



October 16, 2013 – PTO General Body Meeting Minutes

Meeting Commenced: 7:30 pm

Board Members Present: Cathy Gallinger – Treasurer, Disha Mahadevia – Treasurer, Mrs. Tsacoyeanes – Teacher Representative, Loretta Crumlish – Teacher Representative, Ranjini Reddy – President.

Chairpersons Present / Parents Present: Ezili Mayo-Joseph, Sangeeta Shroff, Jennifer Jones, Deb Malloy.

Welcome and Approval of September 2013 Minutes

Ranjini Reddy welcomed the group to the first evening meeting of the PTO. Disha Mahadevia was introduced to the group as the treasurer-in-training who will be taking over from Cathy Gallinger next year.

The minutes of the September meeting were presented for review and approved.

First motion to approve minutes – Damian Sugrue.

Second motion to approve minutes – Mary Tsacoyeanes.

Treasurer Update

An update of the PTO budget versus actual and balance sheets were presented by Cathy Gallinger. There hasn't been a lot of activity as yet this year. Checks from the Craft Fair have been coming in and the fair shows an income of \$6087.50 so far. This number will change as other expenses and income start coming in. The Annual Giving campaign (i.e. direct appeal) is at \$7,107.00. Cathy reiterated that, as things stand now, there is a probability that the PTO could come up short of our monetary goal necessitating an additional fundraiser. This may not be the case only if we can make up the difference in income and expense by a larger participation in the direct appeal. The participation is currently at roughly at 13% of the Conant families. Ezili Mayo-Joseph asked if a deadline had been set for the campaign. Ranjini Reddy replied that a deadline had not been set. The group suggested that a deadline be given to the families; probably before Thanksgiving. This deadline will be distributed by printed copy as well as well as through electronic avenues. Ranjini remarked that doing well on the Annual Giving Campaign will take the stress of "making enough" through other fund raisers throughout the year.

With respect to the tax-exempt status we are in limbo because of the furlough. A tax return is due November 15th and the CPA plans to wait till the last minute to see if we hear back from the federal government. If not, an extension will be filed electronically. Disha reiterated the amount received to date from the annual giving.

Craft Fair Update

Ranjini Reddy gave the update on the Craft Fair. Seema Shenoy has put together a list for the second call for volunteers. There is a need for parking and clean up volunteers for the event. The call for volunteers went out through the principal's email list on the day of the meeting and hopefully this will encourage more families to participate. Beth Ali and Rebecca Bregman were also in the stages of planning the layout of the fair being especially mindful of fire code requirements. Damain Sugrue reported that he had suggested opening up the 2nd and 3rd grade pod if additional space is required. Beth Ali was planning on sending an update to the vendors about the regulations. It was also suggested by Mr. Sugrue that the breakfast for the vendors be set up in the conference room as an additional way to free up space in the lobby area in the morning. Ezili noted that the breakfast is usually cleared by the start of the fair.

Book Fair Update

Ranjini Reddy gave the update on the Scholastic Book Fair. The informational packet is in the process of being put together to go out tomorrow (Thursday, Oct. 17th). The fair is scheduled from November 8th to the 15th. Teacher certificates will be available this year as well. Profits (the cash) from the book fair will go towards the leveled reading library that is set up for the whole school. The scholastic dollars earned during the book fair will go to the Conant library. Volunteer requests for the book fair will go out after the craft fair. In the past, finding volunteers for the book fair has not been problematic.

Student Directory Update

Ranjini Reddy gave the update for the student directory for NiNa Fernandes. NiNa is receiving information for the student directory from Mrs. Olsen. By the end of the week she should have the contact information of families. This year the directory is not being distributed for free. The PTO needs to decide how many copies to print. NiNa got the following quote for printing: 500 copies \$811, 300 copies \$635, and 250 copies \$538. If the front page of the directory is a colored page, it will save 20 cents per copy. There was some question about the 20 cents discount per copy and whether this is with respect to a color page and black and white copy of the Conant photo. We are waiting to hear back from NiNa for clarification.

There was a question as to why the directory comes out so late for Conant when the high school and junior high get it close to the beginning of the school year. Ranjini noted that from the meeting of the PTSOs from all schools, it appeared that the first week of October is when the directories come out for the elementary schools. She also postulated that the delay be due to families needing to confirm their contact information on PowerSchool.

The discussion moved to determining the number of copies that need to be printed. Ranjini pointed out that, this year, families who donated any amount to the Annual Giving will receive a copy of the student directory. Otherwise it needs to be purchased for \$10.00. This process will be tried this year to offset the cost of printing. After some discussion the group decided to print 250 copies for the first printing with a colored paper and a black and white picture. Ezili mentioned that, in Puerto Rico, the schools would have an art competition and the winning art picture would appear on the cover of the directory. This would help increase the demand for the directory. The Conant PTO has done this in the past for the Auction brochure. It was agreed that this would be a great idea for the directory for next year.

Nature Walk

Deb Malloy gave the update for the Nature Walk. The nature walk training is currently being done by Jeanne Hobbie who is a trained naturalist and who has worked for Audobon and Habitat. The problem is that she has a 5th grader and will graduate out of Conant in a year. In conversation with Jeanne, Deb reports she has a lot of ideas on how to improve the program like a nature walk bulletin board. Jeanne inquired if the PTO had ever subsidized the nature walk program with a stipend. Deb proposed to take this suggestion to the PTO meeting. This led to a discussion on the history of the Nature Walk program and how it came to be at Conant. Mrs. Tsaocoyeanes pointed out that although the program was written with the Conant grounds in mind, the landscape has changed since the drafting of the information. A lot of the information does not apply to the grounds currently. It would be great to have the information updated. Deb also pointed out that there were a number of other issues to be taken into consideration with respect to the nature walk. She has been able to maintain a lot of the nature walks over the past years. She is in the process of upgrading the guides for a couple of years. But there are portions of the grounds that will benefit from a fresh start such as the trail that was put in by the boy scouts. Deb reports that there are 72 nature walks per year and 22 trainings. If it is not an option to subsidize the nature walk training position in the future then it is critical to have someone start training with Jeanne as soon as possible.

The group then brainstormed about possible ways to deal with this issue including applying for grants for the revision of the nature walk curriculum. Damian Sugrue suggested that, since it pertains to the school, the grant could possibly come from the Conant school. He stressed that while finding a way to keep the program going and making it stronger is an excellent idea, he was not in favor of adding the nature walk as an extra financial line item for the PTO. If a stipend position from the PTO needs to be created, it may be better to have one that is a direct service to the students rather than one that is more in terms of a volunteer coordinator basis (as the nature walk position). The curriculum piece also needs to be looked at as the current science standards are changing. This may also be something that needs to be looked at by the school's science coordinator and maybe find ways to build the program. But as far as the PTO funding goes, Mr. Sugrue didn't think that given where the PTO is right now, it may in the place to be adding new positions perhaps as early as next year. So although he is not against the idea, it may be more prudent to have this issue tabled right now. He will be initiating conversation with Eileen Sullivan who is very interested in bringing the outdoor piece into the classroom. We should also perhaps start looking at funding through science money rather than PTO money for the position itself. It was clarified that although all schools have a nature walk program, they are not as extensive as the one that is at Conant.

Mrs. Tsacoyeanes also suggested going through the town and Tom Tidman who does a lot of resource work with the teachers. A second option was the Gardening club. Deb mentioned that the Garden club was approached but they were not interested. Deb stressed that it really needs to be a priority to have someone work with Jeanne next year; to learn from her. Ranjini pointed out that Deb is also graduating this year and that it has been very hard to get volunteers to take over her administration position. Deb has put in a lot of work making sure that the manuals and materials are there for each walk. The PTO has been trying to get parents interested and to volunteer for the nature walk program. Deb also remarked that if needed training videos can be put together. However, there is an urgent need to find someone for both the administrative and training components of the nature walk. Guide material update could also be done with help from some grants. There has been a start in this direction with revisions of the 5th grade guide with help from a parent volunteer.

Principal Update

Mr. Sugrue presented the following updates.

1. The security system is functioning with Conant acting as a test subject. The front door and the recess doors can be operated by the teacher and staff ID cards. Teachers have 24/7 access and staff have weekday access with a 2 hour before and after school access window as well. Mr. Sugrue plans on getting a remote access box put in by the door near the delivery drop off area soon. At that point the door keys will be redundant and will be collected.

The system appears to be working well. Instant lock down capability is functioning both from the principal's cell phone as well as from the office. The emergency call button has been installed. If engaged, the video feeds from the camera go to police and fire and they get an automated emergency call. All camera feeds are also being monitored from the central security office in the high school. Everything seems to be working well and the last few bugs are being sorted out. Parents will not be able to see any of these changes except that only one front door will be open. If the office is short staffed or going to be empty for awhile, the door will be locked. Mr. Sugrue has also ordered extended rope, like theater roping, to guide people to come to the front office as they walk into school. The school also got crash bar locks in case doors need to be locked from the inside. The school committee has asked the safety committee to look into the idea of locking the front door. The safety committee still recommends that a front door remain open at this point.

2. Conant is starting to work on the writing rubrics with a consultant. Conant is also working in conjunction with Gates to look at commonalities across the district and to share ideas.

There was a question on the MCAS test results. Mr. Sugrue reiterated that Conant has moved from a level 2 to level 1 school.

Open Items

Fundraiser in January/February

Ranjini mentioned that in order to make up for the potential deficit between income and expense on the PTO budget it is highly likely that we will need to have an additional fundraiser sometime in January or February (as there are usually no other competing activities for these months). It is unsure what shape this fundraiser will take and we are hoping to have a meeting with interested parents to decide. The aim is to have it a family oriented event. The group had many good ideas starting with a bowling night as it was done for the fundraiser for Hannah Keenan earlier in the year. Ranjini reported that Christina Pharo was hoping to have a bowling night fundraiser for the Conant PTO next year. Jennifer Jones suggested a talent show or a variety show. Mr. Sugrue mentioned that Jana Bardsley was interested in doing a talent/variety show at school. Other ideas included a teacher/staff basketball game (as Merriam does), a quiz, and a winter carnival in school. The idea of a winter carnival was especially liked by the group.

Movie Night in December

Ranjini presented the idea of having a movie night at school in December as a drop off event. This would need parent volunteers and as Mr. Sugrue pointed out a license to show the movie. Students can come in their pajamas and a sleeping bag to watch the movie. We need to think about the age group, the movie, and other details. Ranjini will follow up with the Douglas PTO who do movie nights often. As an aside, for Games night, Ranjini reported that Gameswright, a company in Newton, will be sending about 50 games for parents to try out and games to sell. This will take place on the 10th of January.

Meeting Adjourned: Approximately 8:30 pm

First motion to approve September 25th 2013 PTO general body minutes – Christina Pharo.

Second motion to approve minutes – Ezili Mayo Joseph