

PTSO Meeting Minutes

May 20, 2010

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6:30-7:25 p.m.

Attending: 25 present, including, from the school: Dan Rubenstein, executive director; Penny Marzulli, director of development and communications; Rachel Beerman, Humanities teacher; Thomas Butler, dean of students. For PTSO, Carla Juana Lino, co-president; Kristian Larsen and Nina Flores, co-vice president; Karl Greenberg, Secretary; Adam Schechter, Treasurer.

Carla Lino opened the meeting, thanking parents who contributed to the Teacher Appreciation Breakfast.

Treasurer's Report: Adam Schechter reported that the school photographs earned the PTSO some \$500.88 and sale of T-shirts another \$664. So far the annual appeal for the annual fund has garnered \$9,445 to date.

Nominating committee report: John Adler said he will be presenting the slate at the June final meeting, during which elections will also be held.

Introduction of Dean of Students Thomas Butler: Mr. Butler said he began his professional career teaching and tutoring for nine years in 3rd-6th grades in Detroit public schools via the No Child Left Behind federal program. He was appointed to help maintain better order and discipline, but says he is already noticing that he is building so many positive relationships with students that it's no longer a "discipline" job merely but "I'm becoming a mentor to students—sometimes to help students deal with issues that may not be academic."

A presentation by Humanities teacher Rachel Beerman: Ms. Beerman announced that she will be moving up to 7th grade to teach U.S. history. She is learning now how to use Brooklyn to teach US History—a lot of Revolutionary War and colonialization history happened right here, she notes.

She says her 6th grade curriculum takes off from the NY state standards for the year, which focus on geography, economics, and world history in the sixth grade—what she jokingly calls "the whole world throughout all of time"; seventh and 8th grade focus on U.S. history in two parts. She says she worked hard this year to make the grade a good lead-in to US history, because right now the students are ending the year with a study of the pre-Colonial Americas. Her goals this year: to develop literacy and critical thinking skills; to develop the ability to collaborate with peers; and to engage with the world around them. She has been working with Mr. Cetrulo to integrate her program with the ELA program and vice versa. So, for example, they have been reading and writing fictional accounts of Roman life by creating "Roman journals"; they completed an analytical essay about comparative world religions; they learned about Socratic discussion by having one: they were asked not just to answer questions but to take the questions farther. They learned receptive literacy by reading both fiction and nonfiction. And

they learned to evaluate evidence as the bedrock of research. The hardest thing has been to teach students to work together. This unit they are visiting the Natural History museum to do field work.

There are other cross-disciplinary opportunities happening. Arts and Spanish are also focusing on the early Americas. Advisory has been reading *Three Cups of Tea*, which is a nice chance to see a current part of the world in the news (Afghanistan) that we had been studying in our Silk Road study last fall. What can parents do to support their child's learning in Humanities? (1) Ask your children questions about WHY they think what they think. Push them one step further to test their assumptions. (2) Observe your child's passions, interests and curiosity, and seek ways to challenge and enrich his or her understanding of these topics. (3) Investigate the world with your child. (4) Keep a map around the house!

Charter School Advocacy Day update: Sam Willner and Lucara Aman made a presentation about their visit to Albany to press for more funding for charter schools—and for a lifting of the state cap on charters--on Feb. 2, 2010. Several students made the trip along with their parents. The banner the art club made won second place, with \$500 going to the school. Since then, some things have changed: Dan Rubenstein noted that the state Senate passed a bill to double the number of charters allowed in the state. (The assembly was set to vote around the end of May.) He reported that he had met with state Sen. Velmanette Montgomery earlier today and that she has moved a bit more towards supporting charters—or at least not actively opposing them. “I believe your advocacy has influenced her,” he told the students. Penny Marzulli at that point handed out advocacy postcards to mail.

Upcoming events:

--Liz Scheines noted that the Scholastic book fair she has organized will be held at the school Monday June 7-Saturday June 12.

--Dan Rubenstein noted that Friday is “ride your bike to work day” and that students are encouraged to do so but wear helmets please. “I guarantee the facility will have bike parking,” he said.

--Ms. Vaughan was seeking 2-liter bottles for a science project.

--The “Truck Farm” is coming and with it an opportunity for a great art project that melds growing things with performance art. It's all part of the sustainable food movement. The Truck Farm will judge our students' exhibit along with others and “substantive prizes are at stake,” Dan said.

--The 2010-2011 school year calendar is now available. We tried to increase the academic days by 4-5 over the regular public school calendar. We wanted 189 versus the NYCDOE's 184. So in 2010 we will begin the school year on Monday Sept. 5, not Wednesday Sept. 7

--The year-end ceremonies are Friday, June 25 and it is a half-day. Please come to the awards ceremony at 9:30 in the auditorium. There will be a dance performance and student exhibitions to follow, as well as a picnic on the playground, weather permitting. Students may leave after lunch anytime.

--The auction benefit is Thurs. June 3.

--Parent-advisor conferences are Thurs., June 10 and there is no school that day.

--Thursday, June 17 is the last PTSO meeting.

Q&A with Dan and LaNolia:

--Dan reported that the school has had some trouble with voicemail technically and apologizes. But he says you should have a response within a working day if you leave a message. If you don't, email please. The Internet works better and is more in the school's control.

--***A report on the admissions lottery:*** more than 500 entered the lottery, up from 300 families last year. We're at an 85-90% yield but it's too soon to say if that will stay so, since Middle School admissions haven't been announced. That percentage should drop. We are seeing a much higher concentration at certain schools, like PS 321, Childrens School, and PS 107. It's a little bit concerning because it may decrease diversity in next year's class. We may make adjustments in the future, but we won't know actual diversity data until the DOE pulls their data in the late summer. Some 20 schools in the district are represented. We accepted no one out of the district except for siblings. There are not many spots at all in 7th because only a handful are leaving that we know of. We accepted one sibling in 7th grade, who was the sibling of an accepted 6th grader. We also made fewer community/school visits this year. There remains only one school in the district that is ideologically not interested in promoting the charter school as an option.

--Ted Deignan asked whether the school is doing anything to advocate for reversing proposed cuts in MTA service to the neighborhood. He said he knew of two families who got acceptances but who were seriously considering not enrolling because the 71 bus from Red Hook will be cut. Is this on the school's radar? He was seconded by another parent who works for the MTA. He noted that June 27 will see cuts of the 3rd Ave. bus as well and that the MTA was putting student MetroCards on the table. Dan says "we'll certainly take this up as an administrative team."

Respectfully submitted,
Julie Triedman