

Minutes of the Peter Hobart PTAO February 26, 2008

Meeting called to order at 7:05 pm by Rebecca Phelan

Welcome (Rebecca Phelan)

Rebecca welcomed everyone and asked that people consider volunteering for PTAO positions.

Approval of the Minutes from the Jan 22, 2008 meeting:

Minutes corrected with Eduard the teaching assistant's name.

Amy McTavish moved to approve the minutes as changed.

Renee Salzer seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Winter Events

- ❑ Kindergarten Information Night (Julie Salamzede and Mary Campbell)
We added a brochure to the folder this year. We passed out 67 folders to prospective parents. We had many kids in the child care and received favorable comments from parents about the child care. We had snacks in the cafeteria, but no one really visited the cafeteria, so we will probably drop that next year. She thanked all the volunteers. We had enough volunteers, and a lot of Kindergarten and First Grade parents who would not have normally volunteered. There was a great mix of volunteers and a lot of good conversations despite the very cold weather.
- ❑ Artist in Residence (Julia Fredrickson)
Timothy's last day is Thursday. The collages have been pretty amazing and the kids really enjoyed it. Hopefully you have seen at least some come home. We have asked the parents to keep at least one at school, so we can do some displays. She also thanked all the parent volunteers.
- ❑ Breakfast for Families (Julie Yarosh)
We had second grade breakfast last week (130 people) and kindergarten tomorrow (150 people expected). The breakfast last week went well and we have had good replies regarding the food. The kitchen is easy to work with and planning has been well.

Spring Events

- ❑ Imagination/Inventor's Fair
Julie Huber reported for Amy Hayden that all planning is moving along very well. She is looking for someone who would be interested in shadowing her and taking a chair or co-chair position for the event next year or the year after.
- ❑ Book Fair (Jill Riley)
There will be a book fair this spring, near the end of May. It'll be an all day event with a buy-one-get-one free promotion.

Financial Report

Julie Huber reporting for Lisa Heitzinger. Lisa has prepared a report for budget to date. The one item that might stand out is the going over cost on the Welcome Committee. That was due to the cost of the new brochure. Our supply of those should last for a few years. In the future, it will only be printing cost, not the layout cost associated with creating the brochure.

Principal's Report

Mr. Johnson thanked Julie and Rebecca for their work, and the chairs of the Breakfast with Families, Kindergarten Information Night events. Two weeks ago, the staff finished writing central ideas for the IB PYP program. The report from the consultants who visited last fall requested that we make our central ideas better.

Because the district requires the same IB units at Peter Hobart and Aquila, teachers from those schools came together for three half days to identify these units. Now there are six units per grade, from K to sixth grade.

We are still looking for a home for Eduard. He's currently staying with a teacher who is on leave. But, the school is still looking for a family to host Eduard. We will put out a request soon for a home for next year. We will request a woman student teacher next year, and see if that makes it easier to find a host home.

We saved 18% energy last year. Sam Fredrickson is co-coordinating the effort with Mr. Johnson. We have made the decrease with changes such as turning off lights, computers when not in use, lowering the thermostat. Just sending notices about twice a month has had an effect. There is also a problem with the heating control system (large temperature variations within a room or from day to day), and a new control system will be installed.

The district is in the process of cutting 1.4MM from the district budget, a bit cut (as big as we've taken in the last 15 years). Elementary schools have been charged with cutting \$300,000. We worked together to make district wide cuts and leave a small amount for each school to cut. That amount each elementary school needs to cut is \$35,000. For comparison, an assistant hour is \$2,600. We do not have any plans to cut any teachers, because class sizes would get too large. With current teaching staff, we will have 23-24 kids in first grade, and 20-21 kids in kindergarten next year. We are looking at supply budget for cuts. We are making sure the school stays operational (office remains staffed). Site Council will be brought together to approve the proposed cuts. This city has consistently supported and financed schools at a high level, and the district appreciates that. Rebecca Phelan asked what were the results of the district wide survey. The results were people wanted to keep class size low and to keep IB, among other things.

Site Council is working on re-writing our mission. The IB has stated our mission is not "IB enough". The mission will essentially stay the same, but how we get to that mission and the addition of the value of inquiry and the value of foreign language will probably be added. If you have things you feel that our mission should be that it hasn't been, feel free to give me that. The end result is expected to be largely similar to more IB.

Every week I play a different song or sing a different song for the kids. They hear Mozart and Bach and Copeland. They also hear jazz, Souza, international music. Sometimes he plays or sings silly music. Right now he's playing "Somewhere over the Rainbow" by an artist from Hawaii. The words are about making dreams come true. Mr. Johnson asked that if you have dreams at Peter Hobart you would like to make come true, come talk to him.

Speaker Mary Beth Groff (ELL Teacher for Peter Hobart).

Mary Beth gave some of her background and how she came to be an ELL teacher. She joined Peter Hobart staff last year. The Peter Hobart is called a "pull out" program, where students are pulled from mainstream classroom part of the day. There are 62 ELL students who come to her classroom for a half hour lesson each day. The rest are monitored, but have progressed enough that they stay in the mainstream classroom.

Some students come speaking little English, while others have good verbal English, but need academic vocabulary. Classes focus increasingly on literacy as the students progress through grades. She has a welcome group for students who enter the ELL program at second or third grade. There is also a half time para-teacher who helps kids in classes or with kids who need extra help.

Kids need to develop both their social language and their academic language. Kids usually pick up social language pretty easily. But the academic language is harder to pick up, but is what they need to succeed in school. It's speaking, reading and writing about the classroom content and the higher order skills that go into analyzing information. It takes students 5-7 years, on average, to acquire this academic language. She shared the population demographic. There is a large first grade ELL population, compared to other grades. The program is at capacity in first grade.

ELL students face the special challenges of always having to communicate in a second language, that they may not have any homework help at home, that school communications that arrive home in English may not be understood, and that they are always straddling two cultures. We can help ELL students in several ways. We can greet families to make them feel welcome. Ask your children about the ELL students in their classrooms and including them.

Mary Beth was asked if the ELL students are clustered together in a class or spread throughout the classes. She answered that generally they are spread throughout the classes, although some have suggested that clustering them might be more effective for their learning. Mr. Johnson said he tries in general to keep ELL students who are at the same level in the same classroom, to make pulling students out of class less disruptive. Also, he can't anticipate which ELL kids will enroll in the fall. Questions: what percentage of the kids in ELL are Hispanic? She answered about half. Do Hispanic students attend PSI? In general, no, because their parents would like them to become fluent in English. Question was asked if she is bilingual. She is not. She uses lots of gestures, pictures, and charades to teach the language. Question was asked about the increasing number of English language learners. She answered that when she started there were many Hmong refugees from Vietnam. Today it's African and Hispanic families. Mr. Johnson said that 15 years ago there were six ELL children at PH, and they were actually sent to Aquila because we had no program. Aquila had a significant number of children from Russia. Within three years, the number was up to 50. It's been pretty stable at that number. We see cycles of families from different countries. Question whether learning multiple languages is confusing for kids or enrichment. The answer was it depends on the child and their environment. We have students learning Spanish, and some are wondering if they should be learning that if they are still working hard to learn English. Research has shown that students figure it out. There are some non-native-English speakers at the school who are not in the ELL program, because their English is so good. All non-native speakers are tested coming into the school. Question was how the ELL kids in this building perform on standardized tests. Mr. Johnson said they are doing fine in testing. They are expected to reach the same outcomes as native English speakers, despite the fact that it often takes 5-7 years for them to really master the language. The ELL students take a reading and writing test specific for ELL students, and they also take the standard MCA test for reading. They take the MCA math test verbally (on the computer with headphones). Question was whether ELL students are paired with other kids for mentoring. She answered that classroom teachers do that if appropriate. There was discussion on how to increase the involvement of these students in the "extra" events (like Imagination/Inventor's Fair).

Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.