

ACCESS PTA
General Membership Meeting
January 21, 2010

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by David Fikstad at 6:37 p.m.
The ACCESS Green Team conducted a "waste audit" during the meeting.

PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A request was made to highlight the decisions made in the next set of minutes. Motion was made to submit the minutes to the record. Seconded. Motion passed.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Income notes:

- November meeting: the budget was adjusted due to shortfalls, but the success of recent fundraising efforts has led to a surplus of \$3000
- The Profit/Loss handout shows current financial standing in detail; circled money is already committed.

Requests for budget alterations: the budget committee made the following proposals for \$1350 in new spending, would leave \$1650 for future needs:

- Art budget: reinstate the original \$300 and add \$200
- PTA meeting child care: \$100
- Increase our budget for the Sabin Community garden (currently \$150), add an additional \$250
- Create a library budget, Ms. Gapp requested to exceed her teacher allowance (as a part time FTE, she gets \$350)
 - Sabin PTA's library budget is \$11,000
 - Establish a budget of \$500, could label the items purchased to move with us if we move
- Drama department has requested \$800 for guest artists, listed on back of agenda
 - He has not spent any of his allotment, he has used some funding from Sabin (approx. \$2500)

Discussion of budget requests:

- Drama
 - Kids are excited to do something with the songs they've learned during choir
 - Proposal is to do all of the classes, would it be possible to break them up?
 - Perhaps the artists might not be willing to do only an hour?
 - Is there a way to engage the upper grades? Not really due to the way that the specials are set up
- Library
 - Grades 1-4 have library class, 45-55 minutes per week, grades 5-8 do not have an organized time for a class
 - The teachers know that the library is open for them to check out books, but there is not a time for them to come.
- Information about "specials"

- The 4 “specials” for lower grades: drama, library, art, wellness
- The 2 “specials” for the upper grades: Wellness and Spanish
- The “specials” teachers can work with the middle grade classroom teachers
- Librarian and Drama instructor have not approached Mark to request funds
- The classroom teachers get a large budget so that for field trips they don’t have to ask for money from the parents.

Q: Is there inequity: the middle schoolers do not get as much money as the lower grades from the PTA?

A: The academic budget largely goes to the middle grades, but with this approval it would tilt towards the younger grades, though the Social activities budget does seem to benefit the upper grades more than lower grades

Q: Should we, if we increase the budget for drama, specify which guest artist we’re funding?

A: no, leave it to the instructor.

Q: When we cut the budget, what did we say we’d add back to when we had more money?

A; Communications was cut, probably for flyers and outreach; Health and wellness, was for a committee with Sabin; Legislative had \$150, possibly an optional contribution to support state legislative activities; Run for the arts: not a PTA activity, but PTA had bought food; Technology: \$2k, bought laptops; Yearbooks, was \$300, idea was to have people pay for them when we cut them, idea there was to offer financial aid for those who couldn’t pay for one (8th graders only)

Q: Concerns about unfairness to Sabin, whatever we don’t pay for, the idea behind it is that Sabin will then pay for it. It’s like we’re taking money from someone else

A: It is true that many of the things being discussed are largely funded by Sabin, but we’re trying to reinstate those categories first; and based on what people have stated that they “missed” having when we didn’t have enough money. Current Sabin PTA doesn’t seem to complain, but there may be echoes of previously contentious relations.

Counter-proposal: do not raise things back above the previously stated level; replace the things that are shared with Sabin first:

- Drama: not raise past \$300
- Put back spending for library and garden
- Can add childcare.
- Do not include items that are not helping to defray what Sabin is spending
- Proposal is to use \$675 for shared items.

Responses to counter-proposal:

- The proposal by the ACCESS budget committee seems like a reasonable balance
- Keep thinking about how we can be more equitable

Voting:

Motion made to add \$100 to the budget for childcare, seconded. Motion carries.
Motion made to increase garden budget to \$500, seconded. Motion carries.
Motion made to increase drama budget to \$500, seconded. 1 opposed, motion carries.
Motion made to approve \$500 for library budget, seconded. Motion carries.

PRINCIPAL REPORT: Mark Sandilands

State testing:

- Mobile lab working very well; router is very strong (comes with mobile cart) no cutting out from the laptops
- Have finished reading & math 3-8; hoping to get reports, most kids already know their results. For ACCESS: 100% meets, high percent exceeds
- The students do have the opportunity to re-test if they want to “exceed” but they are not allowed to retest to simply exceed their score
- ACCESS does not have a score “report card” like other schools, just goes in a district pool
- In the future, we would like to get the information out even though it is not published, will give the parents the report.
- Science testing will be the week of Jan. 25th for 5th and 8th grades
- Writing testing will be Feb. 8 for 4th and 7th grades
 - 7th grade will submit it online so they can print a draft, edit it and then submit it (we’re among the schools piloting this new method)

Q: Do their scores have any impact on approaches taken in their education?

A: No academic decisions are made from the scores.

- Teachers may look at it to help determine if they can handle a higher level; but the tests are at “grade level” so if they’re already being taught at a higher level, that wouldn’t help in academic placement.
- Writing does have an impact, trying to get the scores higher as it has historically been the weakest; in the past, scores have been in the low 80s, last year it was 100% for meeting but not exceeding

Prospective students:

- Information about applications and tours are posted on website, tours start next week, no more one-on-one, there will be 1 in the evening, 1 after school, 2x/week
- Teachers requested that they don’t walk in with a big group disrupting instruction time
- Application deadline: March 12 (for the first round, if there’s space, people may get in over summer)
- For Current year, could take 8th graders, other grades, don’t have space.
- New this year: ***Prospective Parents Information night, March 3, 2010 at 6:00 p.m.***; there will be short presentation, rooms will be open hope to have parents around for questions.

Q: Will prospective students still be allowed to sit in on a class?

A: Teachers have said it is disruptive, so as a policy will not be allowed, though in very exceptional circumstance could make a special arrangement

Q: Have there been a few new students during the course of this school year?

A: One 4th grader, got in off waitlist; one 1st grade replacement; still have people on waitlist

Staffing and location for next year:

- No idea yet about staffing, district usually releases numbers in mid-March, gives an allotment of staff for the number of students the program can take (200 for this year).
- **No information on new location**, or if we're staying at Sabin
- On the 28th having a meeting with principals of Sabin, Alameda, Beaumont, and PPS representative to talk about facility concerns and enrollment issues.
 - We need more space if we are supposed to grow.
 - Could be in another shared location, or an empty building
 - Sabin principal concerned about space, but Beaumont is losing people, since kids are staying at Sabin for 7-8, Alameda is packed

Q: Would they consider sending all of the middle schoolers at Sabin to Beaumont?

A: There is lots of discussion what to do with the K-8s, adjust boundaries, not sure how it impacts us, but we need to be there to find out what their schools need. Makes more sense to keep all of ACCESS together.

Q: Current numbers?

A: Need to keep our total enrollment number at 200 in order to keep the current number of staff, so some classes are 21 kids, some have 31. If district says we need to grow, we'd need to balance it by grades; as kids move up, the current grades will have to split into 2 sections.

Q: What about blended grades? Could there be a 2/3 grade and a 3/4 grade?

A: Depends on what the district says and what we get in terms of applications. Had not planned on having 1/2 blends this year, but that's how it had to be done. Should start to see more kids qualify for ACCESS when the Naglieri test is given across the board in 2nd grade

Q: What is the district considering about retesting? For currently enrolled, could put kids in an uncomfortable situation?

A: There is no re-evaluation, once you're TAG you stay TAG. Parents can determine if the program no longer is appropriate for his/her student.

Q: Good that there's going to be more equity in terms of testing, but if the 1st grades fill up through word of mouth, then once they find out in 2nd grade they would qualify, there's a chance there'd be no space?

A: Trying to get the word out. Sent out fliers to all school counselors and TAG coordinators (TAG coordinator could be a teacher, asst principal or principal) to all schools with kids in 8th grade and under.

Q: Any experiences where people want to apply but can't afford the testing?

A: In PPS, they've been able to get them into the schools while they're doing the testing, can work with the TAG dept to find another school doing the testing.

Q: Would we want to put money aside to give testing scholarships?

A: Families in need do get help; Mark will keep track of requests to get a private tests.

Q: What is the retention rate? Are there a lot of people who leave?

A: Under 10 per year usually; this year 4 students moved, 1 decided to home school, 1 went to private, 1 back to neighborhood school. Approximately 8-10 per year. We also have students transfer in from out of district, and if the home district revokes their intra-district transfer, the students must stay in their district.

NEW BUSINESS

Alison Abell

High school re-design:

- Focusing on getting the district to look at TAG students needs in the HS redesign
- Had good turnout/parent support

Conference:

- ACCESS has attracted "quirky" students, some have specific diagnoses, may also have social/emotional issues, or Aspergers/spectrum, considered "Twice Exceptional" (2E)
- There's a 2E conference in March in D.C., presenters are experts and teachers, would be great to have a ACCESS few teachers attend this 3-day conference
- 1 parent has already offered \$400 which would cover 1 attendee, another parent has offered miles
- Would like to use BigTent to see if **other parents would be willing would help sponsor trips for teachers** through monetary donations and/or miles
- David and Amaya stated that use of BigTent for this purpose would be appropriate
- \$400 is just conference, breakfast and lunch
- Providing them with this information would benefit all students, since these students can require more teacher time

Q: Aren't there other conferences here?

A: Yes, but this is truly an exceptional set of speakers; all teachers have had to become subject matter experts

Q: Is there a parent library for ACCESS parents focusing on related issues?

A: Could probably do a volunteer-based parent lending library. Mark will make a request for space for such lending library.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TAG advisory council: Monday at board meeting they'll be revealing the first version of the HS redesign

Judy Berck (submitted information in advance):
ACCESS has already raised more than \$1k for Haiti

Garden Committee:

So many classes want plots they will be adding new ones
Families are encouraged to participate, *Saturday, Feb. 20 from 9:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.* will be building new raised beds

New Green Team newsletter was released online

VISITING SPEAKER

Dr. Kingsum Chow, Lego robotics report
With Andrew Migliores, parent volunteer for 1st-3rd graders

Presented a Powerpoint presentation regarding the history of Lego Robotics at ACCESS, and how to move forward. Full content can be seen under "files" on BigTent.

Summary:

- Lots of parents helping
- Will need more parents to help as coaches, there will be experienced coaches to help them
- Not asking for money, Lego Robotics is funded by volunteers who get funded by their companies for their time
- Got money from PTA last year, do not need money this year
- Struggle to find enough coaches
- Kids do the work, guided by parents; big job of the coach is to get them to focus and encourage them to work as a team
- In Junior Lego League, everyone wins
- In First Lego League, building a robot is not the only thing they do, judged on
 - Robot performance
 - Robot Design
 - Project Presentation (research project)
 - Teamwork: everyone helps each other to do a task

Q: How does research fit in?

A: Research must involve finding a way to create something that benefits the community, not related to robotics, sometimes the kids do not want to the research

- Next year's theme: Body Forward
- Want to present to the teachers

- Maybe have day camps during spring quarter, try to continue a Friday after school program
- 1:10 ratio is way too few adults
- Maybe Saturday workshop as well
- Have experienced kids come in to help
- Summer will have some day camps
- Reorganizing teams in the future

Problems from last year: had students that joined just for fun, and some that wanted to do well, can't mix well. Options to help solve this dilemma?

- Maybe charge a Fee
- Spell out time commitment
- Have them write an essay explaining why they'd like to join

Could they do a SUN program?

Just have a team focused on the robot building?

Have a parent who'd be willing to lead a team just for "fun"?

- Tried that on Friday after school: robot and laptop, for 9 Fridays after school, but kids would only show up sometimes, and still didn't focus

Current focus is on getting coaches; there are lots of interested kids.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:41 p.m.