

Danbury City-Wide PTO Council  
Meeting Minutes (Proposed)  
Monday, December 4, 2017  
6:30 PM  
Administrative Center, 63 Beaver Brook Road

Attendance: Rich Matzinger (C-W Co-President/DHS), Rachel Chaleski (C-W Secretary/AIS), Joseph Martino (Finance Director), Liz Agosto (Park Ave), Jennifer Benson (BMS), Victoria Ceylan (Stadley Rough), Dawn DaSilva (Park Ave), Kathleen Hock (King Street), Chrissy Maruffi (Pembroke), Lisa Ruffles (King Street), Kathy Snow (WMSA), Joan Strauss Evans (King Street), Mitchell Peterson (BMS), Brian Cullagh (BMS), Mary McGuire (BMS), Kathleen OBrien (WMSA), Carolyn Keenan (South Street), Dawn Newsom (Pembroke), Andrew Ruffles, Doreen Squillace (BMS), Austin Hammar (King Street), Rick Vaughn (BMS)

Call to Order

- ✓ The meeting was called to order by Rich and began at 6:32pm.

Welcome, Introductions and Updates

- ✓ Rich welcomed attendees to the December meeting.
- ✓ The Secretary position for the City-Wide PTO is open. Rachel will step down from the position, since being elected to the Board of Education.
- ✓ Time was given to allow review of the minutes.

Approval of Minutes

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

Treasurer's Report

- ✓ The current balance is \$717.24.
- ✓ PTO's that still owe 2017-18 dues are: DHS, Ellsworth, Great Plain, Mill Ridge, Morris Street, RPMS, Shelter Rock, South Street, Stadley Rough and WMSA. (Received WMSA dues at this time.)

Superintendent's Report (Joseph Martino, on behalf of Dr. Sal)

- ✓ An update on the Standard Based Report Cards will be given at the next CWPTO meeting.
- ✓ The 19<sup>th</sup> budget is due to the mayor by February 15 according to city charter. The Board of Education will receive a budget package early/mid-January. Once approved, the budget is reviewed by the mayor, proposed to city council at the April meeting and voted on in May.
- ✓ Budgetary challenges remain, even after the loss of 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Aids and Coaches. Space is an issue with larger class sizes and overcrowded busses. Joe estimates about 5+ teachers, along with some shifting, and custodial staff to fill the high school addition. Modular classrooms are still being considered for WMSA. The other middle schools each hold about 1,000 students. The goal is to avoid reaching 1,100 students. The elementary school growth shows about 900 per grade. The total student population continues to grow by 1 - 1 ½ % across the

- district. Two classes were added at KSI, but space is still challenging there, as class size is currently around 26. Space is needed at SSS. Class size at Hayestown is around 26-27. Resources are clearly tight and the state has given notice of additional deductions to come in December. Joe does not foresee the budget to get any better in the future. In his 6 years at the district, this was the first time positions were taken out of the budget. He does not foresee any structural changes at the elementary level, but recognizes the challenges there.
- ✓ The September opening of the high school addition will be reviewed by the board in April. Joe is optimistic as progress is steady. The study being done for options at ACE should be completed in the coming weeks. Joe reiterated the possibility of portables at WMSA. The tennis courts at the high school will be replaced. Joe mentioned the limitations to some state funds are strictly allocated for facilities updates and repairs.
  - ✓ There were two additional busses to the fleet this year. Bus runs continue around 50 - 60 students. Some Ellsworth runs are at 72. Each bus costs the district \$60k.
  - ✓ Joe opened the floor for questions. Vicky asked about the DECO program. Joe confirmed the district is committed to DECO. There are about 150 students in the program. Vicky said students were told that funding has been cut. Joe said that the state cut its funding, but the district will continue to run the program. The district is seeking federal money to help with the cost. Vicky said there are several students who were unable to take certain courses that were available last year. Joe said he would look into it.
  - ✓ Kathleen asked if there was opportunity for students to transfer to a less crowded school. Joe said there are some schools with lower numbers, like Great Plain, but they also host preschool and/or special education programs. All elementary schools are at or above capacity. Most class sizes are mid-20's. The district has considered portable classrooms, but there is not space for them. Lunch waves are longer, some starting at 11am. There are longer bus routes. Optional zones may be considered, where families are given a choice of school because of a district overlap.
  - ✓ Kathy Snow asked when the WMSA portables would be installed and if they are in September, will the lottery be open to more seats. The plan is to get them in by the fall, as they can be installed quickly. Students on the waiting list will be offered seats as they are available.
  - ✓ There was a question about how similar student populations are at grade level across the middle schools. One teacher said that the average class size at BMS is 25-26, while the average at RPMS is 16-17. Joe stated there are about 50 students that differentiate the two middle schools, BMS and RPMS. RPMS had a smaller 6<sup>th</sup> grade than BMS, but the overall 6<sup>th</sup> grade across the district was smaller. It was also asked if there was any discussion about making the middle school lottery an automatic entry for all students. The concept has not been visited lately.

#### Updates from School Representatives

- ✓ Stadley Rough PTO's fall fundraiser did not do well this year, but they do many others. They just had one through Chic-fil-A. The PTO is working on putting together a Read-a-thon/Fun Run. They will not hire an outside company. The PTO is faced with many difficult questions about school and bus overcrowding and programs being cut. The PTO meetings are running

long, because parents are bringing their concerns and questions about the schools and the education that their children are receiving.

- ✓ Broadview PTO sends a weekly e-newsletter, "News You Can Use," which has been successful in relaying information to parents. They are working to encourage attendance at the PTO meetings, which has been low. Jennifer, who has a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, was sometimes the only parent at last year's meetings. The PTO has completed a Cherrydale fundraiser and Book Fair and were not as successful as in prior years. The PTO sought one-time donations. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade social and 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade dances were successful. The PTO provided staff with dinner during the late conferences. The conferences had 81% attendance this year, to which Mrs. Thomas (principal) owed it to individual sign-ups. Jennifer was able to meet with every one of her daughter's teachers individually. Celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, last week was a fun Spirit Week with a "color war" contest.
- ✓ Pembroke PTO hosted a Bounce fundraiser, which raised about \$250. The Election Day Bake Sale did very well and raised about \$400 over the forecasted amount. Square One Art orders will be delivered in two weeks. This year it was done in the fall, as opposed to spring, and raised about the same profit amount. Tomorrow is a holiday reading night, where teachers and volunteers will read to the kids and kids are offered hot chocolate, baked goods and a craft. Next week will be their Holiday Boutique.
- ✓ Park Avenue PTO just finished their fall fundraiser through Mixed Bags, which offers 50% profit. Last week, a free Zumba night was held for students and families. There were about 100 attendees, who received a free bottle of water. Next week, a Holiday Shop will run for 4 days, where all items cost \$1. There is no profit taken and actually ends up costing the PTO every year. The kids enjoy being able to shop for their families. Dinner was provided for staff during the late conferences. The PTO met last week and agreed upon allocating a certain amount per classroom. Last year, the PTO purchased items for outside play, and this year, they will do the same for indoor play. The Election Day Bake Sale raised about \$500.
- ✓ King Street PTO will host a Bounce fundraiser on January 12. This was to replace the Danbury Titans Hockey Night, which closed. They will also hold a Yankee Candle fundraiser and Book Fair. The PTO is trying to schedule a fundraiser with Apex, but running into some challenges. Kathy and Lisa are leading a group of 5<sup>th</sup> graders, called "Campus Cares." The group of 30 students volunteers once per month for 45 minutes before the school day. They work on various projects having to do with local and/or global issues, like recycling to raise money for a charity and collecting food donations for a local shelter.
- ✓ WMSA PTO held a school-wide dance as a fundraiser, which was well attended. There is more fundraising for individual groups and activities at the middle school level. The theater group, which will present Legally Blonde this year, will do fundraising for props, supplies, etc. They held an Applebee's breakfast fundraiser last weekend. There was a cookie dough fundraiser for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade end of year trip. There are new members on the PTO executive board, who will try to implement some new fundraisers to assist teachers and supplement programs. Lauren sends weekly updates and is working on having them translated. Liz mentioned that Park Ave PTO engages families through parent liaisons, one for Spanish and another for Portuguese. Dawn said the majority of their meetings are in those languages and the last meeting had about 20 parents in attendance.

- ✓ AIS PTO will incorporate more student assemblies, as requested. They have been successful in the past with Mobile Ed Productions and have done an Earth Dome, STEAM Museum, etc. This year, there will be a Sky Dome Planetarium and Spirit to Overcome assemblies. As a reminder, the AIS lottery opens on January 1 for all elementary grade levels. Rachel suggests to apply every year, as there is a high student churn rate. It seems several PTO's are working to purchase and install refillable water stations for their schools. Joe said that there were some installed by the district at several schools (Hayestown, Stadley Rough). A group of last year's AIS 5<sup>th</sup> grade students wrote a persuasive essay on the best type of drinking water and asked the PTO to help with this project. The PTO is willing to pay for the stations and labor, if needed. Rachel asked Joe for direction on proper approval procedures. Joe has pricing on stations from Grainger. To have the city install depends on their workload. The current Public Building Division is short-staffed and there is a growing list of winter issues. Joe said the PTO could purchase the units through the district, but the city is mindful of the installer. They must be licensed through the city. Rachel said there was a work order placed, but Joe recommended to hire and obtain approval from Rich Jalbert.
- ✓ DHS PTO held their last meeting a few weeks ago, which focused on Naviance, a web-based tool for college applications. There were many questions from families with middle and high school students, so the PTO hosted an informational session. Guidance councilors were unable to attend, but provided a slide deck. A parent, whose child is currently going through the application process, was able to show other parents how to navigate through the tool. The PTO received positive feedback and will likely hold the session again next year. Rich highly recommends the nation-wide tool, which may be found on the DHS website. Rich also had issues with moving forward on installing another water station. He said Sean Hanley could not assist with the installation until summer. The PTO had one installed and is seeking to install two additional units to replace existing fountains over the winter recess.

### Other Discussion

- ✓ Austin Hammar, a 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at KSI, spoke about the large teacher turnout at the previous Board of Education meeting. This was to raise awareness of the teacher workload and stress, which trickles down to the students. Many teachers are bringing work home to be done in the evenings and weekends. There is only so much that can be done in the school day and at home, while still maintaining a work life balance. Teachers are in their profession, because they love what they do for the children. Austin went through and graduated from Danbury public schools. He has been an educator for 11 years and has seen a lot of change in that time. Austin created a document that was distributed, in which shows the "academic matrix/pie" that divides the school day. With the deduction of funds and staff, teachers are further burdened by the state and local mandates. Austin directed the group to the second page of the handout, titled "A Classroom Teacher's Week," which depicts the majority of each school day spent on Math (60 min), Reading (60 min), Writing (50 min), Social Studies/Science (55 min) and Intervention Groups (30 min), as designated by the matrix. The "Read Aloud" portion (20 min) is often omitted to make up for time spent in other areas. He is reading the book "Holes" to his class and should have been able to finish weeks ago. Some students need additional phonics help and are being pulled out of the classroom during

other subjects, but then miss out on that instruction. Teachers are given one 40-minute prep time per day. Austin then referred to the first page of the packet, which lists various elementary-level assessments that he is aware of. He specifically pointed out the On-Demand Writing, which consists of three types (Narrative, Opinion, Informational) that a student must write within the year. With the new standard based report card, data points were increased from 25 to 66.

- ✓ Liz asked if Austin sees a significant drop in missed subjects for the students who are being pulled out of the classroom. Austin tries to arrange a time that correlates the classroom subject with the subject that student is receiving extra help. One teacher said at the elementary level, reading is the priority, so a student could be pulled from another subject to get reading help. A middle school teacher said that multiple programs for interventions were instituted at the middle school level. He teaches a phonics class. Students are being pulled from Social Studies. Lisa asked if phonics was removed from the curriculum and now being introduced. A South Street 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher mentioned an assessment called Core Phonics, which elementary students take three times per year; teachers are required to enter the data, although they do not administer the test. One teacher mentioned a lack of training for the middle school intervention program, which sparked an elementary teacher to mention the same for the Lucy Calkins program.
- ✓ Kathy Snow asked what can the PTO's do to support the teachers. Austin said that after teachers spoke at the last Board of Education meeting, district-wide communication relayed information about a committee that will investigate and gather information. A Google survey was distributed to select teachers. Austin did not offer another solution. Joe confirmed a committee that includes teachers and administrators across the district was initiated. It was asked if parents would be part of the committee. Joe said he did not think there were.
- ✓ A former district teacher spoke of her decision to transfer to another district based on this conversation. She has a child at the WMSA and is considering to pay for his education in the district she works.
- ✓ Vicky said parents complain to the PTO, but are not inclined to attend or speak at a Board of Education meeting. She is considering other options for her elementary school-aged son, who was identified as Talented and Gifted earlier in the year. Vicky said the Saturday program was full, so it was offered to cover the cost for her son to participate in the STEM Scouts program.
- ✓ Rick Vaughn grew up in Danbury, currently works as a Special Education teacher at BMS and has taught for almost 28 years. His father worked in the district for 49 years. The teachers care and are doing the best they can. He understands the financial constraints. He feels too much is scripted/micromanaged not only in Danbury. Young talent is leaving the district as a result. Teachers voices are not always heard or seen as complaining, but most everyone has the children's best interest at heart.
- ✓ Rachel has worked with the CT School Finance Project to set times for workshops in Danbury. Although the finance aspect will not solve the issue, the workshops include preparing testimony, Op-Ed letters, building relationships, etc., at local and state levels. If anyone is interested, she will provide an e-mail from Erika Haynes of the non-profit, state-wide organization. Katie Roy has presented several times in Danbury. Joe reminded the group

that the Board has hired a lobbyist. He and Dr. Sal have testified numerous times in Hartford. There is a new education formula, but will be phased in over 10 years.

- ✓ Vicky mentioned the shortage of substitute teachers. Interventionists are being reassigned to help back fill.
- ✓ Brian, a teacher at BMS, would like to know the outcome of the teacher surveys, how much involvement the parents and children have in the process, what and when are the next steps. Joe said that the forms are being received and will be reviewed. Brian said that multiple BMS teachers collectively gave input on the form, but asked how all involved - teachers, administrators, parents and students - can have an equal say. Parents should also have a vehicle, like the teacher survey, in which they can identify issues or concerns from their perspective. The issues should then be formally documented to work toward solutions.
- ✓ One teacher spoke about the time it takes to care for the whole child, including the social, emotional and physical needs. Aside from teaching the curriculum, she emphasized the importance to connect with a child.
- ✓ Another recognized the goal of the curriculum to address problems as kids progress through to high school, however, teacher input was not leveraged in the development of the new structure despite requests. She appreciated the survey, but it did not lend opportunity for other input. Teachers have requested to provide input on the new pacing calendar. Multiple programs or initiatives should be implemented gradually and not at the same time. A year should have been given to properly prepare and deliver the new middle school ELA and intervention programs, prior to additional change. She said she is creating 15 - 19 lesson plans per week to accommodate varying groups and learning levels.
- ✓ On behalf of the CWPTO, Rich thanked the teachers for coming to share their thoughts and insight. The CWPTO cares about the teachers' concerns. He expressed sympathy and encouraged more communication, such as through e-mail or speaking to the Board of Education. The PTO representatives can relay the information to their respective PTO's. Teachers are welcomed at all the PTO meetings.
- ✓ Joe also has clearly heard the position of the teachers present. He reminded the group that he sits on the cabinet with Dr. Sal. The district has put forth effort to reach all of its students. Some of the assessments, like STAR, were mandated by the state. There is concern around student achievement. He realizes the teachers' perspective and does not underscore their concerns, but the goal of the programs, such as the middle school intervention, Read 180, System 44, etc., is to benefit the children. The elementary math program has been gradually introduced by grade level. He assured the group that Dr. Sal is aware of the issues. The district has done some great things with very little and has endured despite its history of low resources. Last year was the first year that the district was faced with major cuts. The district will continue to find ways to thrive. Joe emphasized the disparity in resources that continue to decline across the district, at central office and throughout the schools, especially when communicating and comparing resources with other districts.

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

- ✓ Board of Education Meetings: January 10 & 24 at 7pm

✓ City-Wide PTO: January 8, 2018 at 6:30pm

Adjournment

✓ Rich thanked the teachers again for their attendance and utilizing the City-wide PTO. The meeting adjourned at 8:02pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Rachel Chaleski

City-Wide PTO Secretary