

DeWitt Middle School PTA Meeting, April 29, 2013

Minutes by PTA secretary Tonya Engst

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Vanessa Wagner motions to approve the minutes from the previous meeting. Amelia Habicht seconds. The minutes are approved by unanimous vote.

CO-PRESIDENT'S REPORT, DIANA CAMPBELL

- **Volunteers needed; great opportunity to help our school and be involved!** We have some open positions for next year. Among other volunteer positions associated with the PTA, a new Co-President and Treasurer are needed. Please contact any current board member, to express your interest and thank you!
- **Mailing list signups:** We would like to get at least one adult for each student on the DeWitt email list and add more teachers and staff, too. [This "list" is actually a Yahoo group, but its main function is to distribute by email information about school happenings, usually upcoming events. If you want to sign up, visit <http://www.dewittpta.org> and look for a signup form near the lower left.]

A discussion followed, where we talked about the most efficient way to work with forms that are routinely sent out for other purposes and work the school district to efficiently collect email addresses and add them to the Yahoo group. This discussion also covered how we would like to also work smoothly with the school district (and related forms) and to create our paper-based directory in the future. Creating the paper directory for this school year was a frustrating process and the hope is that it will go more smoothly in the future.

- **Teacher Appreciation Luncheon:** Coming soon. Volunteers to make food, donate funds, or staff the luncheon are being sought. [The luncheon took place before these minutes were circulated.]
- **8th Grade Promotion:** The organizing committee is in good shape. The promotion event will take place on Monday June 17 at Kulp Auditorium (that's at Ithaca High School). The 8th grade graduation party will take place on Wednesday June 19 at DeWitt. It will have a beach theme. Exact times will be publicized once they are known.

TREASURER'S REPORT, SHIVAUN ARCHER

Shivaun walked us through income and expenses so far this year, and shared with us the budget (below)

Diana will check on what's happened with returned paper newsletters so that we can try to lower our returned newsletter fee because it is a bit high this year. Also, she will check on making sure we print the right number of newsletters.

We have \$900 extra funds. Not sure if the 8th grade graduation may need some. Subject to final executive board approval, the remainder is to be split among the three grades evenly.

DeWitt PTA Treasurer's Report 04/29/13, Reporting period from 09/01/12 - 04/29/13

Income:

- DeWitt PTA Membership = \$471; DeWitt donations w/ membership = \$395

- DeWitt Direct Appeal = \$1610
- Donations to International Night = \$25
- Advertising = \$542
- iGive = \$26
- T-shirt fundraiser net income = \$301
- Staff Appreciation Lunch donations = \$170

Total = \$4736

Expenses:

- Office supplies, mailing = \$420.77 (3 newsletters)
- Returned newsletters = \$41.05
- NY PTA dues = \$408 (based on 102 members)
- PTA council dues = \$45
- Directory Printing = \$231.60
- Bank Charges = \$9.49
- Open house and welcome picnic = \$474.78
- Stocking student supply cabinet = \$175
- International night = \$225
- Meetings - Joint PTA meeting and ice cream social = \$62.77
- Miscellaneous = \$33.05 (= change on hand and gift for Judy Fernandes)

Total = \$3323.94

Pending expenses for the year: Mailing (-\$150), Insurance (-\$250), Donation to DeWitt Activities (-TBD)

Checking account balance 04/24/14 = \$4788.95

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

- **Orchestra trip:** Mr. Knight accompanied the DeWitt 7th/8th grade orchestra to a competition in Boston last weekend. The orchestra got a Silver and was one point from Gold, and received good feedback from the judges. A Silver is considered something to be proud because of the prestige of the competition Thank you to the folks who gave money to make that trip happen.

[The 7th/8th grade orchestra did not travel to the competition that it has attended in recent years, near Hershey Park, but went to Boston instead. A big reason for this change was to be exposed to a higher level of competition.]

- **Electronics recycling fund raiser:** Mr. Knight reported that the recent electronics recycling event at DeWitt made \$700 on 15,000 pounds of electronics. It was a lot of work and part of an effort to fundraise for a sign. The desired sign will have LEDs. And cost at least \$8,000.

Question: Will district also help pay for sign?

Answer: Mr. Knight hopes so, and he hopes that the fundraising effort will demonstrate to the district that there is interest.

- **ICSD budget and impact on DeWitt:** Mr. Knight thinks that any changes in the budget won't much effect DeWitt, because the amount of teachers/staff stays the same. He requested an additional full-time employee (FTE) in the arts and an additional full-time employee in consumer science. He is also thinking that maybe FCS and health could be combined in the future as this would allow more flexibility and interdisciplinary studies.
- **Testing:** Mr. Knight said that testing has a big impact on the students. He feels that this amount of standardized testing doesn't make sense for our students in their developmental stages, and that the students are over-tested. He encourages parents to engage NY State and talk about the legitimacy of all this testing. He feels that we need to fight against business-driven processes and models that are being imposed against the teaching profession.

Esther Racoosin adds that the NY State PTA website has information about advocacy regarding testing. <http://www.nyspta.org/>

- **Fundraising:** Mr. Knight has created a fundraising calendar to track the many fundraising efforts that occur at DeWitt. So, he hopes to do a fundraising report for the next meeting.
- **Daily schedule:** There are two different bell schedules this year. One for 6th grade and another for 7th/8th grade. There were a lot of benefits to this, but some areas that need to be tweaked, such as (English Language Learners) and music, so there may be some changes next year. He hopes to have a new plan by June so that staff (and parents) can know what to expect. And if there are questions or feedback perhaps it can be responded to over the summer, before school starts.
- **Teacher vacancies:** A reading teacher is retiring, so there will be a different teacher returning from last year. Mr. Knight also said something about a math teacher, but I missed the details.
- **Musical director:** Mr. Knight reported that ICSD will be advertising for a musical director this spring so that a person can be hired with plenty of lead time for next school year. That way, it will be possible to have a school musical next year.
- **Autism program:** This program will be dormant next year because DeWitt is not expecting any students who have autism next year. So that room can be a reading or math lab for now until/unless another student who has autism attends our school.
- **Report cards:** Mr. Knight would like the school's report cards to be more meaningful. He would like them to have a different format that would be more specific about the specific skills that a student is strong in, and what areas need more focus. Also, he would like to offer the opportunity for a parent meeting where the report could be discussed. He is also looking at how kids get put in Earth Science and Algebra in 8th grade, to make sure that kids aren't overlooked who could fit in those classes. *[A meeting is scheduled for May 28th at 7pm, in room D201. At this meeting, you can learn more about accelerating into Earth Science and/or Algebra during the 8th grade school year.]*
- **Big 6th grade next year:** Next year the 6th grade will be a large group as compared to normal. DeWitt is expecting 204 incoming 6th graders! Generally, DeWitt class sizes are 165-192, with an average at about 185.

Question: Does he get another teacher?

Answer: Needs to be figured out.

Question: What about the size of advanced math?

Answer: Needs to be figured out.

Question: [Looping back to slightly earlier in the meeting] What about Earth Science and Math in 8th grade and making the decision?

Long discussion: Better information about this should be in the newsletter and the DeWitt handbook/manual.

ADAM ENGST RELAYS SLEEP INFO FROM PROFESSOR MAAS

At a recent PTA meeting co-sponsored by several ICSD PTAs and the similar (but not PTA) group at LACS, sleep expert Professor Maas from Cornell University spoke to the group about teens and sleep. Adam (DeWitt parent) attended the meeting and thus shared a summary of the meeting with our group, so as to spread the information more widely.

Suggestion: Get Prof. Maas talk to the students directly in an assembly because many students will listen to an expert more so than their parents. He is a great presenter and should do well when presenting to middle schoolers.

Here is an outline of what Adam shared:

Evidence that your teen is sleep-deprived

- Alarms get ignored
- Difficult to get them out of bed
- Sleep very late on weekends
- Feeling sleepy or dozing in class
- Irritable behavior
- Overly impulsive behavior

Teenagers need 9.25 hours of sleep per night (adults 7.5 to 8.5 hours)

Only very rare individuals might need less

Teen biological clocks are delayed 2 hours (1 AM to 10 AM would be preferred)

Benefits of more sleep

Better grades

- Sleep is critical for memory consolidation
- Necessary to be able to develop innovative solutions
- Studies have shown up to 25% improvements in GPA

Better athletic performance

- "Sleep spindles" in phase 2 sleep necessary for motor coordination learning
- Maas consults with pro sports teams

Weight loss

- Blood-glucose regulation impaired with lack of sleep
- Sleep deprivation increases hunger hormone grehlin, and decreases satiation hormone leptin

More pleasant—less of the stress hormone cortisol, which plays a role in impulsive behavior, lack of empathy, sense of humor, and mood

Practical advice (which may not always be possible)

Set a good example on your own

Set a consistent bedtime that will result in 9.25 hours of sleep

Maintain schedule on weekends (otherwise you're mimicking jet lag)

Catch up on sleep by going to bed earlier, not sleeping later

Avoid naps, but if necessary, nap for no more than 20 minutes

Do not use Snooze!

Avoid caffeine (as in soda!) after lunch

No electronics in bed - the light wavelength simulates daylight

Challenges

Homework projects that end up in late nights

Early-morning events or athletic practices

Disconnecting teens from their electronics

NEWSLETTER PLANNING, JENNY BARNETT

Jenny, our newsletter editor, noted that she could use a helper who would focus on individual interactions with people who might write articles and help those people meet deadlines.

The last part of our meeting was devoted to planning some aspects of the next paper newsletter that the PTA will be sending to school parents and caregivers.

It was suggested that a great addition to the newsletter would be team reports from the grade-level teams. Mr. Knight plans to ask teams to do these reports. Jenny and Mr. Knight made a plan for how these could occur more efficiently.

The next PTA meeting will be held on June 10th, at 7pm, in our usual location, one of the DeWitt music rooms.