

MINUTES

Horsemen PTA Minutes

March 23, 2021 | 7:30pm | *Meeting called to order by* Christina Grillo

In Attendance

Board Members in Attendance: Christina Grillo (President); Andrea Williamson (Secretary); Brianna Staudt (VP Website, 1st & 2nd Grade); Christina Papadopolous (VP 1st Grade); Lauren McBride (VP Fundraising, VP 2nd Grade & 4th Grade); Juliana Aloia (VP 4th Grade); Neelima Reddy (Spiritwear Coordinator); Mitch Sylves-Berry (Rivertown Parents); Mechtild Steinert (VP 8th Grade); Maribel Correa (Treasurer); Sophia Rana (VP 5th Grade); Krista Barron (VP pre-K and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion); Allison Madrigal (Co-Vice President); Leslie Rosario (VP MS); Leah McVey (VP 8th Grade); Carla Garrido (VP 5th Grade); Samantha Ford-Godette (VP); Daphne Uviller (VP 6th Grade); Dana Tavano (VP Kindergarten); Katy Lough (VP Kindergarten); Beth Provincher (Spiritwear Coordinator); Brenda Rodrigues (Vice President); Elissa Smith (VP Grade 3 & Social Worker Coordinator)

Guests: Fay Serafica (Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Committee)

General Hello's and Introductions

Christina welcomed board members as they joined, and formally kicked off at 7:31. She mentioned Mr. Borsari will join the call promptly at 7:30, to speak to us about the budget, the return to 5 days of in-person learning, and address any other questions. Christina also noted we have a packed agenda to cover!

Mr. Borsari Superintendent Update

Mr. Borsari gave an update on the school year thus far and what is ahead in the year. On May 18th, there will be a vote for the 2021-2022 school budget, and to fill three trustee seats that are open for election. Mr. Borsari is hoping that we'll have competitive elections again, as we have in the past year or two.

It's a challenging year, more so than ever, for this coming years' budget. There has been work underway since December, as the team works to reduce the budget deficit. He described some of the challenges specific to this year, of changing sources of funds and policies, and the nuances of various sources of funds, including timing, how amounts are calculated, and various limitations. For example, one requirement of funding from the Cares Act is to spend 20% of funds on learning loss, which could be spent on summer programs, and additional supports over the next 3 years to support students in the school.

Mr. Borsari spoke to the challenges of running the school district this year during the Pandemic. He spoke to the many decisions that the administration has had to make that have made many parents and other stakeholders unhappy, which has been a challenge. He noted that all of their decisions have been made thoroughly with the best interests of the students, staff, and families in mind, while managing through considerable ambiguity. The guiding principles the administration has used to make decisions has been to ensure the safety and health of students and staff, and have students in-person in school as much as possible.

The students will transition to all in-person instruction between April 7th for elementary students, through to April 12th for middle school, and April 14th for the highschool students. The district purchased ~15 large 20x20 tents that will be set up outside of each school, along with 40 additional picnic tables to allow students to

be outside as much as possible (weather of ~50 degrees or warmer, and even with some light rain), particularly for lunch. Each school will be managed differently.

Mitch asked the ratio of students who chose to stay remote. Overall, it is an 80/20 split for in-person / remote. The ratios are the highest at JP and Morse at 82% - 86%, while the lowest ratios are at the Highschool, which is ~60% desiring in-person.

Maribel asked what ratio of teachers and administrators had been vaccinated. Mr. Borsari noted that they do anonymous tracking, and ~80%+ of respondents have received the vaccine. Roughly 300 of 500 teachers and staff have responded, with teachers having a higher percentage in the upper 80% range vs 70% range for staff. [Christina, did I get these numbers right? If not sure, I can take out and vaguely reference.]

Mr. Borsari expects that many of the procedures in place this year will be carried over into the 2021/2022 school year, including the wearing of masks, cracked windows, cleaning procedures, traffic flows, and other precautions. Starting 5 days a week in-person will help the entire district (staff, teachers, students and parents) plan and be prepared for the next school year.

Mr. Borsari spoke to the changing quarantine requirements specified by the Department of Health, and how the relaxation of quarantining requirements improved the districts' ability to successfully support in-person learning. He mentioned that required quarantines were 95 in January and February (42 per month), vs ~1,100 between September and December (275 per month). The high number of required quarantines by teachers and administrators required Morse and JP to be closed for multiple weeks in the fall. Mr. Borsari was positive on the revised quarantine rules, noting that the District can point to just a handful of cases where transmission took place on school property, mostly amongst staff.

Sophia asked Mr. Borsari if the district is investigating installing air purifiers into each classroom. Mr. Borsari noted that the district is looking at a few options, but that air purifiers are quite expensive and would cost \$1,000,000 or more. For the remainder of this year, we will not have air purifiers, but have the benefit of the warmer weather to hold windows open wide to improve ventilation, in addition to plans to use the outdoors as much as possible with the purchase of the large tents and outdoor tables. Mr. Borsari also noted that the district has spent \$1.1 million on COVID related items, including \$117,000 for the plastic dividers that were just purchased, the costs of the new tents, chromebooks to ensure each student had one, and over \$300,000 of cleaning supplies.

DEI Committee Roadmap

Brianna reviewed the roadmap document, which is broken into 3 parts; 1) take-away's from the listening sessions; 2) identified goals for the PTA based on the feedback; and 3) the action plan with timing, owners, and budget to achieve the stated goals.

There were 7 key take-away's from the session, that largely covered how the hispanic community struggles to connect with the school community and the PTA, and some specific struggles they face.

Brianna then summarized 9 action items the team has proposed. Highlights are covered below, but full details can be found in the DEI Roadmap Presentation. [Christina/Bri, is it appropriate to link the document?]

The first action item identified is to revisit and re-detail the role of the class parents and grade VP's, and ensure there are hispanic and/or fluent spanish speakers for each grade. Another action is to hold a PTA recruitment event in Spanish, including food and child activities, using \$400 from the National PTA grant funds. There are two action items focused on improving communication channels to HS and MS families, including a new HS

club/program where HS students could provide advocacy to families. Mitch noted that there is a group in the HS that helps new students integrate, and that building from this initiative may be a helpful starting point.

The group is also suggesting that the PTA (and the district) increases use of instant (text) messaging, including Remind. To support the use of WhatsApp, there is a \$150 budget allocation to utilize Google Voice - 5 months @ \$10/month.

There is also a plan to explore anti-bias or inclusion training for PTA board members and class parents. NYS PTA and National PTA do provide resources that can be used to help with this training.

The last action item was to make PTA meetings more accessible, including Spanish translation, and agendas re-worked to move any housekeeping items to an executive session. Christina suggested another solution is to host a quarterly meeting for general membership, with the other monthly meetings being focused on the executive board. Mitch also suggested reaching out to other Rivertown PTA's on how they engage with their membership. Leah suggested one avenue for achieving greater membership engagement would be further engagement of the class parents. Brenda also suggested that we host some meetings with either guest speakers or key subjects to the broader membership (e.g. when Chris Borsari joins our meetings). Brianna and the DEI team were appreciative of the suggestions, and will re-work this action item to accommodate the feedback.

Brianna asked the board for a vote on agreeing to the proposed action items. The board voted unanimously in support of the actions discussed. The next step is to submit to the National PTA.

Nominating Committee and Executive Slate for 2021/2022 School Year

The Nominating Committee has prepared the following slate:

President: Sophia Rana

Vice Presidents: Allison Madrigal and Brenda Rodriguez

Secretary: Fay Serafica

Treasurer: Brianna Staudt

The slate will be voted on during the upcoming April meeting.

Andrea also shared a recommendation from the committee, to re-visit some of the roles of the President and find other owners amongst the Vice Presidents and other Executive Board roles. She shared the difficulties the Nominating Committee had in filling the President position, similar to the situation 2 years prior. The committee is suggesting that the Board looks for ways to make the President role less daunting for future years, and to best support Sophia for this upcoming year.

Christina noted that we would discuss this in further detail in the next agenda topic.

Secretary Update - Bylaws and Procedures

Our bylaws expire after 3 years in October, so we are working to renew them. There is a standard PTA template for by-laws, which allow modification to a limited number of around ten terms. Following this meeting, Andrea will distribute the draft bylaws via email, to allow the board a month to review. At our next meeting, we will have a vote to adopt the new bylaws.

Andrea suggested that we implement a new set of Procedures, to complement the bylaws. The Procedures would document how the PTA is structured and administered and give a brief description for the various roles and committees. This will also serve as a helpful on-boarding document for new PTA members and each year as board members take on new positions. Andrea mentioned keeping the document “light” so that it is easy to reference, read, and keep updated. She asked the board for those interested in helping with this effort to join a new committee to draft. As part of this effort, we will also look at the roles and responsibilities of the various board members, to ensure that the responsibilities are aligned to the most appropriate roles. Christina emphasized that this is not to say that any current board member has not done a great job. She complemented the existing board for their dedication and commitment, and reiterated that these are to make improvements and enhancements to the PTA, versus corrections.

Brenda shared that her non-profit organization recently updated their by-laws with the help of an expert firm that included many topics that address how the organization should be run. These included sections on conflicts of interest, how new committees are established, the role of the board, and other important terms.

Andrea asked that anyone interested in helping with this effort reach out to her after the board meeting.

Community Wardrobe Update

Daphne shared that they became aware of a house on Dell Street that may have availability to house the Community Wardrobe (the house is owned by the Reformed Dutch Church). However, they learned thereafter that the house requires a Certificate of Occupancy before it can be utilized. Elissa’s husband is an Architect who walked the site, and suggested that the group focus on a 2-car garage and perhaps an entry room that would be sufficient space for the wardrobe. The group drafted a letter to the town building department and town trustees to ask for temporary approval to use just the garage. The letter is to be sent from the Church. The town trustees are aware that this request is coming. In the meantime, the clothes will need to be packed up from the current location, before April 7th. The Wardrobe was able to obtain all of the needed clothing racks thanks to a community member, whose company had excess racks that she was able to obtain. The DPW is also offering to help, in moving clothing and racks to storage and the new location. It was suggested that, if needed, the clothes could possibly be stored in the Pods that the district had been using for excess desk storage.

Elissa mentioned the shout-out that the community wardrobe received in the daily NYS Coronavirus Update emailed from Governor Cuomo. Immediately after the email was sent, we received several emails with offers to help from all over the state! Some of the local outreach has proven helpful.

So far, 125 families have been able to sign up to shop at the Community Wardrobe.

Scholastic Outdoor Book Fair

This year we will host an elementary-wide book fair outside over two weekends, April 24/25 and May 1 (May 2 rain date) outside of JP. The fair will run from 10am - 4pm, with ~30 minute visits, and 10-12 families at a time staggered at 15 minute intervals, to assure social distancing. We will need volunteers to help manage the fair - 2 additional volunteers at a time.

The book fair is a “quick set-up” all in cases (9 total) except one table of supplies. The cases will be stored in the JP all-purpose room. There will be only one opportunity to re-stock after the first weekend. The logistics around Teacher Wish Lists are still pending, perhaps just limited to the books in the flyers, that teachers can select in an online google form.

Brianna and Andrea are targeting raising \$500 All For Books via fundraising efforts, which will require additional efforts in addition to "Rounding Up at the register". Some ideas are a pencil pull for \$1, and/or a virtual way of fundraising in advance via a potential new VENMO account (TBD). Students selected by the Social Workers in each school will receive a \$5 voucher to spend at the fair.

There will be teacher reading nights, one night per school. We will gather a list of topics for each school VP's to discuss with their respective principals (wish lists, All for Books, Posters and Flyers, Reading Nights, etc).

It was noted that there have been 14 volunteers who have offered to help at the book fair thus far. [I can't remember who added this and where the volunteers were captured.]

Teacher Appreciation Lunches

Lauren noted that the four Principals held a meeting, and have agreed to host teacher appreciation lunches. The suggestion is to use the budgeted funds to purchase individually wrapped bagels. Requests will go out to parents to provide accompaniments including drinks, cream cheeses, bags of chips, and apples.

Committee Updates

Rivertown Parents: Mitch to distribute an update separately via email due to time constraints.

School Updates

JP: For the week following Spring Break, JP will host mindful activities to help welcome students back to the building. For Teacher Appreciation, school VP's will share a daily message of thanks to teachers.

Morse: Principals owe a building update to families by tomorrow with information on what school will look like after the break. Many details, like lockers, snacks, and lunches, are still being finalized. There is still a food ban on bringing in outside food.

WI: Similar to Morse, Mr. Holland is working on return-to-school logistics, to be shared tomorrow.

MS: Daphne pointed to the meeting minutes, which were just distributed. The school is anticipating a return of 85% of students. Daphne thought the teachers would greatly appreciate a "daily affirmation" during Teacher Appreciation week.

Meeting Adjourned

Christina closed the meeting at 9:52, thanking everyone for their engagement during a very long and packed meeting. The next board meeting is scheduled for April 16th at 8:30pm.