

Merriam PTO Meeting Minutes January 6, 2010

Board Members Present: Donna German and Kim McCormick, PTO Co-Chairs, Tricia Forrester, Secretary

Also Present: Ed Kaufman (Principal), Dianna McNeish, Zing Liao, Karen Finkelman, Jonathan Barron, Trudy Khosla, Lynn Armstrong, Chester Li, Suzanne Jorris, Yvonne Benelli, John Matthews, Doug Willard and Susan Brager Murphy. Teachers present were Christy Nealon, Rachel Russell and Fran Strohm.

Fundraising and Volunteering Update

At 8:32am, PTO Co-Chair Donna German called to order the third PTO meeting of the 2009-2010 school year. Donna started the meeting with an update on Camp Fair and Auction Night Fundraising.

Camp Fair Fundraiser

Trudy Khosla, Co-Chair of Camp Fair Committee, reported 111 camps will be at the Fair January 19, 2010. So far, the event has raised \$18,000 for the PTO. They are setting up 94 tables and are at their maximum now. Last year, they had 350 families attending. The committee will be asked for donations of items, baked good and volunteering in allotted time slots in Friday flyers and weekly emails.

Auction Night Fundraiser

Susan Brager Murphy, Co-Chair of the Auction Committee, reported they will be sending out flyers for Community Donations. A community donation is a donation of an item or professional service from the Merriam Community. The Committee is looking for families to donate lottery tickets, Wii Games and an i-Touch. The deadline now for donations is 1-11-10. Volunteers will really be needed the night of the Auction helping with the Welcome Table, Silent Auction Paperwork, selling raffle tickets, the Closing Table and clean-up.

Grade-Level Reports

Ed turned the meeting over to the teachers for classroom updates.

First and Second Grade Update: Fran Strohm reported the first graders are working on weather tracking and getting ready for their trip to Drumlin Farm for maple sugar season. In Math, they are learning to read thermometers, skip count and use a number line. They are preparing the students for Student-Led Conferences which takes a bit longer for the younger students. In Open Circle, they are discussing Dangerous and Destructive Behaviors – when to tell a grown-up about annoying behaviors. They are discussing situations of when to act and change behavior.

Third and Fourth Grade Update: Rachel Russell reported the third graders finished up with their unit on the Pilgrims. They have started composting with worms and soil

testing. In Everyday Math, they are working on basic multiplication facts and place value to the millions. They have gotten to use laptops this month and have started with data entry. In Language Arts, students are reading Hundred Days.

Fifth and Sixth Grade Update: Christy Nealon reported the fifth grade students are learning research skills in Language Arts: how to find information. In Social Studies, students are doing biographies of Revolutionary characters, using their writing skills. In Reading Group, they are reading Winn Dixie and My Brother Sam is Dead. In Science, they are continuing with the ecosystem and have polluted the system, the final step. They are making observations and talking about real life pollution and it's impact. The students in fifth grade have started Human Growth and Development – changes in the body, nutrition and self-care. In Social Studies, they are finishing up the Colonial Studies and took a field trip to Old South Meeting House. The students are moving onto the Revolutionary Period and working on historical treasure chests. In Math, they are finishing up long division and are reviewing fractions: addition and subtraction. In sixth grade, students are starting to study a unit on the Microworld. In Social Studies, they are studying Egypt with simulations in dress and social class. They are working with decimals in Math: adding and subtracting. Merriam Monthly will be on-line and more information will be coming soon.

PTO Meeting Topic: Your Feedback

Donna reported last year the PTO raised \$91,000 and paid for eight teacher assistant positions. This year, the PTO is looking to raise \$86,000. It was reported Directory Ads and the Spirit Wear Sale came in under their projected forecast. The Family Portrait Fundraiser, Oktoberfest, Game Night and the PTO vs. Staff Basketball Game put us back to a level to where we are comfortable in this economy.

Donna opened up the meeting to feedback for Communications, Fundraising and Community Conversation topics.

Tricia Forrester reported the results of parent feedback from a survey conducted last year.

- Over 100 parents responded
- Over 90% were OK with Friday mail being only electronic
- Over 95% were OK with the newsletter being only electronic
- Most respondents preferred educational fundraiser like Willow Books, Scholastic Books
- Most everyone agreed the auction should remain as a big fundraiser as well as the Camp Fair
- Over 65% of respondents were in favor of an initial appeal to collect funds and have fewer fundraisers.
- Over 97% agreed that the weekly PTO emails were effective reminders.

One parent commented that she'd like to see the Willow Books Evening continue. The PTO let her know it will be coming up soon, March 15, 2010. She enjoyed Community

Events like this one, Scholastic Book Fair and really enjoyed the PTO vs. Staff Basketball Game. She didn't want to sell a lot of stuff for fundraising. Ed reported the feedback from the teachers regarding the PTO vs. Staff Basketball game was great. A couple of parents said it was the best event they've attended and would like to see more sporting events. One parent suggested soccer in the fall. Trudy thought it would be a good idea to try to capture ticket sale information. The PTO agreed that ticket sales should be targeted next time to encourage buying tickets early with a discount price or paying full price at the door. Another parent suggested more food options. Everyone enjoyed the half time events.

An idea of a Comedy Night was raised. Zing Liao knows a parent who is a comedian who may be interested in volunteering for a fundraiser such as this. Another idea was a talent or fashion show but Ed thought it would be a tough sell for the teachers.

Some comment they liked the giftwrap fundraiser and were disappointed it wasn't offered this year. It had been offered for three years and it initially raised a lot of money. In the second and third year, only a small group purchased from this fundraiser. The PTO swapped it out this year to offer Spirit Wear and the Game Night. It was suggested that giftwrap and Spirit Wear Fundraiser alternate years.

Auction Feedback – A suggestion was made to have a minimum bid on the community donations. Another suggestion was to see if the donors would be willing to provide two donations if there was a bidding war.

It was noted 20% of the Merriam Community attends the Auction. Suggestions as to how to raise attendance were

- Utilize room parents to communicate the event
- Set up tables for those attending individually
- Set up tables by classroom/grade for parents who attending without another person/couple
- More babysitting. Currently, one of the AB girls teams provides this as a fundraiser. It was suggested to have more so more parents could attend.
- Another suggestion was to see if the ticket price could be reduced by offering appetizers instead of a sit-down dinner.
- Another suggestion was to comp dinners if people send over a certain amount.

Direct Appeal Fundraising – There was a suggestion made to reposition the appeal to the Fall and tie it in with a tax donation and matching corporate contribution. One parent thought a letter stating why the change could be appropriately drafted. One parent suggested having parents think in terms of an annual projection and donate quarterly.

It was asked of the PTO to help find another volunteer to help with Lost & Found. It was noted it has been getting very difficult to find volunteers to help out with many of the events.

Electronic Newsletter – Hardcopy vs. Electronic. Comments were mixed with many stating they preferred the hardcopy in the Friday Flyer. A couple of suggestions were to put article links at the bottom of Ed's letter as well as putting a link in every weekly email.

Topics for Community Conversation – One suggestion was for anti-bullying and Technology and Kids in School. It was noted these topics were coming for future PTO meetings. A third suggestion was to have conversation on the role a parent with the teacher in terms of helping with homework, communication and response time, being an advocate for your child vs. being a pest to the teacher. Ed suggested this as a symposium or parent coffee topic at a different time.

PTO Minutes by Patricia Forrester, Merriam PTO Secretary 2009/2010