

Minutes of the Meeting
January 4, 2012
Winchester High School Parent Faculty Association

Attending: Jody Collins-Skinner, Marie Sabatino, Debbie Benedict, Eileen Milner, Audrey Loria, Carol Cashion, Jen Trevett, Tobey Kelly, Cheryl Eagan Donovan, LuAnn Stackhouse, Paula Michienzi, Joanne O'Donnell, Ana Vazquez, Carol Savage, Ingrid Geis, Cindy Bohne

The meeting was officially called to order at 7:32 pm.

Parent Freshman Advisors: The slate of advisors was voted in by the attending members. They are Marie Sabatino, Cheryl Eagan-Donovan, Jen Trevett, Tobey Kelly. The advisors report that they have an excellent slate of class officers; the class participated in a community service project for Transition House with the senior class; they have been selling sweatshirts, sweatpants and pj pants.

The December Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved after first and second motions for the same.

Treasurers Report & Direct Appeal: The Direct Appeal is just shy of the goal by \$1200; participation is down somewhat (30% vs. 37-38% in prior years); average donation amounts are also lower this year. A postcard mailing will be sent in January to families that have not participated. It was noted that a strong push must be made to collect money at the Open House.

The Treasurers Report was unanimously approved after first and second motions for the same with no discussion/corrections.

Principal's Report: The MSBA is expected to select the designer of the feasibility study for WHS on January 10th. The FY2013 budget is still being discussed; currently the budget is 9% over last year's; a working session is expected to reduce the overage to 6-7%. The budget is expected to be presented to the School Committee on Tuesday, January 10th. Midterms will be held on January 17-20; early dismissals will occur each day. Dr. Gwin extended thanks to the PFA for the holiday breakfast; special thanks were given to the Social Committee for the same.

Town Meeting – 21st Century Technology Discussion: Susan Verdicchio moderated the discussion. Dr. Gwin shared the letter that he had included in the December newsletter regarding the 1:1 computer initiative, similar to the program at Burlington High School. (This can be found at the PFA website.) The following notes were documented by Susan at the meeting:

Intro: We all know there are deficiencies and problems with technology at WHS at the present. We wanted this conversation not to focus on the present, but to look ahead, focus on what would be better, or what we envision replacing or fixing the current situation. Tom Gwin has formed an exploratory committee to study school-supplied iPads or other tablet devices issued to students and teachers on a 1-to-1 basis, with Wifi access to the Internet throughout the building, modeled on an on-going iPad initiative at Burlington High. This would replace paper textbooks with online texts.

There are at least two sets of issues with this proposal. First, issues concerning replacing paper textbooks with e-textbooks, and, second, concerns about the device to be used and Internet access.

Discussion

- need to fix existing problems with Wifi access in the building first; whatever device you decide on won't work without proper infrastructure; this needs to be fixed now to use the equipment already in the building and then would be in place for new device
- if WPS to supply devices and expect students to use them, must have infrastructure in place

- Burlington has a fairly old building, and needed \$1.5M to upgrade for universal Wifi access; Tom thought they got a grant or some kind of private funding from Cisco or other company to cover this; his intention was to move forward with this, not necessarily wait for renovation project; funding is a concern
- not clear how this would fit into districtwide technology plan; need both infrastructure and technicians for tech support & maintenance, so not workable unless these needs are addressed
- one of the main uses for the device is note-taking; iPad has no real keyboard; laptops would be better
- right now, online or e-textbooks are bad; no page numbers, difficult to refer back and forth; force the user into a more linear reading experience than you want to have; several parents had asked their kids and kids preferred paper textbooks
- simply moving from paper to electronic textbooks is not progress; should be moving away from old-fashioned “read the textbook/take a chapter test” direct instruction
- in order for e-textbooks to evolve, there would need to be user demand; they are evolving & having interactive features
- scientific data showing people do not read from a screen the same way that they read from print sources; data about use of multiple windows online, and/or use of Internet, actually being harmful to memory and attention; data that multi-tasking is a delusion
- scientific data showing use of active screen (like iPad or laptop) interferes with sleep; should read using “e-ink” screen only close to time you go to sleep
- scant data showing link between technology use and better academic performance
- look at Maine’s statewide computer initiative, or Arizona’s, for track record, data on technology’s impact on student learning
- not fair or realistic to require parents to buy laptops for over \$1000 (like in Beverly?)
- on the other hand, if school allowed students simply to bring in laptops or devices if they own one, that would cost less and allow limited school dept. funds to be used to supply devices to those who can’t afford them; seems crazy to use scarce tax dollars to duplicate equipment kids already have
- could be better to use laptops and web-based applications (like Googledocs) than pay for device-specific applications
- learn from Eric Lister’s approach; he focuses on low cost & ease of use; his classroom technology enables students to write more, do peer editing, they feel empowered
- any initiative needs to be teacher-driven or it will not succeed; start with a pilot with a group of motivated teachers, they will motivate (or shame) others into getting on board
- raises equity issues about expecting kids to have computer & Internet access after school; collaborate with public library (or have after-school access to school library)
- dangers of 24/7 schoolwork, teachers posting homework at 6 p.m., students feeling adults expect them to produce work without any breaks; potentially increases pressure & stress
- wary that this is coming from administration, not teachers; we need to step back and ask, “What is the goal? What are we not accomplishing now that technology would enable us to do?”
- need a well-written survey that teachers would take and articulate the needs & goals

- teacher survey done for Focus on the Future showed teachers wanted the technology they already had to work reliably, and to be able to troubleshoot or update software independently (not be dependent on technicians)
- cost of technology has come down, but benefits unclear
- 1-to-1 Committee is not tied down to evaluating tablet or e-reader; will consider laptops

The meeting was adjourned at 8:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Audrey Loria, Recording Secretary