/18 Board of Education Regular Meeting @ 7:30pm
- 3/20 MJS PTA Meeting @ 7:00pm
- 3/24 SDS PTA Meeting @ 7:30pm
- 3/26 MTV PTA Meeting @ 7:30pm
- 4/2 Senior Citizens @ 12:00pm
- 4/7 BMS PTA Meeting @ 7:30pm
- 4/29 Board of Education Budget Public Hearing @ 7:30pm

At the various PTA meetings, Mr. Pepper plans to highlight the aspects of the budget specific to that school, such as repairs or facility upgrades, technology enhancements, and enrollments.

IV. New Parent Resource

- a. Mr. Wasserman presented a newly developed parent resource that will be accessible through the districts website. A new “button” has been installed on the homepage called “Parent Resource.” It will lead parents to a selection of various online video tutorials. Currently all the tutorials concern the math e-textbook and e-resources, and Mr. Wasserman’s plan is to continue to develop more tutorials for use with the language arts textbook as well as other disciplines that have online features. The resources are up and running; we watched the tutorial that teaches users how to access the topic review and tools features of the math e-textbook. Mr. Wasserman said that a letter would be going home shortly to inform all families about this development as well as to remind everyone about log in information. Mr. Wasserman also indicated that very few online tutorials exist for textbooks and that our district is on the cutting edge of providing this help to families.

V. Parent Climate Survey

- a. The annual mandatory Parent Climate Survey was sent out via email through the four schools’ PTAs in January. Mr. Wasserman distributed a print-out of the responses for each of the percentage-based questions. Participation in the survey averaged about 30% from each elementary school, and the middle school participation rate was lower. Virtually all of the responses were well over 90% favorable (earning a rating of “neutral,” “agree,” or “strongly agree”). Mr. Wasserman said he would look into finding a way to share the results with the entire parent community.

VI. Girls Leadership Institute

- a. Thanks to a recommendation from a Salem parent, Rose McCauley raised the topic of Girls Leadership Institute as a possible program to bring into the district for girls and their parents. Several surrounding districts are offering series of workshops run by this organization. It was suggested to propose the program to the Recreation Commission.

VII. Other

- a. Lunch Program: Pizza Oven / Mamma Mia in East Hanover contacted the Board Office to offer its services for hot lunch programs at our district's schools.
- b. Recreation Commission: Mr. Pepper shared an email from Denise Brennan's office with descriptions of its many upcoming programs. He encouraged PTAs to share the information with our memberships.
- c. Internet Safety Program: Mr. Wasserman announced Tom Rich, a New Jersey State Detective and creator/presenter of the program "Always Connected" concerning internet safety, will be visiting our district on April 28th. The Substance Awareness Council is sponsoring his visit. He will present assemblies during the school day at the Memorial Junior School auditorium for the township's 3rd – 5th graders and 6th – 8th graders in two separate sessions. He will also present an evening program for parents at 7:00pm.
- d. Replacement Positions: Mr. Pepper indicated that all recent openings for teachers have been filled. There have been several maternity-leave replacement teachers hired as well as a replacement for a teacher who resigned to pursue an administrative career.
- e. Kutz 4 Kaitlyn: Ms. Bellino announced that the local activity, Kutz 4 Kaitlyn, for Kaitlyn Okolita's family raised approximately \$35,000. Their goal of \$10,000 was blown away, and several district teachers and many township families participated. Mr. Wasko indicated that MJS is holding several fundraisers for Kaitlyn, a current MJS student, such as a lime-green shoelace sale and a variety of games at the upcoming MJS Fun Night.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rose McCauley

Salem Drive School PTA President