

DeWitt Middle School PTA Meeting May 7, 2012

Minutes by PTA secretary Tonya Engst

Acceptance of the meeting minutes from January and March

We need a quorum of ten, which we do not have, so we move on.

Treasurer's Report, Shivaun Archer

Shivaun summarized recent income and expenses. It looks like the PTA has raised enough money to cover expenses for this school year. I've included her written report below.

DeWitt PTA Treasurers Report 05/07/12 (Shivaun Archer)

Reporting period from 09/01/11-05/07/12

Income

(Sept '11-Apr '12) DeWitt PTA Membership = \$564;
(Sept '11-Dec '11) DeWitt Donations w/ membership = \$407
(Oct '11-Jan'12) DeWitt Direct Appeal = \$1815
(Nov 2011) Donations to International Night = \$149
(Sept '11-March '12) Advertising = \$353
(Jan '12) 8th grade trip 50/50 raffle = \$254
(March '12) igive fundraiser = \$45
(Feb '12) Winter fundraiser-Movie Night = \$451
(Apr '12) T-shirt income = \$1955
(Apr '12) Staff appreciation lunch donations = \$50
Total = \$6043

Expenses

Pending-T shirt costs = \$1480
Other pending costs-Staff Appreciation lunch, 8th grade promotion, staff retirement gifts
(Apr '12) Insurance = \$235
(Jan-Apr '12) 8th grade trip fund = \$1000
(Jan-Apr '12) PTA council dues = \$90
(Sept '11-Apr '12) Office supplies, website, mailing (mailing = \$135 every 2 months) = \$817
(Feb '12) Movie night expenses = \$213
(Feb '12) Teacher request-Harlem night = \$150
(Jan '12) Directory Printing = \$244
(Nov '11, Apr '12) NY PTA dues = \$480
(Nov '11) International night = \$38
(Oct '11) Open house and welcome picnic = \$454
(Oct '11) Stocking student supply cabinet = \$150
(Sept '11-Oct '11) Petty cash = \$35

Total (5/7/12) = \$3906

Balance in Bank Account (04/24/12) = \$4189.67

Co-President's Report, Esther Racoosin

* For the T-shirt design contest and fundraiser, we received about 40 designs, and students voted on the designs. The winner was a 6th grader. The PTA is looking for volunteers to help organize and distribute ordered t-shirts

* Staff Appreciation Luncheon: Organizers are looking for volunteer assistance with this luncheon, which is happening quite soon.

* Next PTA newsletter deadline is Tuesday May 15. Contact editor Jenny Barnett if you would like to write an article.

* Graduation party: Looking for 6th and 7th grader families to donate a dessert and/or help with serving at the party. It is a school tradition for 6th and 7th grader families to help with this party. Graduation is the 20th of June, a Wednesday night.

* PTA volunteers for next year are being sought: We need a volunteer to create the school phone directory, and there are several other positions, as well as the position of Vice President. Talk to either of our current co-presidents, Esther Racoosin or Vanessa Wagner if you are interested in any of these roles.

Main Speaker, ICSD Board Member Jay True

ICSD Budget

According to Jay, this was the easiest budget to create in the past several years. It was easy because they knew what income they could expect to receive. ICSD got about a 1.5% increase in state money. They are trying to do multiyear budgets as they go, in order to level out tax increases. This year the increase is 2.3%.

Most employees are getting 2% raises in that increase. There is also a big increase in pensions. The pensions are part of the NY State pension system and not something ICSD can change. It went up about 2%.

Another pressure on the budget is debt service on the bond (from a few years ago) that is now having to be paid off. This bond paid for many new roofs, such as on DeWitt,. The bond also paid for a new gym, wellness center, and performing arts center at Ithaca High and significant improvements at LACS, among other things

The budget reflects a strong desire to bring more technology to the schools. For example, an important upcoming improvement will be a better network for connecting to the Internet, so that more computers or devices in a classroom or school building can get online all at once. Hoping to have this networking in by, say, January of 2013. Also, a desire to have more computers and mobile devices available in the schools. To some extent, these changes are being paid for with cost shifting within the technology budget, not a new cost. Also state and BOCES money is paying for some of it.

Re-arrangement of Upper Management at ICSD

ICSD has various assistant superintendents and a Director of Technology, and they are all becoming chiefs. Chief of Technology, Chief of Business Services, etc., as well as a Chief of Secondary Education (that's middle school and high school)—that person is charged with the academic achievement of these students. Also a Chief of Elementary Education. The responsibilities and goals of these chiefs are more tightly defined around academic benefits, so now they are more directly accountable for the academic success of the students. Some of these jobs will be taken by new people. Special ed is no longer a separate department but falls under the general purview of the appropriate chief.

Also math and writing teachers from throughout the district are now having meetings to collaborate and create a curriculum that works for the entire district, and that complies with state guidelines. So that things won't get skipped, and so that when kids get to high school the necessary topics have been covered. This will help with kids who move from school to school.

Parent Questions

Most of the meeting turned into a Q & A session, with several interesting parent questions. Here are some highlights.

Q. Any particular cuts?

A. No particular cuts.

Q. In a recent Ithaca Times article about technology, it seemed like Dr. Brown wasn't sure exactly how devices, like iPads, might be paid for. Or some students might bring in their own. The parent was curious about Jay's about his viewpoint on that article.

A. Jay isn't sure why Dr. Brown said that. The goal is for every child to have access to a computer. ICSD can pay for it, but would rather not have to. Some other school districts are trying this "bring your own" method of getting enough computers, so that might be something we try here, too. But how ICSD will actually do this is not yet decided. Also there is hope of getting funding from Apple. There is a 3-year-plan for buying all the computers, and the first year for that will be the next school year.

Q. How will teacher evaluations be funded?

A. The main cost is observations of teachers by especially certified people. This cost is not funded by the state. It is a pressure on the budget, but Jay didn't seem to feel that it's a huge cost in light of all the other costs, so it is easily absorbed by the overall budget. It is a larger cost for other schools around ICSD, because ICSD already has some staff who can assist with observations, so it won't all fall on the principals. The smaller the district, the larger the burden.

Q. Can you tell us more about the DeWitt principal's budget?

A. The principal gets a sum of money and has some discretion for where it exactly goes. With the new budget, DeWitt got either the same as last year or more. Unlike with the previous superintendent, with Mr. Brown, ICSD's principals now have more ability to decide on specific budget expenditures within their schools' budget. Principals are also being evaluated now, so it makes more sense for them to have more decision-making ability and latitude in spending their budget.

Q. How does that work out with DeWitt's larger special needs population? Do our evaluations keep that in mind?

A. Jay acknowledges that this is an important concern.

Q. ICSD Logo. There is (was?) a contest to choose a new one. You can read about it in the ICSD Insider. But the parent asking said that she didn't feel that any of them really represented our area. Did the board have any input on the logo?

A. No.

Q. The PTA tries to communicate between families and the school. But there is an issue with the ICSD website because it is so hard to add content to it, for both parents and teachers. It would be so helpful if it were easier to add information to the ICSD website.

A. Jay nicely acknowledged this concern.

There was more discussion, particularly an extended discussion of music teacher cuts in the elementary schools.