

Merriam PTO Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2010

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

Also Present: Ed Kaufman (Principal), Sherene Raisbeck, Brendan Cotter, Mario Castaneda, Satit Phanichyakarn, Colm McDermott, Lisa Pearson, Beth Davis, Trudy Khosla, Faith Erickson, Zuzka Blasi, Neena Arora, Robert Czarnecki, Natasha Wood, Iris Grabarek, Dimitris Papoutsakis, Cath Smith, Orissa Lawrence, Terry Linsey, Diane Johnson, Scott Jelinsky, Marisa Olson, Trish Underwood, Lori Lacascio, Susan Brager Murphy, Mary Bowe-Shulman, Dorene Bowe-Shulman, Christy Nealon, Khurram Waheed, Ayesha Khurram, Uday Hegde

[Two names on the sign-in sheet are illegible.](#)

PTO Business

Fundraising Update

At 6:06pm, PTO Co-Chair Donna German called to order the fourth PTO meeting of the 2009-2010 school year. Donna introduced Kim McCormick as her co-chair and started the meeting by introducing Terry Lindgren as the School Committee Representative for Merriam.

Terry reported this year has been difficult due to a cut of ten million dollars in aid. Terry had spoken with State Senator Eldridge that day and Senator Eldridge said the governor is promising an additional one million dollars but Senator Eldridge doesn't share this opinion. Senator Eldridge said it would be prudent to budget for a four to five percent cut. Terry said funding for teacher assistants has been reduced but restored for special education assistants and technical assistants. Terry reported eighty percent of the money for schools is coming from tax revenues, fifteen percent from state aid and another five percent from the stimulus package. He encouraged us to attend the next School Committee Meeting on March 25th and the next Town Meeting on the first Monday in April. Terry was also encouraged to see the topic of Bullying discussed this evening. He said it's a difficult problem and believes in Ed's vision.

Next, Donna introduced three candidates running in the upcoming School Committee election.

First up was Brendan Cotter. Brendan Cotter introduced himself from Windsor Avenue in Acton, with three children (ages five, seven and nine) in Acton schools. He has coached on town athletic programs and has built five businesses and cares a lot about the Acton schools. He has built and worked with great teams in his professional career and believes he has a strong skill set to work on the School Committee. He has traveled in the past for his job and has seen different school committees and town meetings. He feels he can bring that experience to the job. His website is www.votecotter.com for more information.

Next to speak was Xuan Kong, current chair of the School Committee. He is running for re-election this year. Xuan has lived in Acton for ten years and has a wife and two children in the Acton schools. He works as a Vice President of Research for a company in Boston and previously as a professor. Xuan believes there is no one way of teaching students. He moved to

Acton because of the school choice and believes it celebrates the different learning styles of children. Xuan wants to work to preserve that. He believes there needs to be strong parental involvement and resources have to be allocated by need, not just across the board for all schools within the district. He believes in a strong educational foundation so children are ready for the world when they leave home.

The last candidate to speak was Michael Coppolino. Michael had been a Douglas parent for fourteen years, has been on the School Committee for twelve years and is running for re-election this year. Michael is currently an eighth grade math teacher in Waltham. Prior to returning to teaching, he worked in the IT field as a business owner for IT training for sixteen years. Michael said he believes he brings passion for education and experience to the School Committee. He has served through three superintendents, two major overrides and participated on a special education taskforce.

There were no grade level reports at the meeting. Donna congratulated Susan Brager Murphy on the terrific job she, Tina Hamilton and her Auction Committee did in raising over fifty three thousand dollars for the teacher assistants. Susan thanked the Auction Committee for their hard work. Susan reported putting the art work on-line for auctioning was financially successful which allowed the evening to end an hour earlier. Some auction items are still available and more information will be forth coming about those.

Cath Smith reported the Willow Books evening was well attended but didn't have a number to report yet. She really wanted to thank the teachers who read to the children that evening.

Donna reported the PTO was on target for their funding goal. A direct appeal letter will be going out in April. Donna turned the meeting over to Ed to present Bullying: An Interactive PTO/School Council Community Conversation.

Bullying: An Interactive PTO/School Council Community Conversation

Ed thanked the PTO and School Council for making this evening happen. Bullying is receiving a lot of attention in the news with good reason. There are no simple answers to every instance of bullying and it involves the school community of parents and teachers to work together on issues. Tonight, there will be a video presentation on bullying information and break-out group discussions on two scenarios of bullying. The scenarios were created by the School Council as an aid to talk about how to respond to types of bullying. The first scenario deals with cyber-bullying and the second involves a playground conflict. After the group discussions, we will talk about how to help children and parents deal with bullying and where to go as a community. Ed reported there is a district-wide bullying committee that is comprised of teachers, parents and administrators for grade levels within the district. There are sub-committees that work on educational components to recommend practices and procedures. The committee will be voting on district-wide policies and guidelines surrounding bullying soon.

Ed reported that Merriam uses the Open Circle Program developed at Wellesley College that teaches social skills and conflict resolution. A bullying component will be added to the Open

Circle program. Merriam is working with Open Circle to pilot the bullying component. The first piece of the pilot is teacher training and we will be the first school undertaking this.

Cyber-bullying Scenario

A group of six fifth grade girls (from the same class) had a slumber party at one of the girl's houses. They listened to music and downloaded songs, played games, called friends on their cell phones, and sent emails back and forth to other acquaintances from their class and from the other classes at school. Throughout the evening the parents poked their heads into their daughter's bedroom to ask if the kids needed anything. Otherwise, their daughter's door was closed all evening while the kids took part in their activities.

At some point one of the girls suggested that they choose a boy from their class and make a list of the "Ten Things They Hate" about him. A couple of the girls seemed a bit hesitant, but the stronger personalities prevailed and the next hour was spent with this group sharing their "hate" list with the other girls during email chats. A variety of lists were circulated and by the time they were done probably twenty girls throughout the fifth grade had seen at least one version of the list.

One of the girls in another class printed out a version of the email that had some very hurtful language ("he's fat, he's ugly, he has pimples, etc."), and brought it into school on Monday. She passed it around for several of the girls to look at. When the classroom teacher saw these girls giggling, she came over and asked to see the piece of paper. After reading what was on the page, the teacher tried to figure out the best way to approach the situation.

Questions to discuss:

- What are some thoughts and feelings that you had while reading this scenario?
- How do you think the teacher should respond to this situation?
- What responsibility does the parent who hosted the slumber party have in this situation?
- Who are the bullies in this scenario? The bystanders? The victim?
- What other adults do you think should get involved to help out in this situation? Why?
- What do you think would be the best approach for helping these girls to understand the severity of their actions?
- What could have been done to prevent this situation?

Playground Scenario

The second graders are outside at recess. A group of three boys is off playing by themselves. Another boy, Carl, approaches them and asks if he can play with them. One of the three boys says that they have formed a club and since Carl is not a member he cannot play. Carl asks about the club and the boy says that Carl can not join the club. The boy says it is the "cool" club and Carl is not cool enough to be in the club.

Carl keeps persisting, saying he wants to play and asking how he can get into the club. Finally, the same boy says that if Carl smears dirt on his face they will let him in the club. Carl points

out that none of the other boys have dirt on their faces. The boys reply that it does not matter – if Carl wants to be in the club that is what he needs to do.

Questions to discuss:

- What are some thoughts and feelings that you had while reading this scenario?
- At which point in the scenario do you think bullying has occurred?
- How should a teaching assistant (or other adult outside at recess) respond to this situation?
- Who are the bullies in this scenario? The bystanders? The victim?
- What could have been done to prevent this situation?
- If you were Carl's parent and he told you what happened, what would you have advised him to do?

After our break-out sessions with the scenarios, we came together to talk about our reactions and how to help children, parents and teachers and where to go as a community on this issue.

People in each group had different reactions to each scenario. It was noted the amount of time the parents and school need to have to deal with bullying problems. People expressed help for the bully instead of just punishment.

What will help the Children? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.

- Scenarios like these done in classrooms.
- Scenarios go home to parents.
- Students should be comfortable to tell an adult about bullying.
- Build self-esteem with children at home and school.
- Communicate expectation of good behavior and interaction with all children.
- Develop empathy.
- Resolution for everyone.

What Will Help Parents & Teachers? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.

- Parents are not alone in bullying situations and it can happen to anyone.
- There needs to be a cooperative element: parents with parents and teachers with parents to deal with the situation.
- Educate parents that the attitude of “some element of teasing will always happen” is the wrong attitude.
- Educate the educators.
- Collaborative material to go home to encourage parents to have needed discussions.
- Develop an anti-bullying policy and pledge for all students and parents to sign.

Unanswered Questions and Where to Go? Opinions from parents and teachers shared as a group.

- There is not one specific answer as to how to report bullying and follow-up, each situation is different.
- Does Merriam have a catch phrase for making sure everyone is included in play?

- How to get the rest of the community involved in the issue?
- There needs to be responsibility and consequences.
- Theoretical discussions need to be put into application.
- Resources and written guidelines available as we go home this evening.

The evening was concluded at 8:30pm.

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