

Minutes of the October 16, 2014
Winchester High School Parent Faculty Association
** Approved **

Attending: Malini Dutta, Elena Langlois, Leah Holber, Kathy Czeck, Lisa Vahey, Karin Sangster, Susan Verdicchio, Principal Sean Kiley, Michelle Nathan, Paula Michienzi, Heidi Driscoll, Sue O'Connell, Audrey Loria, Ewa Romaniuk-Calwowska, Julie Piantedosi, Karen Fagan, Mary Ellen Melarangi, Cindy Bohne, Isobel Magee, Debbie Benedict

Malini Dutta called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Co-President's Remarks- Malini:

The school year began with a great amount of sadness (with the death of senior Patrick Gill), but there has been an amazing sense of community since the accident. There have been challenges because of the school construction, but safety of the students and faculty is the #1 concern, and that has been going well. There are bound to be little problems along the way, but we need to identify them and address them quickly.

Welcome to the New Board of the PFA. There are 4 new members- Lori Scully is Co-President, Mikie Ulwick is Publicity Chair, Mary Ellen Meloragni is a member of the Social Committee, and Karin Sangster is the Grants Co-Chair.

The Open House for parents ran very well and the Student Activities Fair was a big success.

The PFA is now a 501c3 non-profit organization which should help with the Direct Appeal in terms of an increase in matching donations from employers, and donations which will now be tax deductible. The PFA has retained a CPA, Abbot and Company, to file tax return and the paperwork necessary to remain a 501c3 organization. The Direct Appeal has had a slow start—because of the interruption in the school schedule with all of the events. The DA Chairs did not send out email blasts asking for donations. Will start to do that soon and hopefully the donations will increase. A motion to accept the New PFA Board was passed.

Secretary's Report –The minutes from the last PFA meeting on June 11, 2014 were reviewed. There were no comments. Motion to approve minutes was passed.

Treasurer's Report– Budget needs to be approved this evening. \$17,100 has been raised to date in the Direct Appeal. The goal for the year is to raise \$30K. Of the \$30k budget, \$12,600 is needed for recurring expenses such as the Open House event, startup money for the Freshman class, all night grad party, gifts and memorials, etc. The remainder of the budget, approximately \$17,300, is earmarked for teacher grants. Motion to approve the Treasurer's Report was passed.

Sachem Spirit Fair

Heidi Driscoll announced that the Sachem Spirit Holiday Fair will be held on Sat. November 22 from 12-3pm. This is another opportunity for school organizations (clubs, athletic teams, etc) to sell Sachem goods before the holidays. This is very similar event to the Student Activities fair that took place before the Open House in Sept.

Direct Appeal- Julie Piantedosi

The goal for the year is to raise \$30k. Total raised to date is just over \$17k. About 1/3 has come thru PayPal and about 2/3 from checks. Approximately 145 families out of the 900 families in the school have donated to date. Acknowledgements of DA donations have not gone out yet- Cheryl Meyers is in process of doing that. Amazon Smile was suggested as a possible source of funds. Julie will look into getting registered for this – and then we will try to spread the word to all families to select PFA when they shop at Amazon.

Grants- Kathy Czeck

How the grants process works—In September, each teacher received a simple form, explaining the criteria for grant selection and asking for a description of how the teacher would like to use the money. Grants Chairs review the requests, get clarification if necessary, and then the Executive Board meets, makes selections/ranks grant requests with recommendations from Grants Chairs. Try to hit the underserved populations in the school. They don't fund field trips. Last year there were \$36k in grant requests. This year the requests seem to be fewer than last year. One reason might be the WFEE initiative called Powered Up – which is funding a large amount of technology for the schools. Grants requested that any technology-related grant requests go thru WFEE and not the PFA this year.

Clocks in classrooms- a question was asked as to whether we could purchase clocks for all of the classrooms. Since construction started, none of the clocks have power and thus don't work. Principal Kiley indicated that he just ordered 70 clocks and they will be installed soon.

Newsletter -Anita Colasante

The newsletter team spends a lot of time making sure that all email contacts are correct- hoping to reach all parents with email blasts. In the past, a post card went out, in the fall, by snail mail explaining how to get on the PFA email list, and explained that the PFA list was not the same as the Edline email list. Many parents do not know that, and so we hear that people are “not getting PFA email blasts” and they don't know why. Anita is looking for ideas on best way to reach these people---a post card mailing is very expensive, but should we do it anyway? General feeling was NO. Sean Kiley said he could put an announcement in his daily blast – which goes to the Edline email list- with a click-thru to sign up for PFA blasts. Sean is also looking into an app that kids can have on their phones that will give them access to the co-curricular activity schedule—because the daily announcements don't always get heard.

Class Parents- Cindy Bohne, Class Parent for Class of 2017 was present- no others were in attendance. Looking for Class Parents for Class of 2018. Cindy explained what is involved—it is a four year commitment- you follow the class from grade 9 to grade 12.

School Council- the School Council is looking for 2 new parent members—so far one person has indicated interest. Council is made up of students, administrators, teachers and parents. Please consider running for a position.

HOT TOPIC- Meet the new Principal- Sean Kiley

Sean is very excited to be at WHS and also at the PFA meeting to meet and interact with more parents. Sean expressed that with all of the unusual events that have taken place so far this year, he has not yet been able to be “the principal that he wants to be”. So today, he decided to change that – it was a pivotal day for him. He gave out birthdays cards to kids and said that “in a month, the kids will all know me.” Sean plans to be more visible- a substitute teacher reported she overheard kids saying that “they never see Mr. Kiley”. He will change that—he is a very-one-on-one person.

Sean said he felt the huge community support for the events that have taken place since September- mostly around the death of Patrick Gill. He has been blogging about his experience at WHS and is happy that people are reading it. His hope is to get students to write blog posts for him – to celebrate EVERY kid.

A parent asked a question about school clubs and their availability for kids who also participate in sports or music. Sean Kiley would like to see kids get involved in anything at school—maybe not just traditional clubs—but maybe just getting involved on a weekly basis and not so much of a commitment. Maybe lunch planning; maybe in other areas of the school.

A parent asked what the rules are around kids being in the building after school. There is no policy- there are often kids hanging around – waiting for an activity to begin or waiting for a sports bus, but they should not just be here without a good reason.

A parent stated that there is a lot of research around later morning start times for high schoolers. Can we look into that? Sean acknowledged the research and said that he sees it mostly as a bus issue. All Winchester schools use the same buses and so things need to be staggered. Why?? Buy buses!! It is an issue that may take some time to happen, but if there was a group to spearhead the idea-- it could possibly happen.

A parent asked about the program for 8th grade transition from McCall—could it better prepare the kids for coming here? The program right now seems a little boring- could we do a video showing all of the cool things that happen at WHS to get 8th graders excited? Sean said yes. He has actually already talked with a student about making an 8-10 minute video of “a day in the life of a WHS Sachem”. Sean says he definitely wants to improve the 8th grade transition program.

Sachem Culture-- Sean would like to use the construction issue to spice up our “Sachem culture”. When he arrived at WHS, Sean felt the school was a bit too “heads-down” – very academic. Want to build the culture in a different direction where kids can get involved in any and every aspect of the school.

A parent asked about kids getting outside for lunch now that the courtyard is under construction. Sean was looking into having some tables outside between the portable wing and the building and possibly having a roof over that area.

A parent voiced her gratitude to Sean for “really caring about our kids”. She said it’s been a rough start to the year for everyone and Sean has really demonstrated how much he cares about WHS students and teachers and she was very thankful. There was agreement all around.

A parent asked about what environmental testing has been done during the construction, and how can we see the results. The air quality has been tested monthly and at different times of the day. The tests are done by a certified hygienist. There are two problem areas now in the building. The parent would like to see the actual results posted somewhere. Sean will look into possibly posting that information on www.winchesterhsproject.com website.

Fire- There was a fire in a trash can in the 3rd floor girls bathroom. It is not known whether it was set by a student, or not. Luckily it was a small fire, and there have been no “copycat” events, which was a concern for Sean. The fire drills so far have been about 1.5 minutes longer than the Fire Chief would like—the Emergency Response team is working on this. The building has working sprinklers throughout.

Bomb scare – Very early on Monday morning, October 6, a phone call was made to Sean Kiley’s phone that indicated there was a bomb set to go off at WHS later that morning. He contacted police, the Superintendent, etc. It was determined, at that time, to be a credible threat. Calls went out to homes and cell phones and school was cancelled for the day. There were already some teachers and students in the building when Sean arrived at school. One parent voiced her concern that her son was in one of the modular classrooms meeting with a teacher and both teacher and student had their phones off. As a result, they did not know about the threat, nor the need to leave the building, until much later. A suggestion was made that maybe the fire alarm should have been pulled instead of administrators going room to room telling staff and students to leave the building. The Emergency Response Team is also working on a plan for this early morning scenario.

The next PFA meeting is scheduled for November 3, 2014.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Elena Langlois
Recording Secretary