

11 - 4 - 2021

Outside at Fire Pit on Girard Way

In attendance:

Leah Fosco

Christina Aquila

Lisa Christie

Bob Pape

Molly Riordan

Shawn Gonyaw

Ellen Hobson

Lucy Rojansky

Becky DiSavino

Jenny Barba

Stephanie Hamilton

6:10 pm Meeting Commenced

School Board Update- Lisa Christie

Lisa encouraged all to please send ideas/thoughts to the school board, as they are eager to listen. Lisa had 3 things to highlight:

1) The school board is in budget season. Lisa shared a list of all budget meetings that are open to the public with Stephanie, and these will be included with the PTO notes. There are 3 upcoming meetings for Norwich, 2 for Dresden, and then 2 presentations. Meetings tend to be more focused on the details - if you have something you want included in the budget, it's a good idea to come to the committee meetings so they can plan before the presentation meeting. For the overall SAU budget- all committee meetings are finished, and will be presented at the next SAU meeting.

Lisa shared how to access school board meetings:

Go to SAU 70 website, scroll to bottom- there are circles that have every single meeting that is happening at the school board level. On each circle, you can click on it and it will take you to the zoom link.

2) New school board member: Kelley Hersey had to resign from the school board. Lily Trajman was voted in last night and will be serving out the rest of the term until March. If you are interested in running for that seat, then please reach out to the Norwich school board and they can provide more details.

3) Strategic Planning is starting again next week. There will be lots of subcommittees where they will be looking for people to serve. There will be focus groups, surveys, etc. If you would like to get involved, now is a great time! More information will be coming about strategic planning.

A question was asked: is the playground on the SAU budget or Norwich budget? It is on the Norwich budget. Each budget is approved by each town.

Stephanie asked about the septic: will that be paid for by the Norwich school budget? Yes. Lisa shared that the current plan is to move the septic to the Dresden fields, on Rte 5. As part of the process of moving forward with this plan, the Norwich school board would have to go to the Dresden board and get permission.

A question was asked if Strategic Planning is a general call to get people involved or if there are specific committees. Lisa shared that right now it's a general call, and that she thinks the plan moving forward would be to have people rank order which committee they would like to serve on, etc. The school board is hoping they get many people involved. There will be more information coming on Strategic Planning, and it will be advertised in multiple places: it will be in CrossWords, the PTO newsletter, also on the list serves- not just the Norwich list serve- on all the list serves because it is an invitation to members of the community. Lisa reminded all that school board members cannot speak on behalf of the board, so this may impact casual communication (ie, if you run into a school board member at the grocery store and ask them a question re:the school board, they may not be able to answer- they are not trying to avoid your question).

Principal's Update - Shawn Gonyaw:

Shawn elaborated on the budget piece for MCS. Some of the larger ticket items:

- He kept the new hires to keep smaller class sizes, so there are 2 additional staff members.
- A lot of parents reached out to ask about expanding the PreK budget, to add another section- so that is in the budget.
- There is a little bit of restructuring for Ed Assistants- they had better luck hiring professionals, and had a hard time finding Ed Assistants this year. They haven't been able to hire for a half time French position.
- There are a lot of new teachers, so Shawn told them to submit a budget for supplies for what they need to do their job, so that part (supplies) is up this year. New teachers need new supplies: they get to the classroom and books/manipulatives/furniture are old.
- There is an additional piece to buy teaching books- level books- MCS didn't previously have that.
- MCS put money in the budget for the playground- if people are interested, please reach out to the school board to tell them that is important. This budget has a small amount to start replacing pieces.
- Regular maintenance is also in the budget- a regular maintenance budget would be established to work on long term maintenance and avoid large maintenance expenses. For example: every year we paint 3 classrooms, rather than having to paint the entire school at once.

- Budget includes a handicap accessible bathroom downstairs and also upstairs. Clarification was asked around magnetic doors- it was confirmed that magnetic doors are in this year's budget.

A parent asked that with more classes (ie, 3 classes per year) do we need 2 specials teachers? Shawn responded by saying that the success of the larger specials classes depends on the space. For example: physical education has different needs than art, for example. Overall, he reports that it has been OK- but small class sizes are desirable. A parent asked how is Wednesday "WIN time" going? Shawn said that considering it's the 1st year with it, he thinks it is going well. They have just finished the first round and will assess and regroup after Thanksgiving break. Shawn said the good things about the WIN block is that it allows for accommodating the need to both challenge and help students. Shawn hopes to continue it.

A parent asked: is there anything else parents should advocate for at the school board level? Shawn would like to advocate for Food Service. He reminded us all that Vermont has a great Farm to School initiative with many resources available. A question was asked if we would we have to stay with Fresh Picks or Cafe Services. Shawn said we could look at many options- including stay with Fresh Picks, partnering with another school- many options available. Shawn shared that he knows we have a great school board, and they will listen. If enough people came to the school board, and said- it is time to get our kitchen working, it has the potential to have an impact. Shawn mentioned one other barrier for our food service program: we are the only school in the state of Vermont that does not participate in the federal meal program. That decision is made at the SAU 70 board. Not a lot of MCS parents go to the school board meeting. Encouragement was given to please go to the school board meetings. Stephanie will put the links in the PTO e-mail and Crosswords.

Two more updates from Shawn:

- COVID testing update: We tested 200 kids today in less than 2 hours. They leave happy. Trying to work with Dartmouth to get a vaccine clinic scheduled sooner- the state went by size and so MCS would not get one until December.
- Reinstated the K2 community sing, led by Mr. Dean, a new 2nd grade teacher. On Wednesday afternoons, it was outside, socially distanced and it was so much fun! It was like a mini rock concert. It really made him smile. Parents offered compliments to the hiring committee: excellent new teachers this year!

Book Buzz- given by Stephanie Hamilton

A brief description of what Book Buzz is was given: kids select books, then if you've read it, you advertise it- like telling all what you liked about it. It's done with Norwich Bookstore as a collaboration. Stephanie suggested that we push it to January to give us more time for kids to get vaccinated. Stephanie will run it past Lisa to see if we could push it to January.

A parent asked if we have vaccination goals regarding mask wearing: If we can get to x percent vaccinated we don't have to wear masks? Shawn answered that we had started at the Agency

of Education by saying 85% population, but Delta variant has changed that. Shawn says to look for more information as that comes back around. We are getting there.

Demo wrote an email about Veterans Day ceremony and it was forwarded on to all students.

Molly Riordan gave an update about the handicap accessible trail: we will be able to build the trail November 14. Shawn will talk with the teachers to see what they need help with and to see if additional help from parents is needed.

Treasurer's Report - Christina Aquila

Nothing majorly new to report. An updated budget (as of Nov 1) was distributed. Finished membership drive and between PayPal fees and membership toolkit which collects all the data- we earned less than expected. What can we do differently next year?

Tea Towels: still waiting to hear back on amount earned.

Biggest expense was fall grants: we awarded \$11,000 grants (for a total of 11 grants). Spirit Wear check has not yet come in.

Stephanie thanked Christina for working on the budget. We received 19 grant applications (in past years we have received an average of 5 or 6). Stephanie went into the school and talked to staff to encourage them to apply. We funded 11 of the 19 grants, and we redirected the ones we couldn't fund to different grant programs. We spent \$11,000. A lot of effort and thought went into this by the Finance Committee.. More info will be coming in the newsletter (examples of items that were funded are: books, legos, document cameras, cart, die cut machine, special ed kit). The PTO is very happy with the outcome- it's a credit to the whole PTO and especially to Stephanie and Christina.

Spirit Wear - Lucy Rojansky:

Nothing has changed since last group report. is contemplating doing a holiday Spirit Wear store. She was wondering if there was interest for car magnets? You have to pay for them upfront in bulk amounts so it is slightly different than our normal spirit wear store. Instead of our usual purveyor, she found a cheaper source in South Carolina, and imagines being able to charge \$5 or \$10 dollars and selling it at a small profit. They cost \$3.50 each, so around \$300 would be the total output to start this endeavor. There are around 160 families at MCS total. Other ideas are stickers, blankets, Crazy Creeks.

Tea Towels:

They've been ordered- it's a slow process, we ordered 423, it's delayed- how much will be made is still to be determined.

Business Partners - Jenny Barba:

Exciting news, 14 business partners, commitments of \$3050 with one group having a still to be determined amount. That's a new record. Yay! Jenny has formalized invoices and has sent them. The latest update is that Archer Dental is contributing \$500. Each month she's going to

highlight one of the great businesses that support us. The banner has been rediscovered. Jenny listed all of the business partners.

Fall Staff Appreciation: (update given by Stephanie Hamilton)

More information will go in the newsletter, along with a sign up link. We're going to have it in the multi. It's Nov 19 and for grades PreK-3. The Valentine's brunch in the spring is for grades 4-6 for staff appreciation.

Gift making festival:

Stephanie was looking for community input on how or if we should proceed with this event- she is concerned that there is not enough time to get kids vaccinated. Molly gave a brief description of the gift making festival: Kids get to make little gifts out of recycled items. Kids loved this event, and felt proud that they could give something handmade. Several ideas were brainstormed as to how we could modify this event to be Covid-safe: Could we put together craft kits? Hold it with small groups in Tracy Hall? Molly suggested pushing it to February. Molly and Becca are going to look into pushing it to February, with the hopes that more kids will be vaccinated and we may be able to use the school gym. This is TBD. There was more brainstorming over ideas for how we can connect to the community.

Meeting ended 7:40 pm