

Highcrest Middle School PTO

General Meeting Minutes

March 7, 2007

Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the February 7, 2007 meeting were approved.

Teacher's Reports - Katie Fox & Hilary Harvey

All staff/faculty members thanked the PTO for the Valentine Day cookies.

Teachers reported that there are lots of classroom projects going on - including the 6th grade Science Fair.

Jodi Macauley sent a report stating that in her 6th grade Nothing But the Truth (by Avi) unit, some students chose to read another piece of literature outside of this class novel. The other books (Call of the Wild, The Outsiders and Julius Caesar) had been alluded to in Avi's work. The students then discussed why these works had been included in the original novel, and wrote letters to the author explaining their thoughts. The kids were thrilled when Avi actually wrote back.

Principal's Report - Dr. Cathy Rosen

Students will be taking the ISAT's this week during the first 1.5 hours of school. Teachers will rotate their daily schedule so that the kids don't miss the same class everyday.

Dr. Rosen is doing "transition talks" at the local elementary schools. Fourth graders receive a "Kids Guide to Highcrest" booklet. A letter will go home this week regarding placement - input is welcomed from parents for placement in both 5th and 6th grade classrooms. The Wilmette Junior High will also be sending letters home to 6th grade parents asking for input on placement for 7th graders. Dr. Palzet from the Junior High will be at our PTO meeting next month.

A question came up regarding all of the project work that the students are now doing. Dr. Rosen explained that middle school children retain the most when they "produce" something while learning about a particular topic. - this method is an excellent learning tool for them.

Another question arose regarding the fact that some 5th grade teachers

separate the kids for the discussions on the reproductive system and others do not. Dr. Rosen explained that teachers try to determine what is best for their class, but that it might help to poll the students to see what they are most comfortable with.

A third question came up regarding field trips - though our PTO enrichment committee plans many field trips throughout the year, some teachers plan their own just for their classroom. Some parents felt that field trips should be consistent across the board, while other parents liked the idea that teachers were thinking creatively about what was best for their class. It was suggested that perhaps teachers pass on their ideas to the enrichment committee for consideration for the whole grade.

President's Report - Maggie Belliel and Jenny Frentzel

Highcrest Nominating Committee - There are still plenty of open positions. Please contact Eileen Noren if you are interested in a position for the 2007-2008 school year.

Variety Show - 35 acts will be performing this year on Friday, March 16. Please come out to support these kids - tickets are on sale now. The show will last approximately 1.5 hours and will be held at the Junior High.

Book Fair - Thank you for supporting this. Early results are that it was as profitable (or perhaps more profitable) than last year. All proceeds will go to the Library Media Center.

Highcrestpalooza - Thank you to those who bought tickets and special thanks to the coordinators of the event. It was a fun event for all who came, though attendance might have been light because of the bad snowstorm that day.

Teacher Appreciation -- Thanks to the Hospitality Committee for coordinating the baking and packaging of the Valentine's cookies for the teachers.

Rock for Reading - Over 400 books were donated and approximately \$50,000 was collected by the district for this fundraiser that will serve underprivileged schools.

Last Day of School - This has been changed to June 8th.

Bulls Night - 74 tickets were sold. Thanks to Margie Levinson for organizing this.

Village-Wide PTO issues - A committee has been established to improve the quality of food in our cafeterias and to study the Accuscan system. They hope to implement a food coordinator that would span all District 39 schools. All deep-fat frying has been phased out in the cafeterias.

Night-time PTO Meetings - Approximately 25 people attended the February night meeting. We are hoping to have two night meetings

during the next school year to accommodate those parents that cannot attend morning meetings.

Highcrest Headlines – This weekly bulletin will be online starting in the fall, though there may be an online trial after Spring Break. Distributing this electronically will save the PTO from making 1000 copies per week. Anyone who wants to get the Headlines electronically can email Dr. Rosen.

Feedback – Jenny mentioned that she and Maggie would welcome feedback on how the PTO operated this year and suggestions for the future.

Committee Reports

Bylaws Committee – Lori Goldstein

Lori conducted a vote to amend the bylaws – the vote passed. The amendment suggests a restructuring of the board. She thanked the committee for all of their help.

5th Grade Enrichment – Laurie Cavalier and Beth Miller

On March 16 and March 20, the 5th grade classes will take a field trip to the Naper Settlement. In upcoming weeks, they will also see “Orphan Train”, a presentation by the Northwestern theatre group, and will participate in Civil War Days (parents can also attend this).

6th Grade Enrichment – Susan Campbell and Tina Palmer

The Night Sky Viewing which was cancelled will be rescheduled – more information will be coming soon. The Stock Market Game is underway during classroom math time. The “Arthur Live” and “Chain Gang” presentations will be occurring in the next 2 months.

CRC Initiatives – Keith Dronen

The Community Review Committee (CRC) was formed in 1973 as a parent/teacher/administrator advisory group. The committee obtains topics of interest from the community and then researches that subject for up to 1-2 years. Many of the district’s School Improvement Plans have adopted the CRC’s ideas and suggestions. Wellness and mentoring are the research topics for this year.

Last year, the CRC started looking at progress reporting and how it can be improved and possibly streamlined for all K-8 students. Dr. McGee agrees that a district wide reporting system would be helpful, and that report cards should be sent home to all students on the same dates. A leadership committee has been formed to pursue this topic. Some further

ideas they will consider are:

- * refining the purpose for the “meet & greet” and the curriculum nights
- * considering an “intake” meeting, where a parent could give feedback to a teacher regarding their child’s learning methods at the beginning of a school year
- * redoing the actual reporting system itself – some districts have moved to online reporting

Also last year, the CRC looked in-depth into gender differences in learning. In the past few years, District 39 has noticed a widening gap between boys and girls particularly in language arts, science and math achievement, with the boys lagging behind. The CRC looked at ways to improve learning for both boys and girls, noting that this need not be a zero-sum game. Some of the recommendations included:

- * building a database to better track performance and scores of the children, particularly as they move from one school to the next
- * tying more closely into New Trier’s system, so that we don’t lose track of our student’s performance once they leave the district

As mentioned above, Mentoring is a topic that is being studied this year. The CRC is conducting surveys with teachers and looking at “benchmark” districts to see how they handle mentoring. The goals are to increase the probability of success for new teachers, increase parent satisfaction, and increase the chances of success for the students of newer educators.

Wellness is the other topic that the CRC will tackle this year. This concept is so encompassing that the CRC first needed to define it. Wellness covers the mental health, nutrition, physical fitness and personal safety of our children. The committee is hoping to write a “wellness policy” for the district and create a handbook to distribute to the schools.

A parent in the audience asked if it was possible for the kids to have an advisor at Highcrest and the Junior High, and have consistency with this person for all 4 years. Dr. Rosen noted that she is looking at this as part of the School Improvement Plan.

Any parent/faculty/staff member that has questions or ideas for the CRC can email Keith at kdronen@ameritech.net.

Minutes submitted by Kathy Freedman