



September 25, 2013 – PTO General Body Meeting Minutes

Meeting Commenced: 8:40 am

Board Members Present: Cathy Gallinger – Treasurer, Christina Pharo – Vice-President, Damian Sugrue-Principal, Loretta Crumlish – Teacher Representative, Ranjini Reddy – President.

Chairpersons Present / Parents Present: Ezili Mayo-Joseph, Linda Vittum, Pam Nelson, Rosarie M., Jeanne Hobbie, Charlene Anestis, Michelle Brown-Droese, Rashmi Muralidhar, Jennifer Jones, Paul Thompson

Welcome and Approval of May 2013 Minutes

Ranjini Reddy welcomed the group and introduced Christina Pharo and Andrea Keenan, the vice presidents. The minutes of the last meeting were presented for review and approved.

First motion to approve minutes – Linda Vittum.

Second motion to approve minutes – Ezili Mayo-Joseph.

PTO Board and Open Postions

Ranjini Reddy mentioned that the PTO was in a very good position with respect to board positions with most of them filled. However, two positions were still open for chair of gardening and a secretary. Ranjini urged the parents to spread the word for these posts. There was also a need to find a Nature Walk co-chair as the current co-chair for the Nature Walk, Deb Malloy, will not be at Conant next year.

Treasurer Update

Cathy Gallinger gave a synopsis of the inter-school council meeting with the superintendent Dr. Stephen Mills. Dr. Mills is retiring and a search committee to find a new superintendent is being organized. Parents were invited to volunteer for the committee. Cathy also mentioned that, in the upcoming school committee meeting, the parent survey on the school calendar will be discussed (but not voted on). Parents were asked to respond to the survey if they had not already done so. A reminder was set to be sent out.

An update of the PTO expenses for the year to date followed. The PTO budget vs actuals and balance sheets were presented. Our budgeted expenses for the 2013-14 academic year is \$41,480.00 with an estimated income of \$26,950.00.

Cathy also requested two versions of Quickbooks that can be used by her and Disha Mahadevia, the treasurer-in-training. The total cost would be \$400.00. A vote was taken and the motion to purchase two copies of Quickbooks was passed unanimously by the members present.

Tax-Exempt Status Update

Cathy Gallinger updated the group on the PTO tax-exempt status. The PTO has responded to an IRS request to have the tax-exempt status reinstated as of the date of the filed application. We are still waiting to hear back from the IRS. A question was raised about why the PTO did not have a tax-exempt status. This was clarified by Ranjini Reddy who mentioned that the PTO lost its tax-exempt status because of a failure to file taxes for more than three consecutive years, i.e. 2007-08, 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11.

Budget Review (with revisions)

Ranjini Reddy then presented two revisions of the PTO budget for the academic year 2013-14. The revisions comprise the addition of a line item of \$500.00 for 'end of year thank you' letters to the school office staff and a line item of \$450.00 for the chorus program. Kerrie Stewart, the music teacher, needs a piano accompanist for the chorus program. She has found a member from the community who is willing to be an accompanist at a cost of \$450.00 for the three chorus sessions (4th, 5th and 6th grades). Ms. Stewart is currently trying to find an accompanist from the parent community to help and the budgeted money will be used only if she cannot find a volunteer. There was some discussion by the group on the chorus program and alternate possibilities for an accompanist. A vote was taken on both budget line items. Both passed unanimously.

Craft Fair Update

Rebecca Bregman gave an update on the craft fair. She reported that preparations for the craft fair were progressing well. Ticket prices will be increased by \$1.00 for admission. Seniors and students will still receive a discount. Paul Thompson asked the group to post flyers of the fair around town and in neighboring towns. Linda Vittum suggested spreading the word through the PTO's Facebook page and Twitter account. She volunteered to post the flyer on the PTO Facebook page. A discussion on other avenues where the fair was/can be advertised ensued. Rebecca reported that information on the fair will be included in the Acton Unlimited. The Beacon will not be used for advertising this year because of the cost. Signs about the craft fair will also be posted around town as they were done last year. Ranjini Reddy brought out the possibility of having a table at the West Acton Oktoberfest. Charlene Anestis gave feedback from her experience last year. The group decided that flyers will be distributed during Oktoberfest by student volunteers. Rebecca will follow up with Mrs. Werst.

Rebecca Bregman also updated the group on catering for the craft fair. This year the crafters will be presented with a menu prior to the day of the fair from which they can order lunch. The PTO will only have a snack bar. Linda Vittum suggested the idea of a food truck during the craft fair. Other parents thought this may take away from potential purchases from the snack bar and bake sale.

The VolunteerSpot link has been set up and will go out to the school community. The only change this year will be the addition of volunteers for the snack bar. Set up and craft fair dates were discussed. Jennifer Hodgson volunteered to be the bake sale coordinator.

Direct Appeal Update

Ranjini Reddy informed the group on the changes to the direct appeal for this academic year. Based on the efforts of a group of parents, the current appeal was planned as a folded pamphlet. She thanked Mark and Christina Pharo for designing the pamphlet. Distribution to the classrooms will be done shortly. In addition, the direct appeal was also renamed this year to the Annual Giving Campaign. There will be three levels of giving. Based on the amount of the donation, families would receive an item in return.

This year the plan is also to sell the school directory. A donation of any amount will get a free directory (the cost of a school directory was set at \$10 for those families who would like to purchase one). A question came up about what other schools did with respect to their directories. Ranjini reported that as far as she knew Douglas charged for their directory. Merriam was not going to charge this year (for the first time). However, they do sell advertising space in their directory and make up their expenses. Some of the other schools do it differently. Conant has always given the school directory for free but will be trying to see how charging for it will work out this year. This process can be revisited next year.

O.Fundraisers

Letter to Local Merchants

Ranjini Reddy presented an update on the letters that typically go out requesting a donation for the PTO from the local companies. Typically business, such as Roche Brothers and Donelans, give gift vouchers which are then used for PTO events. Volunteers were required to take some of these letters around. Jennifer Hodgson volunteered to take some of the letters around.

Box Tops

There has been a lot of interest in box tops. The PTO will be reinstating the program again this year. There will be a box placed by the Donelan's receipt box for drop offs. There was a question about the Donelan's program. Ranjini Reddy explained the program as one that collects points based on the receipts turned in by parents. Mr. Sugrue has used the points to purchase playground equipment for the school in the past. A question about the Stop and Shop program was raised. It was clarified that we cannot at present start a new program because of our current tax-status. The group also suggested getting the word out on the Box Tops program through the kids. There was a question also on whether we can have a box in Donelan's for Conant parents to drop off their coupons. This led to some discussion on the merits of having a box at the store. Ranjini will ask Laura Robb, the coordinator of the program, to follow up with Donelan's.

Coupon Books

Given that the direct appeal will be starting up soon, the coupon book sales will move to the beginning of next year.

Principal Update

Mr. Sugrue presented the following updates.

1. Conant will soon have only circular tables in the cafeteria. A second storage shed has been also been ordered. This will help store some of the rectangular tables which are used for events at the school. In addition, 200 folding chairs on racks have also been purchased.
2. All the elementary schools in Acton have been chosen to try out the new PARCC test. This test will be replacing the MCAS next year and is purported to be more aligned to the new Core curriculum. 4th grade will be doing a 2-hour version of the ELL test at the end of the year. 6th grade has been chosen to try out the math test (performance based assessments). Two home rooms, in each grade level, will be taking a part in this testing process. For the 6th grade classes taking the test, because of the time of year of the administration, those two home rooms will be exempt from the MCAS math test. The administration has not received any answers from the state on how the home rooms will be selected or how it will affect the MCAS accountability reporting. Mr. Sugrue is hoping to get more information from the state soon.
3. The MCAS scores have been very good and Conant has moved from a level 2 to level 1 school. Level 1 is the best that one can do based on growth parameters. It should be noted that a level 2 is also very good. Individual results of the MCAS will be posted to the families in the next two weeks.
4. Part of the professional development last year was to develop writing rubrics to match the common core standards. The narrative rubric has been done. Developing informational and argumentative or opinion rubrics are the goals for this current year. Part of the new teacher evaluation system is going to be based on district determined measures which are internal assessments mixed with state assessments. These measures will be used as part of the whole formula of teacher evaluations which will help determine whether someone is proficient or needs improvement. Evaluations for math and reading are in good shape and having the writing rubrics developed will help if it is decided that they will be factored into the evaluation standards. The school staff will be dedicating a lot of professional development time towards developing these writing rubrics. There

will also be collaboration with the Gates school, which is doing a similar process. This will help in attaining greater consistency in evaluations across the district.

5. Security system is almost done and installed. Pictures for new IDs called 'proximity cards' are getting ready. The proximity cards will work on the front door and the two recess doors. Every employee will get a new ID which will be programmed for their working hours. Video feeds are installed and are currently being monitored by security office at the high school. They have the capability to lock down the school doors remotely in case they see any suspicious activity. The front office at Conant also has the capability of locking down doors if needed. All doors except one front door will be locked. The security system also has the capability of operating through other e-devices. For instance the principal can use his cell phone to remotely lock down doors. A 911 panic button has also been installed. When used, calls will automatically go to police and fire. At a recent safety committee meeting, Keith Campbell, the police officer liaison, mentioned that the longest response time was 2.5 minutes to the school.

Theater roping has been ordered to guide people as they enter the school to the front office. Visitor badges are all printed. Mr. Sugrue clarified some questions from parents. He mentioned that 4 fire drills, 2 lock down drills, and 1 evacuation drill will be conducted this year. A lock down drill will happen sometime in October. Mr. Sugrue also mentioned that there are new recommendations from Homeland Security about lock down procedures. However, for now, the school will be following protocol that has already been established. Once the district decides on which protocol to follow, training will proceed accordingly. Mr. Sugrue clarified that the procedures will be done taking into consideration students' sensibilities.

The evacuation plan was also presented. Mr. Sugrue was not in favor of the one currently in place which requires the students to go up Minot Avenue to the church on Concord Road. He has discussed this with Keith Campbell. For the evacuation drill, students will be taken to the baseball field by Route 2. The main idea is to have the students practice how to proceed out of school and to stay together as a classroom group.

The discussion then moved to talking about student pick up procedures and the parking. Busing policy was discussed as was the impact of regionalization on busing. Christina Pharo informed the group on the school committee agenda which would be talking about these issues in their next meeting (coming up soon).

Open Items

School Store

Ranjini Reddy gave the update on the school store. She reported that in the past there has been difficulty finding parent volunteers to supervise the students. This year the scheduling of these volunteers will be given to the 6th grade room parents. Mrs. Macey is the teacher in charge of the school store and she will be working with the volunteer coordinator Shobana Sampath on this matter. Some discussion ensued on the school store and if other grade levels can possibly also be responsible for running the store. Ranjini mentioned that she would bring these matters to the attention of Mrs. Macey. Michelle Brown-Droese volunteered to help in any way with the school store. There was also some discussion on whether the school store could create revenue for the PTO. There was some disagreement on this issue with no clear consensus.

Before the meeting ended, the parents introduced themselves.

Meeting Adjourned: Approximately 9:50 pm

First motion to approve September 25th 2013 PTO general body minutes – Damian Sugrue.

Second motion to approve minutes – Mrs. Tsacoyeanes