

Highcrest Middle School PTO

General Meeting Minutes

April 4, 2007

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the March 7, 2007 meeting were approved.

Teacher's Reports - Hilary Harvey

The 6th grade teachers thanked the PTO for the funding of the Stock Market Game. The children are fully involved with this now and seem to be having fun with it (and even making some profits on paper). The Science Expo is over and they have moved on to making space rovers while studying astronomy. In Social Studies, they are covering ancient civilizations and Rome.

Principal's Report - Elizabeth Brown

There are lots of 6th grade end-of-year activities coming up, like Field Day, the outdoor band concert and the party at Gilson Park. Watch for more information soon.

The last round of standardized testing, the Terra Nova tests, will be administered next week. 5th graders will be tested in language arts and math, while the 6th grade will take only the math portion. These are the final tests that will help identify accelerated math and language arts students. These tests tap more into critical thinking and processing than previous tests did.

Transition forms for placement have been distributed and are due back in the office on Friday, April 13. Meetings are also underway with the 4th grade teachers to determine placement for incoming 5th graders.

Committee Reports

Civil War Picture Day - Maggie Belliel

Mary Lawlor needs help on this day - please contact her if you can assist.

President's Report - Maggie Belliel and Jenny Frentzel

Botanic Garden Enrichment Project - The executive board approved \$1000 for this project for the 5th graders, which will take place later in spring.

Great Books -- The executive board also voted to support a pilot of this program, which will initially be administered through the principal's office. It will require minimal funding: \$150/parent who volunteers to lead a group.

Environmental Awareness - This is Environmental Awareness Month, so please watch the Headlines for more information on PTO-sponsored activities.

Highcrest Board for 2007-2008 year - The slate of nominees was voted on, and approved. The board for next year will be:

Co-President/Past President: Maggie Belliel

Co-President: Jenny Frentzel

Secretary: Pepe Miller

Treasurer: Patti Ray

Legislation (1st VP): Lori Goldstein

Ways & Means (2nd VP): Alison Bischoff

Ways & Means (3rd VP): Barb Shields

Enrichment (4th VP): Margaret Flanagan

Room Parents/Volunteers (5th VP): Mary Ellen Laue

Special Events (6th VP): Dina Mead

Communications (7th VP): Monica Creighton

Community (8th VP): Mary Foster

PTO Meetings -- Jenny & Maggie proposed the idea of changing the meeting schedule for the next school year slightly. Rather than a monthly meeting, there would be 4-5 meetings per year, with 2 of those taking place in the evening. The focus would be on finding high-quality speakers that have topics of interest to Highcrest parents.

Highcrest Headlines -- This will now be distributed electronically on the Friday of each week (containing news regarding the upcoming week). Dr. Rosen will send these to parents via email.

Highcrest Hawk - Deadline for the May/June issue is April 15. This is the last issue for this school year.

Science Saturday - There will be a space-exploration presentation done by Wilmette's resident astronaut on April 21, from 3-4pm at the Junior High.

Transitioning to Wilmette Junior High - Dr. David Palzet, Principal WJHS and Kelly Hansen, Assistant Principal, WJHS

Dr. Palzet and Ms. Hansen spoke on transitioning to the Junior High. There will also be a parent orientation meeting for 6th grade parents in May.

WJHS will have approximately 860 students next year, and employs a classic middle school model of team teaching. Typically, there are 5-

teacher teams, with approximately 130 students in those teams. There is a teacher for reading, writing, math, science and social studies, with a special education teacher assigned to each team as well. There is one 2-teacher team in both 7th and 8th grade, which can ease the transition for some students and also makes placement easier when enrollment fluctuates.

WJHS employs a looping model for the administrators. The principal, assistant principal and certain specialists/social workers will stay with their students when they move from 7th to 8th grade. For example, this year Dr. Palzet is the administrator for the 7th graders, and Ms. Hansen has 8th grade – next year, Dr. Palzet will loop in order to continue as the administrator for the 8th graders, while Ms. Hansen will be the administrator for the incoming 6th graders.

Junior High is a time for students to experiment with as many activities as possible, to determine what they like to do. In 7th grade, all students experience 6-week rotations in subjects like drama and music, while in 8th grade, students get to choose which electives they would like to study. In P.E., students also get to choose electives (i.e. soccer, yoga, fitness classes), which change each quarter.

Health classes in 7th grade focus on mental health and bullying/teasing, while in 8th grade, they focus on your changing body, and substance use/peer pressure. Technology is infused into regular classroom work. Technology teachers may do some co-teaching in the classroom. Differentiation teachers try not to pull the students out of class, but will rather use flexible groupings and creative assignments to assist the students.

Extracurricular activities are very important at WJHS. Dr. Palzet noted that 55% of middle school learning is done via academics, while 45% is done in extracurriculars. There will be a new non-cut sport implemented each year. Currently, basketball, volleyball, soccer and cross-country are available. Field hockey and dance are also available for girls only and this coming year, wrestling will be available for the boys (with Dr. Palzet as coach). In the following year, track and field will be offered. These teams are all interscholastic sports, and are part of the IESA, which means that they can compete in regional and state tournaments.

As for clubs, there are 8-15 offered each session and are based on what students have specifically asked for. Student Council and Yearbook are year-round clubs. The students can also participate in a yearly musical –

this year, they are performing “Fiddler on the Roof”. Youth Connection sponsors the “DEN”, which is a supervised after-school “chill-out” area. They also sponsor a Homework Club and a Battle-of-the-Bands event.

Student and family resources are also very important at WJHS. All teachers make themselves available to offer extra help to students. For example, the 7th grade math teachers are all available after school on Thursdays to provide extra guidance on classwork/homework. There is also a math resource available during lunchtime hours.

Dr. Palzet is a strong proponent of open communication and parents get many emails and monthly ConnectEd phone calls from him on various school topics. WJHS does not employ a Homework Hotline, but rather uses the online www.localendar.com, which provides weekly/monthly assignments at a glance. Students can even print out worksheets that they may have forgotten in their lockers. Another site, www.Schoolnotes.com is also employed, and is more teacher-specific. The goal is for the students to manage their studying independently by the time they leave for high school. The WJHS Wire is a monthly school newsletter, sent via email. The WJHS Highlights are the weekly update that is also sent via email.

There are 2 lunch periods – one for each grade. The period is 40 minutes long, with 20 minutes for eating and 20 minutes for recess. The school day extends from 8:00am to 2:46pm.

There is a 7th and 8th grade Band, a Jazz Band and an Orchestra. They practice 5 days per week, starting at 7:00am. Sectionals occur once a week. These groups compete all over the state. This is a graded class at WJHS. The orchestra practices at Marie Murphy school and is bussed back to WJHS before school begins.

The first few weeks of 7th grade may be a tough transition for some – the school day starts much earlier, kids need to dress for gym, changing classrooms means that students are often late to class, and homework may be much tougher than at the middle school. But after 2-4 weeks, most kids will adjust. If the transition period takes longer than this, feel free to call Dave or Kelly to discuss it. There will be plenty of transition activities in the next few months to help the students: Highcrest kids will go to the Junior High to see the musical and will return in May for a tour of the building; and there will be a 2-hour orientation for 7th graders near the end of August.

As for placement, the student services coordinator, Mary Ward will get

input from every 6th grade teacher and from the parent-input forms. Dr. Palzet encouraged all parents to give input into this process so that good decisions could be made upfront regarding placement. He noted that they do try to put twins/triplets in the same team, but with different teachers - this helps parents coordinate schedules better.

A question came from a parent regarding homework. 60-90 minutes of homework per night is common and team teachers try to coordinate homework so that a child isn't overloaded on any given night. Some kids can get a jump on their homework during lunchtime.

Another question was asked regarding homeroom. The Homeroom Advisory is 10-minutes long on M/T/W and Friday and is limited to general announcements. On Thursdays, homeroom is 37 minutes long and is focused on team building activities.

Minutes submitted by Kathy Freedman