

PTA Meeting December 5, 2017

Tangie Smith filled in for Jennifer, who had a concert for her daughter at Patuxent Valley. There were 16 parents in attendance with Dr. Varlack. She reminded us that the meeting will run differently. All committee reports were typed and have been attached to these minutes.

Principal's Report – Conferences went really well. We got lots of positive feedback. Please continue to let us know how we can improve.

Winter Concert – This will be at the high school on December 20. We have more musicians this year. Get there early, because there will be standing room only. We had many community members help to ensure that each student received an instrument this year.

We are working on developing a night for students and their families related to reading. We are hoping to have an author visit to interact with the families. PTA will support this event.

Pep Rally seemed really successful. We rolled out our new mascot. We celebrated over 100 student leaders. We want our students to know they have a voice of how FRES runs. We celebrated related arts students. The second quarter pep rally will be more academic oriented.

A parent asked about progress on our dismissal traffic issues. Genee has gotten the county folks and local government folks out to our school. They made suggestions for remarking Gorman Road, making a turn only lane into school as well as suggested moving the crosswalks. The school system even said we should swap the car loop with bus loop. That can't be addressed soon. When the county people finally got back to us, they said that nothing will be done. The problem is that there is only major congestion for a short period of time. It is not long enough to warrant a change. Genee reassured us that her voice is heard in the government and will continue to be heard, but has been told NO GO!

COGAT test is being given to test for placements into the Gifted and Talented programs.

Teacher Report– Thank you for our dinner in November. A reminder that there will be NO conferences in the spring. Teachers will be allowing time for phone conferences. This was a county-wide decision. Parents need to know that they can always request a time to meet with the teacher if they have a concern.

Parents discussed how they appreciated the flyer and the push to get the parents into the classrooms during American Education Week. One parent commented, "It made me feel like wow, they are really learning!!!" Genee shared how we had too many people on Friday, but the parents actually liked the one day so they could visit more than one kid without having to take off work extra days.

PTAC – The meeting discussed legislation coming in 2018 – One piece dealt with the problem they are having retaining teachers. They need to recruit more diverse teachers. They are

looking into giving teachers a transfer tax and rate reduction. They would also offer student loan assistance for teachers.

Cookbook Vote – The plan was to vote on the artwork to be used for the cookbook. Not many students participated, so we voted that anyone who put in artwork will have it used in the book.

Did you all notice that our marquis outside does light up. Howard County replaced our light!

January 2 – First PTA meeting of the new year.

Meeting with Bess Altwerger – 4 Year member of the H.C. Board of Education

Bess reminded us that there are a number of Public Meetings coming up. She encouraged us to attend. She also said that there is a public forum at the beginning of every board meeting. They usually are at 4:00 PM and 7:00 PM.

Any time you have a concern, you can speak and ask questions during the public forum they have at the beginning of every meeting at 4:00 and 7:30.

A question was asked about substitutes. The concern is that paras are getting pulled to sub and not being used to help students. The board and Dr. Martirano know that there are not enough subs. Montgomery County pays more. – Raise the rate? - We are operating in a 20 million dollar deficit, so this is difficult. Board is concerned about it. Subs need to have a background check and a BA. They are hoping to pull in retired teachers.

There was a question about why we should build a new school when there are seats in others. Bess talked about how parents don't want their kids transported too far away from homes,

She discussed JUMP START, which is a new program for students at Long Reach, Howard, and Centennial who can enroll at Oakland Mills and River Hill. There they will get college credit through dual enrollment with HCC. Kids can earn up to 60 credits at a greatly reduced rate. Parents who are on free and reduced lunch will get this free. – This is a pilot program right now for rising 8th graders in the overcrowded schools.

They still haven't chosen the land for the high school. Mission Road site is near a quarry and they will blast for at least 10 more years there. They are concerned about structural damage and the impact on environmental quality. There are also 2 sites in Rockburn Park – neither is optimal – one place has wet lands, and the other lot is not large enough. They are getting pushback from that community.

Allan Kittleman is very supportive of us getting a new High School on the eastern side of the county.

Board pushed hard for APO legislation. They want to slow down new housing developments.

Start times was voted that no school would start before 8AM. Is that a reality? We are getting a report soon. We will be discussing if this is the right time to do this with all the redistricting and new school being built. – We don't have the money. PG County used to own their busses - now they will be competing with us. We also have a shortage of bus drivers. We have let companies go, we have changed contracts multiple times. There will be a discussion and a vote.

Our parents expressed concern about how early schools let out so early leaving kids at home alone. Bess is working on some afterschool activities for middle schools. Montgomery County pushed everyone back 30 minutes and then reversed their decision mainly based on the mess it created with transportation. Transportation will give them a report on the cost of all the future plans.

Bess wants to change the Homework Policy. – She wants to make sure homework is given at a reasonable rate for our high schoolers to make sure that they are getting their sleep. She mentioned they are stopping students from turning things in online at midnight. It will have to be due during the day.

How did we get such a big deficit? It is all in the health and dental fund. They have hired someone to research this. We are in negotiations now with the unions. Healthcare went up.

We want to reduce class sizes and more paras – but this deficit is tying our hands.

More money in the budget for lunch and recess monitors?– We used to afford 3 a day, but now it is 2 a day, so we are pulling more paras to cover. – Bess wants to get the bus drivers to be lunch and recess monitors.

Bess encouraged us to email her if we have concerns. She does read them often.

She discussed our great new superintendent. She trusts his sincerity and judgement. Look for his town hall meetings.

We reminded her that the FRES office location is still a concern. We are also worried about the traffic at the beginning and ending of our school days.