

Danbury City-Wide PTO Council
Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 6, 2017
6:30 PM
Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road

Attendance: Lynne Lukasik (C-W Co-President/DHS), Rich Matzinger (C-W Co-President/DHS), Janet Hamilton (C-W Treasurer/DHS), Rachel Chaleski (C-W Secretary/AIS), Dr. Glass (Deputy Superintendent), Richard Jannelli (BOE), Liz Agosto (Park Ave), Jennifer Benson (BMS), Victoria Ceylan (Stadley Rough), Kathleen Hock (King Street), Scott Keating (Great Plain), Chrissy Maruffi (Pembroke), Lisa Ruffles (King Street), Joan Strauss Evans (King Street)

Call to Order

- ✓ The meeting was called to order by Rich and began at 6:33pm.

Welcome, Introductions and Updates

- ✓ Rich thanked those in attendance and introduced himself as Co-President of the City-Wide PTO and President of the DHS PTO. Time was given to review the minutes
- ✓ It was mentioned that the CWPTO meeting dates were not on the district calendar. Dr. Glass e-mailed the appropriate contact to make them aware. Rich mentioned the meeting dates can also be found on the Facebook page (Danbury City-Wide PTO).
- ✓ Victoria offered to help with contacting Chic-fil-A to do a fundraising presentation.

Approval of Minutes

- ✓ Scott made a motion to approve the September minutes. Vicky seconded. All were in favor.

Guest Speakers: Diverse PTO Engagement and Participation (Richard Jannelli, Board of Education and Liz Agosto, Danbury Learning Center)

- ✓ Richard introduced himself as a member of the BOE for the past 12 years. He complimented the work of the CWPTO in recent years. He stressed the importance of the PTO's. He recently learned at a board meeting that the Danbury population is about 65% Hispanic. It was only 2 years ago that the population had the reverse makeup. The rapid growth creates a challenge for the district, educationally and culturally for the students and parents. He stated the goal to welcome and encourage participation from everyone in the schools. A successful school is the combination of the teachers, administration, students, parents and community. A few weeks ago, Richard had attended the Danbury Learning Center's Family Camp, where the concept of a PTO was unknown or thought to be a fundraising organization. Richard has discussed with Liz ways on how to engage more of the diverse population in the PTO's. He is working with Dr. Sal and Anne Mead on the possibility of acquiring translation devises or interpreters for these meetings. Richard then turned the floor to Liz who has had some success with engaging non-English speakers at Park Avenue school.
- ✓ Liz introduced herself as having many roles in the district, among which she is a parent and PTO co-president at Park Ave. The PTO chose to have two parent liaisons, one for each

Spanish and Portuguese language. There was a meeting with the parent liaisons. Child care was provided. Families sat at separate tables designated for each language. Each table went through an agenda, discussion and questions, then came together as one group. The meeting was well-received; however, Liz would like to try a different method, so that the questions and discussion are combined as one group. There will be a questionnaire distributed to parents asking their preferred method of communication. There are over 600 students at the school and paper fliers are becoming too costly. The PTO is looking for methods of paperless communication. They will try the Remind app.

- ✓ Joan asked how it was initially communicated that the PTO meeting would have translators and how the turn out was. It was verbally communicated in the prior year and information was sent out about the parent liaisons. Liz feels word of mouth is the best communication. Turn out was typical for the school, about 20-30 parents, but she hopes to expand attendance. King Street mentioned that they have about 800 students and only about 10 parents typically attend the PTO meetings.
- ✓ Lisa asked how child care was arranged. Liz said the PTO requested volunteers. She also mentioned that the PTO will offer to purchase dinner for teachers who attend the meetings. Janet mentioned that when she was part of the King Street PTO, child care was provided by Girl Scouts. The Key Club was also mentioned. Rachel said that they will help with a community event, but have turned down her request to provide child care at meetings. Richard confirmed that attendance may increase with child care and food, but also parents need to feel welcomed. A peer will often serve as the best catalyst. Parent participation will then lend to better understanding of the curriculum and other things that happen within the schools.
- ✓ Lynne asked if there were any other school systems in the nation that were entirely Spanish speaking in their instruction. Dr. Glass confirmed that there are. The Danbury population may be larger, but 27% of the students are English Language Learners. There are not enough teachers that speak Spanish. The original vision of the AIS intradistrict magnet school was to have dual language program, so that those students were bilingual; however, there were not enough Spanish speaking children or teachers at that time. The state now requires that all students graduate with at least 2 years of Spanish instruction. Currently, about 87% of students already graduate meeting that requirement. Under the new requirement, all CT districts are seeking Spanish language teachers. Liz mentioned that history shows phases of different minorities across populations. Richard said that multiple languages should be taught, but it is still important for a parent and student to understand English.
- ✓ Richard reiterated that he found many parents who did not understand what a PTO was or who had a misconception of the organization. Liz had explained at the Family Camp that fundraisers are a part of the PTO, but parents should not be hesitant to join their PTO, regardless of fundraising participation.
- ✓ Vicky mentioned that 2 or 3 years ago, the Stadley Rough PTO had tried to bolster involvement through similar strategies as Park Ave. The first meeting with interpreters had a good turn out of about 30 - 40 people, but the number of attendees lessened after each meeting. They still provide interpreters with advanced noticed, although no parents currently use the service. Richard said that he has noticed cycles of involvement over the

years. Rachel feels it is particularly challenging to increase parental involvement given the current economic climate, as well as with children having more extracurricular activities. Kathleen suggested there may be a need for more general information on the individual PTO's, based on her own experience prior to joining. She asked how many parents attend each of the PTO's meetings. King Street will usually have 10-12 parents plus the principal and PTO executive board, but no teachers. Park Ave usually has 20-30. Stadley Rough usually has 5 - 10 teachers, 15 - 20 parents the principal attends all meetings. There may be more given a special presentation or topic. Janet raised the question of how to get people passionate about volunteering for the sake of giving back to their community. She noticed that many people who do volunteer often have multiple volunteer roles.

- ✓ Richard would like to discuss the topic again towards the end of the year in order to gage progress. Lynne will commit to assist and encourage participation from all families, as parents who are not engaged are missing out. Vicky agreed there is opportunity to use their voice and enhance the school community for their children.
- ✓ King Street Principal Mrs. Hislop along with Mrs. Gallagher offer coffee and conversation prior to their PTO meetings. There was an interpreter. This helped to increase attendance.
- ✓ Vicky asked if a connection could be made with the DHS students involved in the Early Education program to help with child care at meetings.

Treasurer's Report

- ✓ The current balance is \$717.24.
- ✓ A notice about 2017-18 dues was sent today. Dues were received from Hayestown, Park Ave and Pembroke.
- ✓ Supplies for the Meet the Candidates event were purchased and cost \$31.45. The event was well-attended. Chrissy asked if questions were submitted in writing and if that would help facilitate the Q & A portion. Lynne said they would receive too many in writing as it is easier to write than to ask.
- ✓ Scott made a motion to approve the treasurer's report. Joan seconded.

Deputy Superintendent's Report

- ✓ Dr. Glass has an open door policy and has already met with many parents. He is the instructional contact for the district. The school principals are his direct reports. He addresses questions about teaching and learning.
- ✓ All schools are now required to have a School Improvement Plan (SIP). Each school is required to have an Instructional Leadership Team. To be inclusive as possible, it may include principal, assistant principal, a teacher from every grade level, ELL teacher, SPED teacher, an arts representative, social worker or psychologist, parents and students. Each will have a digitally accessible document. Once finalized, data sets will be presented to Dr. Sal, Dr. Glass and Kara Wanzer. Areas of strength and need will be reviewed. There is a focus on fostering inter-school communication, including administration. At the elementary level, two lead principals convene the 13 schools together, in order to standardize as much as appropriate across schools, but also allow a level of autonomy as no two schools are alike. A

District Improvement Plan is also put in place to align instruction for all core subjects. The District Coherence Plan addresses problem solving and evidence-based claims.

- ✓ With the passing of the state budget, there is hope for the concept of restoration. Principals were pulsed for where it is most needed. A large group answered with paraprofessionals, as they assist with small group intervention. It is uncertain if they will be reinstated. There is no need for any further cuts. Almost every Monday, the cabinet meets. It is one of the smallest in the state and includes the Superintendent, Deputy Superintendent, Finance Director, Staffing Director and Special Services Director. At the secondary level, the climate specialists were critical. They assist with discipline, which allows the principals to focus on instruction.
- ✓ Dr. Glass is the only non-clergy board member of the Association of Religious Communities (ARC), whose goal is to wage peace and bring people together across communities, cultures and religions. He served as co-chair on a Blue Ribbon Commission on immigration. During that time, he heard many immigrants say they did not want to lose their native language, but want their children to learn English in order to thrive and succeed.
- ✓ The poverty rate has greatly increased since Dr. Glass came to the district. About 19 years ago, the poverty rate was about 30%. The state measures student enrollment and Free and Reduced-Price Lunch population on October 1. The FRPL population represent families who are at or below poverty. This information is given at the federal level for Title 1 funding. With the increased presence of ICE, many families would not complete the application out of fear. However, the information is not at risk and does not require sensitive information, such as social security numbers. The poverty rate is now about 54-56%. Research shows that low-income students come with drastically lower levels of vocabulary than their affluent peers. Title 1 funding provides assistance in leveling the playing field.
- ✓ Dr. Glass also serves on the United Way board. The board had decided to aggregate its funds towards the Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) program. For the working poor, the program assists families who do not qualify for federal assistance, but are unable to afford basic necessities. Poverty in Danbury has increased exponentially and is a larger challenge than the ELL population; however, the ELL population typically falls into this category. Through the CT Food Bank, United Way has sent GROW Trucks (groceries on wheels) to schools, such as Park Ave, Ellsworth and South Street. Families that participate in a Financial Literacy program are provided produce, meats, canned vegetables, paper goods, etc. There are significant challenges as children of these families enter the school system, because of their socioeconomic status. Those challenges will follow the student from year to year. Rather than complete gap closing, the focus is on acceleration.
- ✓ There have been several drafts of the 2018-19 school calendar. Dr. Glass went through the color code. The four dates in pink are full Professional Development days as contracted with the teachers union. They are generally focused in the early part of the school year with one at the end, in case of additional training required by the state. The state also requires that teachers have an evaluation/growth plan. The blue dates are designated for teachers to meet with their supervisor. Green represents vacation days. The yellow days are one-hour early release days to allow for Professional Development. Based on parent feedback, these days have evolved over the years, from whole days to half days and now one-hour early

release twice a month. Parents also voiced that contiguous weeks were preferred over alternate weeks. There are some months that are alternate due to vacation days. The 2019-20 calendar is currently being reviewed. The Presidents' Day break decreased from 2 days to 1 day. The school year will begin after Labor Day. The feedback from parents, administrators and teachers for the late start was positive. Rachel asked how long do staff typically stay beyond the end of the school year. Dr. Glass said that the end of the year is June 13 and teachers stay one day later. If no snow days, the graduation date is June 13. If the district builds a calendar that includes 5 snow days, the state permits a guaranteed graduation date. Janet asked about a regional calendar and if other districts start late. Dr. Glass said the regional calendar was abandoned, as it would work for smaller districts but not necessarily for larger districts. Other districts are considering the late start. There is also some controversy over Columbus Day and Veterans Day. One argument is that it would be better to have school on Veterans Day in order to teach students about the holiday and offer programs related to veterans. Feedback from veterans was not positive around the idea to have school. Rabbi's in the community were pulsed on Jewish holidays. Joan asked if the PD day in October was built into the union contract. Dr. Glass said it can be moved within the calendar. Lynne asked if the schools might consider floating holidays, like in the workplace. Dr. Glass said it would further complicate staffing across the 180 school days.

Updates from School Representatives

- ✓ Stadley Rough held an ice cream social last week, which had about 300 attendees. It was well-received by families and the children came in costume. The PTO will design its own version of a fun run. They will host a "Holidays Around the World", which will feature crafts/traditions from various ethnicities.
- ✓ King Street held a "Fall into 4th Grade" for all 4th graders transitioning from MRP and KSP. Light refreshments were served. This offered families an opportunity to come together and meet each other. Since September, the PTO has done several fundraisers - Yankee Candle, Believe and a book fair. About 40 parents came to a wine tasting at Max's Wine & Spirits. An Apex dance-a-thon is being considered for the winter. In place of their Titans night, they will do a Bounce fundraiser in January. At the September meeting, the PTO voted to allocate \$10k towards field trips. They also organized a Pot Luck dinner for teachers during late conferences.
- ✓ AIS held another successful Apex Fun Run. The theme was United. Grade K - 4 raised about \$15,000. Grade 5 raised about \$2,000 for their Nature's Classroom trip in April. Rachel is working to install water stations at the school, but communication has been difficult with the Facilities Director. She has sought assistance from the principal. Dr. Glass confirmed that approval must go through Mr. Jalbert. Rachel said the transition of a new principal has gone well. He has implemented a Student Leadership Team and Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The PTO held a book fair, as well as sold spirit wear and directories. Odyssey of the Mind is offered after school. Without the paras, volunteers are being sought to help with the Kindergarten classes.
- ✓ DHS has had the same communication issue with installing water stations. The fist PTO meeting in September was successful, which coincided with ESL open enrollment. There was

an interpreter. Rich welcomed all parents. They sold magnets and other spirit items. The PTO held a college panel event to provide parents with information and planning assistance. There were about 50 attendees. The next meeting will focus on the Naviance web-based college application tool. The DHS PTO is geared more towards providing information rather than fundraising. Lynne highly recommends that parents be diligent in their involvement with Naviance.

- ✓ BMS has a new website and e-mail address since the transition of the PTO board. There is a weekly newsletter sent out to parents each Monday. Spirit Wear sales were successful. Cherrydale fundraising items will be delivered in a few days. Today was the last day for the Scholastic Book Fair. The 7th grade went to Philadelphia with Global Endeavors, which received a lot of positive feedback. There was a 6th grade social, as well as a 7th and 8th grade dance. They were all well received.
- ✓ Great Plain will hold a silent auction on the 17th. Lyman Orchard pies were delivered today. Last month, the PTO held a book fair and ice cream social. The silent auction is their biggest fundraiser for the year and includes many donations from various businesses - day spas, hotels, restaurants - gift cards, police car and fire truck rides, sports tickets. Tickets are \$7 at the door from 5:30 - 7pm. The event starts with pasta in the cafeteria. There will be movies to entertain the kids, while parents shop at the auction.
- ✓ Pembroke PTO has used Custom Ink for their spirit wear for the past few years. They offer a variety of products with easy minimum requirements. The PTO puts together a pumpkin patch for kids to choose and take home a pumpkin. They had over 150 kids at their Halloween-themed carnival, "Spooktacular". Tomorrow is the Election Day bake sale. Square One Art will be done in the fall instead of the spring. There will be a Bounce fundraiser on Nov. 15.
- ✓ Park Ave PTO provided teachers breakfast at the start of the school year. They are treated to dinner (sandwiches) on the day with late conferences. Tomorrow is a bake sale. They completed a Mixed Bag fundraiser, which gives 50% profit. The PTO will host a Bounce night and Zumba night. The goal is to boost morale, engage more parents and relay a general understanding of the PTO. The school will continue with the "Walking School Bus" with the help of United Way. Parents assist with this daily walk to school.

Other Discussion

- ✓ The Danbury Family Learning Center offers free playgroups at various locations Monday through Saturday for all families with children birth to 5 years old. Older children are also welcome. The playgroups are designed to assist with growth and development. Every school should have a schedule, but Liz will send out to each social worker. It can also be found online: <https://sites.google.com/danbury.k12.ct.us/dflc>.
- ✓ It was asked what is being done for other groups, like the talented and gifted. Dr. Glass confirmed the district is always seeking opportunities for those students who do well academically. He mentioned the recent grant from VH1's "Save the Music." There is a workshop being held tomorrow for teachers. All students at Park Ave, Morris Street and South Street will have the opportunity to play a musical instrument at no expense. It is

required by law that students are tested for giftedness, but not required to program for it. There has been some discussion to provide an inclusive K-12 approach.

- ✓ Janet mentioned that substitute teachers are expected to be flexible in assignments and locations. Dr. Glass answered questions about the qualifications for substitute and climate specialist roles. There is special dispensation for substitutes granted for Alliance districts. Climate specialists were eliminated, but previously were filled by candidates with education, administrative, or communications background. Dr. Glass does not foresee the role being restored at this time, however, it is more likely for the role of part-time interventionist. Interventionists work with small groups under the tutelage of a teacher, primarily on literacy and math. Qualifications are minimal and vary. The entire job description may be found on the district website.
- ✓ Liz said there is an ongoing issue with schools becoming too hot and students not taking enough water breaks. She asked if there was any possibility of acquiring a cooling system. Dr. Glass said this issue is reviewed each year, but it would be too costly for the district to adhere to current building codes, like with recent work done to ACE. Funds do not exist. For safety reasons, there is a stringent protocol in regards to open doors and windows. Richard spoke about the space issue in the district, which also lends to hot schools. The district is growing and must make do with limited resources. Dr. Glass said staffing will be an issue given new space. Closets and media centers are being used for instruction. If funding becomes available, it would go towards the greater need of staffing, granted there is space. Richard spoke about the need to advocate in Hartford and to hire a lobbyist. He encourages residents to become involved at the local and state levels.
- ✓ Janet asked if the new DHS theater will replace the auditorium. The answer was no. Dr. Glass explained that it will serve as a black box/auxiliary theater for smaller events. All DPS buildings are owned by the city and can be used or rented by the community.
- ✓ Rachel asked if there had been any more discussion of changing AIS to an intradistrict school versus an interdistrict school. Dr. Glass said it was considered, however, it is the district's only revenue-generating school. The district would have to reimburse the state for the cost (\$10MM) of the school. The most cost effective and quality accommodations that meet code are the modular classrooms.
- ✓ Dr. Glass mentioned nurse coverage for field trips to help with certain medical needs.
- ✓ Rich reminded members to vote tomorrow.

Next Meetings (All meetings are open to the public)

- ✓ Board of Education Meetings: November 8 & 21 at 7pm
- ✓ City-Wide PTO: December 4, 2017 at 6:30pm

Adjournment

- ✓ Rich made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Scott. The meeting adjourned at 8:57pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rachel Chaleski

City-Wide PTO Secretary