

Danbury City-Wide PTO Council  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday, September 11, 2017  
6:30 PM  
Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road

Attendance: Lynne Lukasik (C-W Co-President/DHS), Janet Hamilton (C-W Treasurer/DHS), Rachel Chaleski (C-W Secretary/AIS), Dr. Sal Pascarella (Superintendent), Sharon Amalfitano (Shelter Rock), Jennifer Benson (BMS), Chrissy Maruffi (Pembroke), Pattianne Nordt (Pembroke), Kathleen Hock (King Street), Lisa Ruffles (King Street), Joan Strauss (King Street), Liz Magnotta (Hayestown), Randall Scofield (Microsoft), Paul Salvatore (WMSA), Blaine Talbott (Park Avenue), Scott Keating (Great Plain), Dawn DaSilva (Park Avenue), Amy Sturdevant (Pembroke)

Call to Order

- ✓ The meeting was called to order by Lynne and began at 6:30pm.

Welcome, Introductions and Updates

- ✓ Lynne welcomed everyone and introduced herself as Co-President of the City-Wide PTO. Rich Matzinger, who is the City-Wide PTO Co-President and President of the DHS PTO, could not attend because of the DHS PTO meeting that was being held at this time. The purpose of the City-Wide PTO is to gather representatives from the PTO's across the district to share best practices and learn what's going on at other schools. The meetings also provide updates from the superintendent that City-Wide representatives can then share with their PTO's. The meetings are open to parents and community members. They typically run for 1 to 1 ½ hours, depending on content.
- ✓ Introductions of all attendees were made at this time.

Approval of Minutes

- ✓ Paul made a motion to approve the June minutes. Joan seconded. All were in favor.

Treasurer's Report

- ✓ The current balance is \$673.69. The 2016-17 dues of \$25 were received from the Ellsworth PTO.
- ✓ Janet will send out information on 2017-18 dues to all PTO's. Checks can be made payable to "Danbury City-Wide PTO." Janet will accept one or two year payments. Park Avenue has already paid for the current year.
- ✓ Funds go towards benefitting all Danbury Public Schools students. Last year, the City-Wide PTO sponsored a sand art activity at the CoDA Festival.
- ✓ The floor was opened for questions and comments. There were none.
- ✓ Pattianne made a motion to accept the Treasurer's report. It was seconded by Scott. All were in favor.

Superintendent's Report

- ✓ Dr. Sal welcomed everyone and announced a great opening to the new school year. The Extended Learning Program (ELP) is delayed and not available on the first day of school to ensure all students are dismissed properly. Due to the construction at the HS, the start of the school year was delayed until after Labor Day. Dr. Sal asked, by show of hands, how many parents would be in favor of another late start next year. The majority of parents expressed they were in favor. Dr. Sal explained that a delayed start would mean a late year end and air conditioning is not in all of the schools. Dr. Sal will present the idea to the Board of Education. The delayed start allowed for more time to organize, lent to better attendance on the first day and a more seamless transition particularly at the middle and high school level.
- ✓ Enrollment continues to grow and is currently at 11,400 students. When Dr. Sal first began his role as superintendent 12 years ago, enrollment was around 9,300 students. The student population has steadily increased by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2% each year.
- ✓ The budget has been a challenge this year. Danbury has been active in the state budget process. Dr. Sal had met with OPM Secretary Ben Barnes last week to advocate for Danbury and share how students are impacted by the lack of sustainability. Dr. Sal will not remove the co-curricular activities, as he feels it is a big part of schooling. The original school budget cost \$5.2MM. The city approved \$2MM. The district then cut \$1MM. There was anticipation of \$2MM from the state, before the Governor's executive order. Under the executive order, the district was forced to make cuts in staff. These cuts included half of the math and literacy coaches at the elementary schools. These coaches work with the teachers to deliver the curriculum and also with students for remediation. Each remaining one has been reassigned to two buildings. Administration has been cut as much as possible, from 55 to 35 administrators. Thus far, class sizes have been kept reasonable; however, there is now concern of larger class sizes. Students are all different in terms of their needs. Teachers are expected to grade and return work in a timely manner. Staff and students are all working hard to succeed despite the low resources. Teachers spend money out of their own pockets. The PTO's contributions are often not realized.
- ✓ Bus routes are longer and rules will be strongly enforced. Certain accommodations cannot be met. The district could probably use another 2 or 3 busses. The high school is overwhelmed. There are seniors who require additional courses to graduate. A few classes were added, but there still may be a need for more.
- ✓ The district is under a hiring freeze, after adding 25 new teachers. There is a total of 100 new staff after retirements, etc. Some FTE are more expensive than others, like specialized teachers at the HS. Once the budget is in place, there may be some flexibility to hire additional employees.
- ✓ The district is looking to add 4 to 6 modular classrooms at Westside Middle School Academy. This would open more spots for students at each grade level. It was originally designed to hold 800+ students. The other middle school populations are within about 10 students of each other, which is a good balance. The growth at that level has gone from 700 to 900 per class.
- ✓ The district is also looking to rent some space for the elementary level, but has not been successful so far.

- ✓ Enrollment at some schools, like Park Avenue, has been stopped. The kindergarten classes there were becoming too big. Ellsworth is also at capacity. These schools will be "sister schools" with other schools that have not yet reached capacity; therefore, making longer bus routes as students would be transported to and from other parts of the city.
- ✓ Dr. Sal has been to almost every school, viewing classes in progress.
- ✓ Construction is going well. There will be a Facilities Committee meeting.
- ✓ Classes hold students of wide ranges of ability and reading levels. There has been feedback from parents that their child is not being challenged or needs more time. The district is looking to institute some systemic work, e.g. labs, practices, etc. National programs, like Read 180 and System 44, are being used to fill gaps. A range of group work, one-on-one work and computer work is involved, as well as assessment to identify where more work is needed, so that all students are performing within 2 grade levels of their placement. This is being focused primarily at the middle school and high school levels. Gap years (3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 9<sup>th</sup> grade) were chosen as the focus. At the elementary level, specifically in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grades, "Imagine Learning" is being piloted at 6 of the schools. Upon success, it will be used at all of the schools. Sustainability is always an issue with such programs, as yearly costs are necessary for supplies, support materials and specialized teachers. Over the years, students are not progressing at the proper rate and consequently fall behind grade level.
- ✓ Going forward, Dr. Sal will alternate with Dr. Glass to attend the City-Wide PTO meetings.
- ✓ The Back-to-School Guide and Bus Schedule are available on the district website. Dr. Sal encouraged parents to read. It reaffirms much of the information being shared.
- ✓ Lynne asked about total enrollment for the school year. Currently, it is about 11,400, but Dr. Sal explained that the numbers are still shifting. The number that is recorded to the state is taken from October 1. It was also asked about the high school enrollment, which is about 3,100. The additions were built to accommodate 3,500, but there was no new auxiliary space (gymnasium, cafeteria). There are 28 new classrooms in the Freshman wing, some science, and a resting room (used as cafeteria space).
- ✓ Over the summer, there was about \$1MM worth in repairs to buildings, such as new tiles, asbestos removal, wash rooms, blinds, painting, and window work. This was a grant that could only be used on facilities within a strict timeframe of 5 months.
- ✓ ACE has about 70 students with insufficient space. The goal would be to hold 125 students. From the high school funds, there is money to do a facilities study to potentially put an addition or relocate to another building.
- ✓ Chrissy asked about the timeframe for the WMSA modules. Dr. Sal hopes they would be in place for next school year, but it depends on city approval. The 4 Shelter Rock modules cost about \$650,000 with 50% reimbursement from the state. However, the state may discontinue such reimbursements.
- ✓ Paul asked if the new busses will have GPS. He also asked for the proper contact if there was a problem with the GPS system. Dr. Sal answered that the busses should have GPS soon, once the routes are finalized. Parents should contact the bus company or Melanie Lukas.
- ✓ Rachel asked if Dr. Sal can foresee the paras being rehired. Dr. Sal explained that with the anticipated loss of \$2MM, there were cuts made to half of the elementary coaches,

- elementary school paras, deans and climate specialists at the middle schools, and secretarial time. Dr. Sal answered that the paras may be reinstituted, but perhaps not in the same way.
- ✓ Lisa asked if there was any larger discussion happening, aside from the modules, in terms of solving for the steady growth of the student population. Dr. Sal mentioned the recent population study by which redistricting happened when there was space to do so. Currently, redistricting is not an option, since all schools are saturated. The district had made some recommendations for the city to build, which may need to be reconsidered. As a reminder, full day kindergarten was implemented with the addition of 18 new classrooms through grant money. The district will continue to seek to add modules. While surrounding towns are seeing a decline in student population, we have a sustained growth over time. Recently, there was a permanent roof put over the 20 year-old modules at South Street School. Lisa asked if there was still a possibility for a charter school. Dr. Sal confirmed that there are two applications to the state for public charter schools. One is for middle school and the other for grades K-5, but there is no building at this point. Danbury does not currently have any charter schools.
  - ✓ Janet asked if students were able to "work from home" in the same way businesses do for their employees to possibly save space. Dr. Sal said there is a blended learning that is already happening. The state has allowed flexibility with the Carnegie units, which is time in the classroom, in turn for performance-based work on skills development and acquisition. Dr. Sal does not think it will make a substantial difference for space issues, but there is more opportunity for this type of work due to technology and laws permitting this Personalized/Blended Learning.
  - ✓ Lynne asked if the cuts to the high school interventionists were also part of the \$2MM budget cut. Dr. Sal said that all schools, except for AIS, qualify as Title 1 schools based on their free and reduced-price lunch population. (A Title 1 school has 40% or more of its student population from low-income families.) The schools may choose to use that money to put in an interventionist. Every school has a School Improvement Planner that must decide how to focus on improving student achievement. Some choose to do Professional Development training or hire paraprofessionals.
  - ✓ Joan asked how the new busses were funded. Dr. Sal explained that the old busses were meant to keep for 6 years, the district had them for 10. The new busses were the result of a new contract. It is the only fleet in the state that is run on propane. With possible reimbursements at the federal level, it may actually save the district some money. The busses have new technology and more cameras for safety.

#### Updates from School Representatives

- ✓ Great Plain PTO has not had their first meeting yet. Scott will provide an update at the next meeting.
- ✓ King Street will have their first PTO meeting on 9/26. In order to assist with the transition of both KSP and Mill Ridge students to KSI, the PTO will hold a Fall Harvest Social for all of 4<sup>th</sup> grade in October. They will have their school-wide Back to School Picnic this Saturday, which includes bouncy houses, food, games, face painting, touch-a-truck and DJ. They have already begun a Believe Fundraiser, which will run through October. Saturday will begin a

KidStuff Coupon Book fundraiser. They will also be doing a Yankee Candle fundraiser and a Book Fair.

- ✓ Pembroke PTO has not met yet, but started its fundraising today with Cherrydale. It will run for 3 weeks. The PTO chose to have items delivered directly to customers, which means less profit, but less work. They held a Kindergarten Social on the Friday before the first day of school and that went well. Their Book Fair started today, which coincides with the school's Open Houses. Spirit wear is being offered. They will hold a sponsorship drive to collect donations. A Fall Reading Night is being held on October 2. They will also do a Lyman Pies fundraiser in the beginning of October.
- ✓ Hayestown PTO gave the teacher a Welcome Back Breakfast the Friday before school started. Tomorrow night will be their Back to School Picnic, which will kick-off their spirit wear sales. They have a Trunk or Treat planned, as well as a Pizza Bingo Night later in the school year. They will also host movie nights throughout the year. New this year, they are offering teacher grants from the PTO to help reduce teachers' personal spend amount. Dr. Sal mentioned that the national average that teachers spend out of their pockets for the classroom is \$650. The PTO would like to honor Roses for Aubrey in memory of one of their students who recently past away.
- ✓ Park Avenue PTO also started the school year with a breakfast for their teachers. This week, they will begin their fall fundraiser with Mixed Bag. New this year, they will raffle a Kindle Fire as an incentive for students. Mixed Bag also offers an incentive for the teachers. They will offer spirit wear at the end of September. There will be a Book Fair in October. They will also host two movie nights throughout the year. Last year, the PTO purchased playground bags for each grade level that had equipment/toys for outside play. This year, the PTO would like to do the same for indoor play.
- ✓ WMSA PTO has not had their meeting yet. They are in the process of planning their first fundraiser. Paul will be co-chairing with Kathy Snow as City-Wide PTO representatives.
- ✓ Shelter Rock PTO also gave their teachers and staff a Welcome Back Breakfast. The school had a Meet & Greet with their new principal before school started. It went well and was especially helpful for new families as well as current families. Open House will be tomorrow and next Tuesday. The Book Fair will be later in the year to coincide with Parent/Teacher Conferences. The PTO will also do Lyman Pies, as well as host various family fun nights throughout the year. In the past, they've done Buffalo Wild Wings, Bounce, etc.
- ✓ AIS PTO will meet tomorrow. Last weekend, they held their Welcome Back Picnic, which includes music, spirit wear sales, bouncy, food, temporary tattoos of school logo. AIS also has a new principal, who held a Meet & Greet before the school year start. The PTO is planning an Apex Fun Run, which works really well for them. Rachel suggested that if your PTO is looking to do this fundraiser, communication is critical among the school staff, principal and PTO board members. The PTO plans the run with the principal, so that it does not coincide with testing and fits within the school schedule. Paul mentioned that Great Plain made about \$10k with their run. He also said that many parents complained about the percentage taken by the company, which is the same or less than other fundraisers. The AIS PTO was diligent in overseeing the program and following up with the Apex team members and families who received pledges.

- ✓ DHS PTO is meeting tonight, which Rich is attending. The PTO will hold several fundraisers that involve student assistance. The DHS PTO Facebook group is hugely successful and very active. Parents assist other parents with all kinds of information.

### Other Discussion

- ✓ Dr. Sal thanked the PTO representatives for all that they do, which really makes a difference.
- ✓ Randy works for Microsoft supporting education, commercial and government accounts in parts of NY and CT. He came to learn more about the community and schools. As a recent Danbury resident, he has joined the Kiwanis Club and the YMCA board. Microsoft has supported WMSA and might be able to support other STEAM programs. They taught Minecraft coding at Stadely Rough. They would like to assist King Street with their event on Saturday. Microsoft offers free event kits, including X-boxes. There are many opportunities that Microsoft can provide customized assistance to the schools, such as technology resources, teacher development workshops, and LinkedIn workshops. Each hour that a Microsoft employee donates to a non-profit, Microsoft will donate \$25. Randy provided business cards. His e-mail is [rascofie@microsoft.com](mailto:rascofie@microsoft.com). He can provide a program guide.
- ✓ There will be a Tedx Danbury event on October 5 at DHS. It is geared towards adults. Lynne distributed a flyer. There is a website for more information: [www.tedxdanbury.com](http://www.tedxdanbury.com). TED is a nonprofit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks, beginning in 1984 and stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design.
- ✓ Chick-fil-A will give a presentation at the next meeting to talk about fundraisers.
- ✓ The City-Wide PTO usually hosts a Meet the Candidates events in advance of the upcoming November election. Both mayoral candidates, as well as Board of Education candidates, would be invited to the forum. Paul suggested holding it in lieu of the next City-Wide PTO meeting. Dr. Sal agreed. Lynne will confirm the date and place with Debbie Warner.
- ✓ Lynne would like to give Debbie a gift for all the help and support she provides to the City-Wide PTO. Lynne will purchase a gift card. Motion was made by Patti to approve, seconded by Paul. All were in favor.
- ✓ There was a question asked about how to apply their PTO for a 501c3 status. Joan offered to assist. Lynne also offered Rich's help.

### Next Meetings (All meetings are open to the public)

- ✓ Board of Education Meetings: September 13 & 27 at 7pm
- ✓ City-Wide PTO: October 2, 2017 at 6:30pm

### Adjournment

- ✓ Chrissy made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Sharon. The meeting adjourned at 7:45pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rachel Chaleski

City-Wide PTO Secretary