

## **PTO Meeting March 4, 2008**

**Attendance:** Dawn Wolf, Joanne Errera, Eileen Colonese, Randi Thureson, Maureen Callahan, Dan Carson, Marc Finkelstein, Ericka Ganley, Lisa Abrams, Stephanie Sanzo, Megan Kelley, Sandi Girolamo, Marina Wright, Stephen Foresi, Sharon Lichota, Heather Servidone

Dawn started the meeting by addressing some old business which was the January minutes. Dawn reminded everyone to be checking the website for the minutes so we can save on the paper. Dawn had one copy for review. Motion to approve, it was seconded. Minutes were approved.

Dawn made some introductions. Dr. Mark Finkelstein and Mr. Dan Carson from the Board of Ed. Mr. Carson will be giving a field house presentation. Dawn asked if they could give us a few bullet points on what is going on with the board right now.

Mr. Carson commented on the quiet negotiations with the mayor and the counsel regarding the budget which will go forward relatively intact. Their primary goal is that instruction and curriculum stay intact as well as classroom sizes. They felt the budget that was passed reflected that concern. They are pleased that so far the school year has been a quiet year and they are thankful for that. They feel Newington is one of the best school systems in the state and that we were unjustly reflected in the media. A report will be presented in the next couple of weeks that will show that our schools are safe and secure and are at the benchmark that others are striving to achieve. This is not just an internal look, but also observations from a third party. Their full report will be received on the 12<sup>th</sup> and they will make their presentation on the 25<sup>th</sup> to the council.

Mr. Finkelstein spoke about increasing the technology level of what the children will be exposed to. Even at the high school level they are introducing World Business which took the place of a general business course. Our children will be exposed to this world and they are adapting to meet that need. They are expanding the math curriculum in middle schools – getting it earlier and being able to take more advanced classes as they get into the high school.

He made note that some of the procedures that are in place now have been in the works for a while and they just came into being after the bad incidents last year. ID cards were in the works well before the incidents. They have kept up a tough zero tolerance policy. It sends a strong message to the other children and they feel it's worked very well. As parents of young children we should rest assured that the people on the board have our best interests in mind. He personally moved to Newington for the quality of the schools and wants to ensure us they are working to keep that standard.

They opened it up to questions or comments. There were none but they reminded everyone they can call at any time with questions.

Mr. Carson started his presentation on the field house. He gave a history of the field house and spoke about the increase in the different sports that have the need now to use the field house. Athletic program supports 25 different sports now and field 57 teams and participation is growing. They are faced with the growing demands of the students who want to participate in sports. They want to offer off-season conditioning as well as injury prevention programs. Expanded locker rooms needed, especially for the girls. Lavatory and showers need improvement; need storage for equipment – at the moment they are stored outside in containers; need an instruction area year round so the students can possibly work on homework. They are here to look for money to help complete this project. They need \$800,000 to complete the project. They have \$425,000 from the town, so they are short \$375,000. This year they want to raise \$275,000 through fundraising. One of their fundraising aspects is through corporate sponsorship; they have been fairly successful so far. Another campaign is the Buy-A-Brick campaign. You buy a brick for a nominal cost which goes into the walkway of the new complex. He is happy to follow up on any leads anyone has regarding companies they might work for that might be interested in donating. All donations qualify for a 501c3. Ways PTOs can help – we can organize a buy-a-brick effort, give time or share ideas on how we can raise the funds, make a donation. Showed a picture of what the bricks could look like. He spoke about how important it is for us to give our female athletes the best possible opportunity to advance and at present time that need is not being met for the females. He thanked us for our time and hopes we choose to help the cause. He mentioned that E. Green PTA donated \$1,000. He understands there are priorities at John Paterson that we have to fund but he hopes we will give some consideration to the cause. Question was asked about when they hoped construction would begin and he said in about 3 or 4 months. They had a few civil rights issues which caused a delay, but it will actually help in the long run as they could be getting grants for the project. They could see up to 55% back for the project. Comment was made about the fact no one has seen any information on the buy-a-brick program except at one PTO meeting. Suggestion was to have the athletes get the brochures out to the community. At the present time the word is not getting out to the community. Mr. Foresi suggested putting the brochure on a website, Mr. Carson indicated it was on their website. Another suggestion was made to put the brochures in the backpacks. He said it's a fine line but he will look into it but he thinks there will be concern about doing that. He concluded his presentation about the field house. He did share that he is assigned to a committee which is looking into uniforms for students. He wanted to give us a heads up on this and there will most likely be a community discussion on this before it is enacted.

Mr. Foresi thanked them both for updating us on what is going on at the Board of Ed. He welcomed Mrs. Sanzo to the meeting. She is a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher. Mr. Foresi gave updates on items going on. CMT's started today for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders. They will go until approximately March 14<sup>th</sup> with a few make up dates. Overall purpose of the examination to see how well the students can apply what they have learned since kindergarten. Directly aligned with what the state dictates. Even though it seems it only affects 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders, it actually affects the whole school. Mostly with specials. Children in other grades can have specials at very different times than normal. He said

it's all working out fine and the first day went great. Writing prompt was today, all students have the same prompt across the state for that particular grade level. Question was asked about the CMT's being a test that you have to pass to graduate high school. It's not the CMT's – it's the CAPT testing at the high school level. Mr. Foresi met with the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 4<sup>th</sup> grade about effort and they had a great conversation. It's important that they have a good effort at everything they do. He tried to relate it to the things they do every day. He wanted to make them feel at ease about taking the CMT's.

He wanted to share that kindergarten enrollment is coming up and if we know of any student is eligible for kindergarten please have them enroll. It does help them make a lot of decision to know the number of students coming into the school next year. Staffing needs need to be met, etc. They can get the enrollment paperwork at the school, the town hall or at the high school. Registration can be done at the residency evening.

Upcoming events: Parent/teacher conferences, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> & 13<sup>th</sup>. They will use the rapid notification system to make everyone aware. Make sure you have an appointment set up with your child's teacher so you can discuss their progress. Report cards will be distributed that week and will be in the office to be picked up. They can be picked up earlier in the day or week if you want to review it thoroughly before your conference.

Each year in Newington Public Schools there is a celebration of abilities. They try to include all abilities levels in the classrooms. Kids on the Block have come, sponsored by the association of retarded citizens. The PTO has in the passed sponsored this event. It's about a \$100 cost to put on this celebration. Fidelco came in last year. They have other organizations come in that deal with people with different abilities. Mr. Foresi asked if we move to vote on sponsoring the event. Motion was made to spend \$100 on the celebration of abilities – it was 2<sup>nd</sup> and accepted.

Accreditation report was completed and John Paterson still meets the rigorous standards of accreditation. John Paterson has been approved and is waiting for the final documentation. Mr. Foresi received a personal call but does not have the paperwork yet. He was told that the report will come back with many validations and very few recommendations on things to fine tune. Once the report comes back the steering committee will get back together and meet and review the document and how they will share it with the staff and the community. He hopes to make a presentation to the PTO about what was in the report. Congratulations were given to Mr. Foresi from PTO members.

Mr. Foresi asked for questions, but there was none.

Eileen gave the treasurer's report. She said we are still looking good. \$8000 left in expenses for the year that we know about. Expenses can go up if the picnic is inside. We need to make sure we have enough in the kitty to cover deposits for next year. We've only done 2 fundraisers this year as we are trying to not do too many. The photographer was a great fundraiser as well as the cookie dough sale. The new cookie dough fundraiser is a bit more "user friendly" and we don't have to buy extras, just what

we order. There are a few new items in addition to the cookie dough. Sell 3 tubs per family to make \$5000 – 4<sup>th</sup> grade picnic and yearbook and for the Nancy Boyle. The other fundraiser we are considering is with Dream Dinners. They will do a kick off night; \$25 at the door, \$15 goes to John Paterson. Month long program – when anyone goes into dream dinners, \$10 for smaller session, \$20 for larger session. We'll probably start that the week after April vacation so the two fundraisers are not overlapping. We will probably start off next year with the wrapping paper again as it's a consistent money maker. We'll have the photographer come back in and we'll get it going ahead of time so it does even better than last year.

Mr. Foresi said how great the ice cream social was and thanked Randi Thureson for helping with the event.

Sandi has been working on Nancy Boyle's coming to visit. 9/6 & 10/28. Nancy and Mr. Foresi will meet to discuss the sessions further, but comprehensive strategies, written responses on CMT's. We received a volume discount of \$200 - \$3400 which covers everything. We are submitted a grant to help offset some of that cost. We should have a decision by the next meeting. The sessions can be video taped for future viewing. A question was asked: is this something the whole school will implement? Mr. Foresi said yes, it would be an enhancement to the whole school. More of it will take form in 1<sup>st</sup> grade

Book fair: Erika Ganley and Heather Servidone: They are looking forward to the book fair next week. All the book lists are coming back. Heather is working on volunteer and it looks good. She was told to look at asking the kids from NHS's key club. Added an extra day and took on a different week so they are hoping that is successful. Preview day on Monday – shopping day, invited the teachers and faculty. They can get first pick at the books. Sales are usually around \$6,000 to \$7,000 so they hope to at least achieve that but possibly surpass it. We get 10% back in books from the sale since it's our 2<sup>nd</sup> sale. 30% is cash profit. Dawn indicated that we took advantage of part of their incentive for prizes for the ice cream social.

Pasta Dinner: March 18 from 6 to 8. They have someone doing tickets, but she needs more volunteers. (Eileen) No raffles this year, maybe just a door prize. One change is that if baseball has started we will do take out instead of the sit down. Baseball caused a big decrease in attendance.

Dawn made final announcements. She would like to officially recognize Sharon for her effort of game night. It was a huge success and it was very well attended. The kids had a blast. Sharon said it was pretty easy to put together, Mr. Bennett came up with a lot of games for the kids. Dawn asked Sharon to continue doing it for the subsequent years. Thanked Alison Houldcroft and Randi for the ice cream social. It was a great success. Dawn is not eligible to be president next year. She would be happy to talk with anyone about the responsibilities. A nominating committee will be put together to start getting the ballots out and collect them in for April and do the elections at the May meeting. Dawn would be happy to help on the committee and anyone else who would like to be

on the committee is happy to speak to her about it. Sharon made a comment about how she wouldn't want to run against anyone since we are all friends. Dawn would ask around to see who might be interested in certain positions.

Dawn indicated we would need to look at the Crystal Rock water we have been providing for the teacher. The amount per month is getting difficult to budget because it keeps going up. We are renting the machine right now which means each bottle of water is costing about \$9 for each bottle. It's getting more and more expensive, some months we are approaching \$130. One option is to look at buying the machine which PTO might be willing to vote, based on the fact that we do something for the teachers for teacher appreciation day. It would cost us \$130 to buy the machine and the bottle charge could go down to \$5 a bottle. In order to be able to budget she thinks it would be easier to control the spending. If we bought the machine we would be able to put a cap on the spending per month. Mrs. Sanzo was asked how the teachers liked the water, she said they loved it. She and Mr. Foresi feel that all the teachers benefit from it. Since the cost is increasing it would suggest the consumption is going up. Another option is to go with a different company – it could be cheaper. Mr. Foresi had a question about if the water cooler that we have has broken down at all. Eileen thinks this is the original cooler. Mr. Carson suggested that we look into the warranty and how much of the monthly rent would go toward the purchase of the cooler.

Meeting adjourned at 8:27