

Minutes of the Meeting November 6, 2013
Winchester High School Parent Faculty Association

Attending: Audrey Loria, Malini Dutta, Julie Piantedosi, Kathy Czeck, Arundhati Ghosh, Susan Marx, Mary Ellen Eagan, Jenny Splaine, Yen Ngo, Brenda Reishus, Becky Miranda, Ann Hibbard, Bill Holber, Lisa Vahey, Cheryl Myers, Karin Sangster, Paula Michienzi, Anita Colasante, Sam Kunes, Christa Russo, Susan Verdicchio, Susan Wolf, Amanda Lewis, Ingrid Geis, Gael Robinson, Elena Langlois

Audrey Loria called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Co-President's Report:

Welcome to Amanda Lewis who will be the WHS point person for the Override Campaign.

The School Committee is thinking about setting up "Working Groups" about various issues that they hope to address. Parents who are interested in serving on a group are encouraged to contact us.

There will be a meet-and-greet with the new Athletic Director, Marc Arria, during the second week of January.

There will be no PFA meeting in December.

There have been rumors that Karen Branley, the front office secretary, is retiring, and they are true. She will be retiring in December, and a surprise party will be planned for her.

Secretary's Report

The minutes from the last PFA meeting on October 2, 2013 were reviewed. There were no comments. Minutes approved.

Treasurer's Report

The 2013-14 budget was presented, as well as year-to-date numbers. The anticipated Direct Appeal Income is \$30,000. The recurring expenses are \$11,800, and the Academic Grants budget is \$18,000. The current Direct Appeal income is at \$22,170 and there are a few more checks that just came in today. The Report was seconded and approved.

Principal's Report – Tom Gwin

Winchester Town Meeting approved to fund the WHS Project for \$84.5M. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor, 153-5. The project is now going to be on the ballot on Dec 10 for a town wide vote.

There are two tours of the HS remaining on Saturday mornings for residents to see the condition of the building. They are November 16 and December 7, the weekend right before the election.

The new AD, Marc Arria, will hold a Winter Sports Night for all athletes and parents on Wed., Nov 20 at 6 pm.

Dr. Gwin and the Bill McAlduff will travel to Washington on Nov 18 and 19 to accept the Blue Ribbon Award.

This week is the end of the First Quarter. Grades will be posted on November 20th.

The Lantern Walk is this Sunday on the Town Common at 5 pm.

The District Technology Plan is now online. Looking for input/ comments.

The Youth Behavior Risk Survey will be administered on Nov 20. An email will go out with a link to the Survey and will provide information for parents on how they may opt out for their child, if they choose.

Committee Reports:

Direct Appeal- Cheryl Meyers reported that \$22,495 has been raised as of today. This is about 75% of our goal. We have 973 families in the HS, and 21% have donated. Audrey recommended that emails continue to be sent out asking for DA donations until we get to the \$30K budget.

Grants – Brenda Reishus and Kathy Czeck reported that the many applications were submitted and a grants committee reviewed, discussed and selected requests to fund. In 2012-13, \$21K in grant requests were received; this year \$34K. The teachers were asked to complete a very simple form, not complicated. The budget this year for grants is \$18K. The funding worksheet handed out in this meeting shows \$17,031 in grants because we are behind on Direct Appeal money at this time. We were asked not to fund Technology requests without input from the Tech Dept.

The worksheet is divided into three groups: 1) Preliminary grants – set aside for immediate use (with funds we have in-hand); 2) Technology grants that have been approved by the department and 3) lower priority grants that will be funded as additional DA monies come in. We are looking for approval for all three categories at this meeting.

The decision to get from \$34k in requests down to \$17K in grants was a multi-step approach. The criteria for funding are on the website. Some requests did not meet the criteria, so they were rejected. After that, it was a priority ranking by the two Grants Chairs. Then, the six person PFA Board reviewed the recommendations and there were revisions. When necessary, teachers were asked for clarification or prioritizing of their needs. We also tried to approve grants for underserved students.

Q. In emails asking for additional Direct Appeal funds, can we describe the specifics of grants that are being funded to encourage parents to donate? No, we don't want to provide specific details so that we get into why one department received grant funds and another one did not.

Q. Did we talk with Friends of Art or Friends of Music to get additional funds? The Art and Music Departments already request funds from those organizations in addition to PFA grants.

A motion was made to accept the budget of \$30k for the PFA. Seconded. All in favor.

A motion was made to allocate \$11,047.39 for grants immediately. Seconded. All in favor.

A motion was made to allocate \$1510. for the Technology grants. Seconded. All in favor.

A motion was made to fund, as funds allow, \$4474.25 in additional grants, not to exceed \$18,000. for the year. Seconded. All in favor.

Social – Paula Michienzi reported that the Teacher Appreciation Holiday Breakfast will be held on Wednesday, Dec 11. This may be a good time/place to do Karen Branley's party.

Parent Class Advisors – New Parent Advisor for the Class of 2017 are Cindy Bohne, Ceci Cordeiro, Christa Russo, Mikki West, Gael Robinson, and Heidi Driscoll. Motion was made, seconded. All in favor

Gael Robinson - There will be a first ever Schem Spirit Holiday Fair on Sat. November 23, from 12-3 pm in the caf. The gist of the event is to have teams and clubs sell extra items, or bring in new items that were not sold at the Open House event back in September. It is the weekend before Spirit Week and there will be lots of Schem gear.

HOT TOPIC: WHS Guidance Suzanne Ontso, Director of the Guidance department is our guest tonight. Questions were requested and submitted ahead of time to Ms. Ontso so she specifically addressed those. The first question was regarding how much time freshman actually get with their counselor. Freshman are tracked closely, progress reports are reviewed. They meet in small groups (3 or 4 students) to meet their counselor and again to do schedule planning. Each counselor has an equal load of freshman, sophomores, juniors and seniors. There was a Freshman Parent Guidance Coffee in October that was well attended.

As of today, 72% of our seniors have already applied to at least one college. That is ahead of past years. Guidance did a Common App workshop in large groups that got students moving on their applications.

There is an unprecedented rise in risky behaviors—it is a very big issue. The demand for counselor's time related to this has increased exponentially. It is a priority. In Edline, under Guidance, there is a list of Resources that counselors and students/parents have access to. Teachers are encouraged to identify students at risk.

How underfunded is the Guidance Dept? Compared to other towns, our caseload is high—228 students per counselor, divided fairly evenly between all 4 grades. Our entire annual budget is \$6,800. which includes the Naviance fee. Naviance is used for college preparations, but we are also starting to use it for students on Ed Plans in transition. The caseload at other high schools: Concord- Carlisle-200 students per counselor, Lexington-195, Wellesley-185. Ms. Ontso has a reduced caseload (as Dept Head), but she is also the coordinator for the transition program for students who are out of school for more than 14 days, due to sickness, injury, etc. The one thing that would improve the guidance department: more staff. Our doors are always open to students. They drop in all the time. We never turn them away (even though they are supposed to schedule an appointment!)

Is there room in the proposed new HS building for additional guidance staff. Yes.

Given that colleges put a large value on guidance recommendations, how well do counselors really know the kids? They meet more often, and one-on-one as juniors and seniors. Parents do “brag sheets” as part of Naviance so that counselors can know what kids don't tell them. The guidance department staff goes to many of the students events to see how and what they do-sports, music, teams, performances, etc. Teachers reach out to counselors all the time to discuss students.

Why did kids not get schedules until the 1st day of school this year? Last year they came earlier. There are changes to schedules and staff happening right up to the last minute before school starts in September. The goal is to give students their class selection early in the summer so they know what classes they got into. If we gave schedules out in June, there would be too many changes by September.

When do parents get access to Naviance? Parents do not get access to Naviance, students do. They get a password for access in Jan/Feb of sophomore year. They need to share password with their parents.

What happens when my child gets a teacher that cannot teach? Dr. Gwin responded. We are in the second year of a new evaluation system. Teachers are reevaluated on 33 elements in 4 categories. Eventually there will be student and parent input. Teachers who are “unsatisfactory” are put on a 2-year plan for improvement. There are two evaluators who do unannounced classroom visits, coursework review etc. The process for removing underperforming teachers is not known at this time.

There is very inconsistent use of Edline among teachers. As part of this new evaluations system, Dept Directors will have access to their teacher's grade books to see if teachers are actually using Edline. Prior to this year, counselors could not see kid's Edline accounts; now they can.

The next PFA meeting is scheduled for January.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elena Langlois
Recording Secretary