

PTA Meeting Minutes, September 19, 2011

www.dewittpta.org/

Submitted by Tonya Engst, PTA Secretary

PTA Co-President Esther Racoosin introduced PTA board members and committee chairs who are present: Vanessa Wagner (co-president), Shivaun Archer (treasurer), Tonya Engst (secretary), Sarah VanLooy (mailing list manager), Jenny Barrett (newsletter editor), Ellen Slusar and Patricia Sipple (co-chairs for Bring Your Family to School Night), and Wendy Salomon (Fall Fundraising co-chair).

Previous PTA Meeting Minutes

Minutes will be posted on the PTA Web site under the Meetings heading (<http://www.dewittpta.org/meetings.html>), so in future please look at the minutes on the Web site. Vanessa motions to approve the minutes from June 2011, Wendy seconds, all approve except for three abstains.

Treasurer's Report (Shivaun Archer)

Shivaun proposes a budget (see end of the minutes for a worksheet with line items). Proposed income is similar to how much income the PTA received last school year.

A question is asked about funding for school clubs, because the budgeted amount seems to be less this year.

- A reason for this is that many clubs will occur during the school day this year. But teachers can request PTA funds for club-related needs, and Ms. Rivera asks what the process will be for this. Penny Boynton says there will be some funding from the school district for clubs that meet outside the school hours.
- Esther says that the PTA hopes to have a form available next week for teachers to request club funds, and it would be helpful if the PTA can get a ballpark estimate about what the total money amount from requests will be. PTA might adjust/raise that number if it seems that the club requests are higher than expected. (Later in the meeting, Ms. Rivera asks if the PTA form could also be made available online.)

Esther motions to approve the ~~minutes~~ budget. Patricia seconds. All approve.

There is also a form to get refunded for a PTA-approved expense, and there is a form so that a merchant doesn't have to charge sales tax, since the PTA is a non-profit organization. Shivaun can supply these forms.

Co-President's Report (Esther Racoosin)

(Esther spoke from written notes, so below are her notes, with some bold added.)

On behalf of the PTA board, I would like to welcome all of you to the first PTA meeting. I hope that the school year is off to a good start for your students.

First, I'd like to thank all of the families and staff for attending last Tuesday's "welcome" picnic at Stewart Park. This is the first year that we have planned an

event like this and I was pleased to see so many families come out and enjoy the late summer evening. It is very helpful to meet other families who you will get to know over the next couple of years and also useful to learn about the school from more “senior” families and staff. At tonight’s meeting, we will hear about the first two weeks of school from Ms. Rivera, our associate principal, information from our school-family liaison, Penny Boynton, and our librarian, Joanne Church.

If you had a chance to look at the DeWitt PTA page in the DeWitt Middle school student and parent handbook (that’s page 8), you would have **read the following mission statement** taken from the New York state PTA bylaws: (I’m paraphrasing it...) The PTA's mission is “to promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, community and place of worship...to bring into closer relation the home and the school, so that parents and teachers may cooperate intelligently in the education of children and youth...” That is a “heavy-duty” mission statement, one that would seem to be difficult to achieve. However, **the DeWitt PTA thinks that it can achieve these goals by enhancing and encouraging communication between the school and the home.** In addition, **we would like to be advocates for our children’s education.**

How can we accomplish this? First, because much school information at DeWitt is funneled through the PTA, **we hope that everyone will join the PTA listserv.** Please fill out one of the forms near the entrance of the room. Second, we hope everyone will **visit the [PTA](#), [DeWitt middle school](#), and [ICSD websites](#) regularly.** Finally, **we encourage everyone to [sign on to the “school tool” parent portal](#).** Through this application, you can access your student's academic records, leave messages for teachers and access your student's meal plan account. There are some forms in the front of the room that you can use to sign up.

Finally, we would like to **fill some positions on the PTA board and standing committees.** We are seeking a vice-president to serve on the board. This position mainly involves assisting in enhancing school-home communications and helping with PTA events. Next, we would like to find a volunteer to be assistant editor for the PTA newsletter. We also would like to find volunteers to help with the PTA bulletin board, in the hallway outside this classroom. Finally, we would like to find volunteers to help with our winter fundraiser that will be held in January or February.

Associate Principal Report (Ms. Rivera)

Where’s Mr. Knight? Our Principal, Mr. Knight, had hip surgery recently. He is doing very well and will be back in a couple of weeks.

New staff this year:

- New French teacher Rebecca Stevenson is here after living in Brazil for 13 years.
- Monica Sherman came from the Ithaca High, and she will be working in Special Education and co-teaching English.
- Barbara Borelli will be teaching autistic students.
- Mary Gessini is the new school nurse. The nurse that was here last year has moved to a local Montessori school. Mary was at Ithaca High previously.

- Lori Backus is a new Library Aid. She came here from Ithaca High.
- Kelda McGurk is a new Occupational Therapist.
- Jilian Ryan is new in the Special Education department. She is a former school psychologist and teacher, and has transferred here from Ithaca High.
- Also, DeWitt has several new paraprofessionals and aids.

Interviews: They are interviewing for another Special Ed teacher because at the last minute a teacher took a different job. And they are interviewing for a new math teacher because Mr. Kaultman is taking a year off to focus on family. For what would have been Mr. Kaultman's 6th grade math class we have a long-term sub now.

Advisory and Advisors: Over the course of the meeting, we learned that what was called Home Base last year (home room) is now called Advisory. The teachers of Advisory are Advisors. Each Advisory has 13 students.

Clubs and Bells: Last year, Home Base was about 17 minutes long but this year Advisory is about 8 minutes, except on Thursday when it is skipped. This gives more instructional time overall, and it gives time on Thursday afternoons for all students to participate in clubs. Clubs are not by grade. Teachers lead the clubs. Students will participate in four clubs over the course of the school year, and students got to indicate their club preferences. **Clubs begin at 2:57 on Thursday afternoons.** If a teacher wants the club to extend after school ends, it could go until 4:30 and students could then take the late bus. (On Thursdays, there is a late bus.)

A parent asked, and it was clarified that the **TSA club** is different from the clubs just discussed. Dave Buchner and Dave Bob Walters will decide when to start the club. It is usually an online application. Penny Boynton says it hasn't been announced yet.

Late Bus: A late bus leaves at 4:30 on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday. A student can stay after school if they've previously set it up—**a student staying after school must be with a teacher**, not just hanging out. (See below, Penny Boynton's comments about after-school outings, and Joanne Church on the library). A student could ask a teacher to meet after school for extra help. Students can also connect with teachers for help before school, during lunch, or during study hall.

Mr. Knight's student improvement plan: Two of our school's subpopulations last year did not meet the state's testing benchmark for Math or English (*I, your notetaker, am not sure what the benchmark was or what the name of the problem is*) last year. The subpopulations were students with a disability and students getting free or reduced lunch. Mr. Knight and others are looking into this problem.

Bring Your Family to School Night (Open House) is October 6: There might be a staggered schedule so that parents with children in more than one DeWitt grade can go through two schedule sequences in one evening.

Let's Dance: The first dance is Friday 9/30. 7th/8th grade only for the first dance.

Vacation! 10/7 and 10/10 no school for students. 10/7 staff are at school. 10/10 is Columbus Day.

Running the numbers: This year, DeWitt has 30 more students than Boynton, but five fewer teachers. So that's an area being looked at. Total number of students per grade: 6th, 188; 7th, 171; 8th, 160.

Backpacks and lockers: The school doesn't want kids carrying huge backpacks all day. It's a health issue. The school has been especially working with 6th graders to help them with lockers. Students should ask their Advisors if they need help opening their lockers. A parent noted that at least one 7th grader still can't open his locker.

Great start! Ms. Rivera was overall upbeat, and she closed her remarks by saying that the school year is off to a "great start" and that the "kids are doing fantastic."

Site-Based Shared Decision Making Council (aka Site Council)

This is a separate organization from the PTA. A PTA rep is on Site Council, as well as students, staff members, Mr. Knight, and parents. The council talks about things like time between classes, broken door in the bathroom, or installing a school sign.

The group will start to meet when Mr. Knight returns to school, likely from 4–5 PM, once per month. The day has yet to be chosen. Parent volunteers are sought for this committee. To become involved, talk to Esther or Maria Wolf, or consult the PTA Web site for info (in the future).

Family Liaison, Transportation and Way2Go Liaison (Penny Boynton)

Secretary's note: Penny has a Web page (<http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/legacy/dewitt/administration/pennyboynton.htm>) where she writes: "My function at DeWitt is to assist with the flow of information and resources around the circle of learning. I do this by connecting students, families, school staff and community agencies to address their needs."

Various things happen after school here. Forms for signing up get handed out at lunch. For example, the Ithaca Youth Bureau organizes outings. Different towns or areas will also sometimes offer special programs.

Way2Go has information about carpooling and bussing options (<http://cctompkins.org/community/way2go>).

There is no homework club this year, but it was great for about a dozen years and Penny would like to get it back. The teachers were hired to stay after school. Unfortunately this program was cut.

Penny says that her office is near the cafeteria. There's a phone there if kids need to call home. She tries to help kids with questions and choices. Email her or call her if you need anything, or if you don't feel heard.

Joanne Church, School Librarian

Secretary's note: This section was changed slightly from the original version of the minutes, based on my having received a digital copy of the hand-out.

Joanne circulated a helpful hand-out that summarized her main points, and I've appended it to the minutes.

Library hours are 8:30 to 3:30. This is unlike last year where students could routinely visit after school. But last year she had many after-school conflicts, like meetings, and she doesn't want students to count on the time and then have her unable to be there. But, if Joanne happens to be in the library after 3:30 and a student really needs library time, the student can ask, so long as the parent knows the child is there.

Note: Students can be in the library after 8:30 and before Advisory time. To do this, students must sign a clipboard in the lobby (a staff member will be in the lobby with the clipboard) and then the student signs another clipboard when they get down to the library.

If a student needs more library time to get their work done, please get in touch with Joanne. More Internet use is happening this year, but it is tricky for students who do not have Internet access at home, or who have unreliable access or many people at home sharing one computer.

In response to a parent question, Joanne noted that in **6th grade students get an NT account**—a username and password to get on the school computers and an email account and a Blackboard account. **Students who can't print at home** can bring in a flash drive or email themselves homework as an attachment and then print in the library. Save it in a few ways to get a good format (Word, text, etc.) (A parent notes that teachers are using lots of different Internet tools right now.)

Book donations: A parent asks if the library interested in used books? Yes. Bring books that seem appropriate for middle schoolers to Joanne. If they are new, they may go in the DeWitt collection. If they aren't new, they will go on the shelf in the cafeteria. If she thinks the students won't use a book, it goes to Friends of the Library book sale.

Boxtops for Physical Education

Physical Education teacher Tracey Armstead is collecting "boxtops for education." She hopes to use the funds to buy treadmills and a dance pad. The dance pad would be for gym as well as Special Education, noontime fun, and clubs. These boxtops are on packages like granola bar boxes, and they can be handed in during Advisory.

More Meetings!

Next meeting is Monday 11/14. Meetings will be every other month this year. If you would like a meeting to cover a particular topic, please tell Esther or Vanessa.

2010 Final Report	2011 -2012 DeWitt PTA Budget	Proposed 2011 Budget 9/15/2011-6/30/2012	up to 9/15/11
\$2,954.09	Check book Balance		2726.75
Income	Income		
\$1,002.00	Membership dues	1000	
\$55.14	Donations-additional membership contributions	200	
	On going fundraiser - igive, tops gift cards	100	
\$560.00	Advertising-Directory	550	
	Advertising-Newsletter sponsors	150	
\$1,795.00	Fall Fundraiser - Donations-Direct Appeal	1800	
\$1,143.00	Spring Fundraiser-Raffle/Dinner &Movie, Movie night	1500	
\$420.00	Donations-staff appreciaton luncheon (inc. gift card)	420	
\$1,327.35	8th grade promotion - donations/fundraiser	800	
\$0.30	Interest	0.5	
\$6,202.79	Total Income	6520.5	
Expenses	Expenses		
Admin	Admin		
	Supplies, blue paper (weekly Blue Note)	100	
\$44.50	Supplies, office, incidentals, stamps	50	
	Website	50	47.28
\$725.47	Mailing Permit/Postage (6 bi-monthly newsletter)	750	140.06
	returned newsletter to school surcharge (\$0.50 each)	25	14
\$235.00	Insurance 2010-2011 (paid by June 1)	250	
	PTA Council dues (101-150 member level)	35	
\$294.00	NYS PTA membership dues	300	
\$91.00	NYS PTA 2nd payment (by March 31)	100	
	Bank fees	100	
Projects	Projects		
	Welcome Picnic	350	
\$81.39	Bring your family to School Open House	100	
\$273.99	Directory-printing	300	
\$82.70	Hospitality/Refreshments (meetings)	100	
	Focus day		
\$250.73	Staff appreciation luncheon	300	
\$150.00	Student Supply Cabinet	150	
\$500.00	Trip Scholarships	500	
\$179.69	International night --food	200	
\$1,722.33	Teacher requests incl. clubs: fall and spring	1600	
\$19.44	Retiring teachers honor	50	
\$75.00	Spring Fundraiser - Movie expenses	200	
\$726.32	8th grade promotion reception	700	
\$50.00	8th grade breakfast	100	
\$201.75	Miscellaneous	100	20
\$5,703.31	Total Expenses	6510	221.34

DeWitt Middle School Library

560 Warren Road

Ithaca, NY 14850

607-882-9858

www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/library

Joanne Church, librarian: jchurch@icsd.k12.ny.us

Lori Backus, library clerk

Library hours: 8:30-3:30, closed during Advisory period

My job as your school librarian is to:

- work with teachers to develop lessons involving information use
- promote reading through special projects and displays
- maintain a facility and collection that enhances every student's learning experience

At the middle school level our focus is on helping students become safe and responsible digital citizens, critical and efficient internet users, and life-long learners who read and manage information. I am always interested and eager to hear from parents about new ideas or programs, and encourage you to call me or email me whenever you have questions or comments about the library.

We would love to have your help in the library! The middle school library is an ideal place to keep in touch with your child's school world. Please contact Mrs. Church if you are interested in scheduling a regular time to come in and help in the library, or if you're willing to be called upon occasionally to help out with special library projects.

Your students should be able to access the library as much as they need to in order to get their schoolwork done. If this is not happening, please encourage your child to see Ms. Backus or Mrs. Church, and we will work with their teachers to make sure that they get some library time.

Your students will need access to an internet-connected computer to complete some homework assignments. More teachers are using the internet to provide resources for lessons, and many teachers are starting to use Web 2.0 tools to manage their classroom assignments and projects. With limited time to access the library and computer labs, some students will need to get on a computer at home to complete their work. If you don't have a printer and they need to hand in homework they've completed at home, have them save it as a Word document and send it as an attachment to their email account.

Your students need your help to keep them reading. For many of our 6th graders, this is the first time they have not had scheduled library time each week. Middle school years are also when many students' free-choice reading time decreases dramatically. Time spent reading = increased academic achievement, so please encourage your child to keep reading for pleasure – you may even want to institute a family Quiet Reading time! We also have an extensive selection of free books, located in the cafeteria, as a result of our affiliation with the Family Reading Partnership as the home of the community's first Bright Red Young Adult Bookshelf.

Parents are welcome here anytime! The library belongs to the whole DeWitt community, and we encourage parents to come to the library. Stop by, browse the collection, check out a book or two, sit and soak in the ambience!