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|  | MINUTES |
| Stone-Robinson Elementary PTO Open Meeting |

9/18/2014 6:00 PM

# In Attendance

Denise Bachman, Dawn Brindle-Branch, Viola Campbell, Eric Field, Angie Foreman, Whitney Gammell, Jenne Garrett, Nachama Haas, Jennifer Hallock, Jen Higgins, Terri Higgins, Karen Hutter, Nicholas King, Gwynn Malikian, Latha Masters, Emily Morrison, Chesley Mullins, Brandon Readus, Danielle Ronquest, Nicole Weiss

# Principal’s Report

## Summary

* Dr. King reported that there were four major construction projects in the building over the summer. Three are completed, and one is still ongoing.
* On the 10th day of school, our student enrollment number was 404; as of today, we have 407 students. These numbers reflect grades K-5, without Bright Stars. Dr. King anticipates that the student enrollment will remain around this level for the remainder of this year.
* We added a fourth Kindergarten position on the Monday before Open House. The staff was supportive with helping the new teacher set up her classroom right before the first day of school.
* We have 5 new teachers this year: Denise Bachman, Lili Houchens, Jan Bond, Sandy Shaffer, Hollyday Marks, and 2 new TAs: Sophie Dougadir and Brittany Garrison.
* We have a new counselor this year—Don Landis. He is doing an excellent job of being very active with the students. His two daughters attended SRE previously.

* We are also embarking on a new endeavor this year. “1:1 in fifth grade.” This model is implemented in the middle schools, in which each child receives their own laptop. We are one of three schools that will be implementing this program, providing each child with their own Lenovo laptop. This is a PC machine. The goal is to help students become comfortable with the laptops and begin using the computers for their work so that they are ready for middle school. It is hoped that the program can be expanded to third and fourth grades in the future.

# Treasurer’s Report

Viola Campbell presented the proposed budget for the 2014-2015 fiscal year:

* Nicole Weiss clarified that the proposed budget is the PTO’s best estimate for how the PTO money will be spent over the coming year. She explained the way the budget is developed over the summer. She also explained that the budget has been online for review by the general public in order to allow for questions in preparation for discussion this evening. Everyone in attendance at the meeting tonight is invited to vote on the budget this evening. Once the budget is voted on and the budget process is completed, the PTO can proceed with giving teachers their allotted money so that the money can be used for classes, field trips, etc.
* Viola and Nicole offered explanations about specific line items to help meeting attendees understand various money allotments, such as the increase in classes for certain grade levels, and the decision to use a per student formula. Dr. King noted that the process of classrooms requesting additional funds after the initial PTO allotment for the year will not be continued this year, as was the practice in previous years. Beginning this year, teachers will be given the one-time allotted amount.
* A question was raised regarding why the funds for Special Education were cut this year. Nicole clarified that the decision was made based on reviews of three past budgets, in which previous monies were not spent. Dr. King noted that the Special Education teachers receive funding from three sources: what the school gives them, what the PTO gives them, as well as what the County gives them. The Special Education funding is different from what the mainstream classroom teachers receive, which is just from two sources: what the school gives them and what the PTO gives them.
* Angie Foreman expressed her concern regarding the reduced funding for Intervention services. Viola Campbell noted the past years’ budgets in which the money allotted was not spent. Angie requested to meet with Viola in order to clarify past year’s funds that were not reimbursed to her as of yet. Discussion focused on the needs of the Intervention teachers as well as the missing money from last year. A proposal of $350 was made for the current academic year for the Intervention teachers, in lieu of the originally budgeted $200.
* Nicole clarified that the decision making system for Intervention was switched—rather than base funding decisions on a per full-time equivalent, the budget subcommittee decided to allot a dollar amount to the department as a whole. She expressed that she is open to changing the system for the current academic year, depending on what Angie and Denise think is best for the Intervention department. Denise and Angie suggested that they work out the actual funding within the department once the allotment is made.
* Nicole suggested penciling in a proposed change and then voting. Based on discussion and group suggestions, the proposal was to return to the $200 per FTE equivalent formula; according to this formula, the budgeted amount for Intervention would be $350.
* Dr. King clarified that the County funding for an Intervention specialist is currently at .4 FTE. As a result, SRE is creative with finding additional money to fund supplementary Intervention workers.
* Jennifer Hallock proposed removing the Welcome Packet expense, which saves $100.
* Gwynn Mallikian inquired about whether the PTO budget accounts for enrollment attrition. Dr. King noted that SRE does not experience much attrition, and he anticipates that enrollment will stay at 404-407 throughout the year. Nicole and Dr. King indicated that midway through the school year, the PTO will check in with teachers to see how much of the allotted funds have been used, and if all funds are not used, funds will likely be reclaimed and used for other portions of need at SRE.
* Nicole explained that the Acorn Fund and the Sunshine Fund are two line items that the PTO is committed not to change. Teri Higgins and Nicole explained that these funds are in place to help families who need items such as shoes and coats, as well as families who might have experienced a loss.
* Nachama Haas raised a question regarding why the year-to-year expenditure is increased by approximately $8000. Nicole explained that last year, SRE paid Sharon Wood’s salary for just the one year. This year, the PTO must resume paying for her salary, which caused the budget expense to be higher.
* Nicole explained that a tax preparation service fee was added to the budget, in order to prevent the tax confusion from years past.
* A question was raised about the Innisbrook Fall Fundraiser. Nicole explained the past years’ fundraisers, including the Invest in Your Child campaign’s history, as well as the decision this year to pursue not only the donation campaign, but also the traditional fundraising. The goal is to earn $10,000 from the donation campaign and $10,000 from the traditional fundraisers.
* Danielle Ronquest inquired about the landscaping budget. Nicole explained that last year’s landscaping budget ($650) was not spent, which prompted the question of whether this money should be re-allocated for other purposes. Danielle explained her project in which she spearheaded clearing out the central courtyard at SRE, as well as her goals of having this area be a butterfly garden with raised beds for vegetables. Nicole shared that yesterday, the Day of Caring volunteers did a lot of the heavy work in the courtyard. Nicole also clarified that the $650 allotted for landscaping can be used on the courtyard, such as wood for the raised beds, seedlings for the gardens, etc. The group suggested that Danielle might put out a list on SRE Online of what she would like to have for the courtyard and families might already have items and/or donate items for the project.
* Nicole also explained the allotment for the new teacher to SRE.
* The Food Lion fundraiser will be removed, as they are no longer having this program.
* Nicole made a motion to approve the budget with the changes made tonight. The motion was seconded by Jennifer Hallock. The budget passed by unanimous vote by all in attendance, with no one dissenting.

# Parent Council Update

Jen Higgins reported on several topics from Parent Council:

* Pam Moran offered an update on the Albemarle County capital improvement program, focusing on modernization. Two main goals were discussed, including having ergonomically correct furniture and natural light in each classroom.
* Redistricting was also a topic of discussion at the Parent Council meeting. A plan will be put forth in fall of 2015 and implemented in fall of 2016. A shift will be a major focus at Albemarle High School, but may also be experienced in other areas.
* There was also a “Lightening Round” for each representative to talk about issues in their respective schools. Fundraising was a common theme, and many schools are using the direct donation campaign model, much like SRE. Jen Higgins asked Pam Moran about SRE not having full accreditation due to the low SOL scores; Dr. Moran explained that consultants will be working with Dr. King to determine a plan to address the low scores.
* Jen Higgins noted her discussion with Dr. Moran regarding the low scores in reading and math, particularly relative to similar schools in the County.
* Dr. King offered his perspective regarding the SOL scores.
* Chesley Mullins inquired about the Investigations math program; Dr. King noted that SRE is using it, and that the school that has the highest scores in the County (Murray Elementary) has been using that program for a long time, from the primary grades forward.
* Nicole shared that she received an email from a parent who inquired as to what is happening at SRE to address the math needs, as seen in the low SOL scores. Dr. King explained that “math salons” are not something that is done regularly, but rather are done to supplement regular instruction. The salons were planned last year in order to address specific skill areas to provide additional enrichment, rather than remediation. Over the course of the year, he believes the school might complete six salons.
* Dr. King explained that by building the math program focusing on the skill and knowledge base that the students will need, rather than by teaching to the test, students will have the skills they need to pass the test properly. Further, he feels that the students who are taking the SOLs right now have not had the long-term benefit of the Investigations math that would be necessary to pass the SOLs as they are currently written. As a result, it is more difficult for these students to be successful.
* Today in the faculty meeting, Dr. King and the faculty looked at the types of questions currently being asked on the SOLs, because the questions are no longer simply looking for just the answer. For example, the questions might ask the student to put together a model in order to solve for the answer—which requires thought, planning, and processing—rather than simply putting forth an answer.
* Jen Higgins expressed that as a parent, she is frustrated that SRE is not keeping up with the other schools in our County and the nation. She questioned why it is possible for other kids at other schools to be successful, but our kids are not successful.
* Dr. King pointed to understanding resourcing and funding to help explain why SRE may not be performing at the same level as the other schools. He is not sure what was happening at SRE prior to his arrival.
* Nicole asked how long Investigations math has been in use at SRE. Dr. King clarified that Albemarle County schools use “adoptions” whereby the county “adopts” a specific model of instruction, but individual schools and teachers can choose to implement or not implement that model (e.g., Investigations) at any given point. For example, Angie Foreman stated that she first used Investigations approximately 11 years ago, but some teachers have only been using it with students for the past 2-3 years.
* Nachama Haas asked whether the English and math issues are related, due to the math comprehension problems with the “new” style of math problems presented to the students. She expressed that she is hopeful that teachers are supporting students with understanding the linkage between these two concepts.
* Dr. King expressed that he is happy to hear that parents at the meeting are struggling with their students’ math homework, because that tells him that teachers are using the “new” math with students.
* He also explained the “implementation dip” that commonly accompanies new versions of tests, in which performance dips, then students grow accustomed, and then performance improves.
* Dawn Brindle-Branch suggested that teachers hold a parent instruction night in order to teach parents the “new” math methods that students are being taught for the SOLs so that parents can support students at home with homework.
* Jennifer Hallock asked whether any other assessments are being completed with students in order to determine whether students are learning the important academic content. Dr. King indicated that the County does not support any further assessment beyond SOLs.
* Viola Campbell shared that she has had children in public school and in homeschooling. She found that her children’s math skills were not at the level she expected when she transitioned them from public school to homeschooling, particularly in preparation for pre-algebra and algebra.
* Dawn Brindle-Branch suggested that the SOLs may not be of great importance for parents to worry about, as it is just one day’s worth of testing, rather than a full assessment of that child’s learning.
* Dr. King agreed, noting that SOLs are a snapshot of a child’s abilities and can’t be used to judge a child’s full abilities or forward trajectory.
* Denise Bachman expressed her desire, as a parent, to hear from SRE where the weaknesses are, how the other successful schools have been successful, and what the plan is to make a positive change going forward. She acknowledged that no one was prepared to discuss this issue tonight, so she suggested a separate meeting for the SOL topic.
* Latha Masters asked whether other parents will have the opportunity to have a conversation similar to this one in a larger forum, for parents who are not at the PTO meeting this evening. Dr. King noted that comments at the State of the School Address will likely be broad in nature, and said that any parent who has concerns about their child’s performance or the strategies that the school is implementing, he or she (or both) are welcome to make an appointment to come in and talk with Dr. King individually to address their concerns.

* Jennifer Hallock inquired about the State of the School Address. Dr. King proposed October 2.

# Current Fundraising Updates

* Playground Committee Forming: Completing the upper playground is the target of the fundraising effort this year. A committee is beginning to form to address this issue.
* Innisbrook Catalog Fundraiser: Catalogs go home tomorrow—it will look a bit different because it is not in an envelope anymore. It is just a catalog.
* Coupon Books: This fundraiser is ongoing.
* Giant Cards: This effort is ongoing. Dawn Brindle-Branch encouraged parents to recruit friends and family members to give your kids their Giant card numbers so the students to earn a chance to select something from the treasure chest, and to earn the class ice cream party. Please also visit the Giant sign up genius (check SRE online) to sign up to gather Giant card numbers at Giant on Pantops.
* Boxtops/Labels for Education/Coke Codes: Angie Foreman encouraged everyone to bring in Boxtops, Labels for Education, and the Coke Codes, as she is accruing all three types of labels/codes. A suggestion was made to use the Coke Codes specifically to buy each classroom teacher a new playground ball. Angie also shared that the Boxtops Football Challenge will be coming soon.
* Bloop: These fundraiser days will be ongoing throughout the year.

# Upcoming Events

* Movie Under the Stars: The Lego Movie is the winner this year.
* Fall Pizza Party: More information to come about this.
* After School Enrichment Program: The four-week sessions are starting up October 1. The only change is limiting the days that outside groups can come to SRE for their program for supervision purposes. Outside groups (non-SRE) can occur on Mondays and Thursdays.

# New Business/New Proposals

* All School Shirts: This is part of our school spirit program. All of the shirts are the same. They are grey with green print. Sometimes kids wear them on field trips, but the intention is to build school spirit. The shirts will be available for sale soon!

# Open Discussion

* Eric Field suggested that the PTO and parents think about service projects that the Boy Scouts can do for SRE. Ideas generated from the group included gathering Giant card numbers while the Scouts are selling popcorn and peanuts, as well as assisting with the courtyard gardening efforts. Chesley Mullins also suggested that the Scouts might enter the Coke Codes. Dr. King offered the idea of the Scouts talking with the fifth grade teachers about making charts and graphs. This will likely be an ongoing discussion.
* Nicole explained the format of the PTO Meeting, followed by the PTO Work Session. She welcomed all teachers and parents to continue to come to PTO meetings in the coming months.

# Next Meeting

10/16/2014 6:00 PM, Stone-Robinson Elementary Library