

Claremont Immersion School
PTA General Membership Meeting
September 15, 2015

PTA President Introduction– Amber Dungan

Amber welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced herself as the President of the PTA for the current school year. Mabel offered translation to the group.

Amber explained the role of the PTA, and reviewed what the PTA does and doesn't do. The PTA's purpose is to engage families and students. It works to engage the CIS staff and community as a whole. It offers various programs, such as Odyssey of the Mind, afterschool enrichment, and fundraising. Although the PTA would like to cut down on fundraising to some extent, we cannot eliminate entirely. PTA meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month at 7 pm.

The PTA communicates via two list-serves, one called "Claremont PTA" and one called the "Prattle." One difference between the two is that the Claremont PTA list serve is moderated, while the Prattle is not. In addition, the Claremont PTA list serve is used to communicate school only business, while the Prattle is used for general community messaging, for example if someone is looking for childcare, has a free crib, etc. Another way the PTA communicates is through our Tuesday packet. The packet is used to communicate Claremont events, and these are printed on purple paper. Other flyers are also included to communicate events from outside providers.

Claremont is one of four schools that will pilot an electronic flyer system. There will be an eight week trial period, after which time the school system will decide if this system will stay in place. Amber explained that we are hoping to become a school that communicates primarily electronically, unless parents object.

Amber then explained that the PTA welcomes parent involvement, and that one way to do so is to join the PTA. Another way you can get involved is to volunteer, which can take many forms. It can be working from home on a weekend, or making a donation.

The PTA also has a website- www.ClaremontPTA.org, and the PTA publishes a guide specific to the school every year. Hard copies will be available to Kindergarten families and new families at the school. The guide has every bit of information that you would want to know about Claremont Immersion School.

Principal Jessica Panfil- Introduction

Jessica began by welcoming parents. She stated that this is the largest Claremont student population ever- 731 students currently. She introduced Carlos Ramirez, the new assistant principal, and her co-lead. She introduced him as a talented teacher, as well as an organized, thoughtful, and caring mentor for our kids.

Carlos acknowledged this introduction, and thanked the school and community for giving him the opportunity. He is happy to be able to impact more students in his new role.

Jessica then introduced three new teachers: First, Aracely Vance, who is also a parent, and who teaches 3rd grade with Ms. Brown. She then introduced Mary Real, joining as a member of music team. Third, Irania Escalante, Claremont's new full time counselor was introduced. She is here five days a week, and has helped several children transition to school already. Also, Senora Gonzales, who is teaching kindergarten on the Spanish side with Ms. Konstantine, is back after being 'lent' to Hoffman-Boston.

Amber then introduced the executive board members as follows:

Jorge E. Figueredo (President-Elect), Elizabeth Addington (Treasurer), Melissa Schwaber (VP of Fundraising), Lyzbeth Monard, (VP of Membership and Outreach), Susie Wallin, (VP of Educational and Green Initiatives), Sarah Bohl (VP of Social Events), Dayna Davitz (Recording Secretary), and Marjorie Araya (newly elected VP of Communications).

VP Fundraising Introduction: Melissa Schwaber

Melissa first noted that there will be no Innisbrook sales this year. She explained that in about two weeks, parents will get a Claremont spirit wear order form, which may replace Innisbrook in terms of a fundraising effort. Jessica may institute "Spirit-wear Friday," a school day encouraging kids to wear their spirit wear. A question about donating funds for families that can't purchase products was asked. Melissa answered that donations in-kind are always welcome- the process is simply to indicate that you are adding additional funding on the order form.

She then discussed the many fundraising opportunities going on at the school this year. The "Amazon Smile" fundraising program gives .05% of purchased to Claremont. The only limitation is that it cannot be done via mobile phone. Parents can also link up their grocery store cards, so that their purchases contribute towards the PTA. The only exception is that Giant requires purchases be made by debit or cash in order to be able to donate towards the PTA. School pictures, another fundraising event, will be October 16. And there will be a fundraising event coming up asking parents to donate what the PTA would spend on your child.

Melissa is looking for an assistant fundraising chair, and a product sales chair. She will be moving the Artware sales to November, and the product sales chair will assist with that. She also needs people to join the silent auction committee, approximately 1 to 2 more people. This year it will be a hybrid auction- part online, part in person. Finally, she will need help with the 'Read-a-thon.' Kids will get sponsorships for books that they read during this event.

A meeting attendee asked that the auction itself be described. Melissa explained that parents can bid online or via their phones. They can also go to the party in person and bid there for more of a social aspect. She is currently working on securing a party location.

The Claremont guide is being picked up from the printer tomorrow, and she asked if there was a volunteer to assist with that effort. Finally, a Girl Scout troop is working on a little free library, so donations of books (Spanish books in particular) are welcome.

VP Fundraising Introduction- Sarah Bohl

Sarah introduced herself as new to the PTA Board, and explained that she is leading the PTA's social events. She mentioned several events coming up, the first one being the Marine Core Marathon (MCM) fun run, which will be held on October 24th. The Claremont Physical Education staff gets funding for their programs through this MCM Fun Run. The run is about 1 mile long, and last year 240 Claremont students ran it. More information will be coming out to parents about the run.

The Claremont Fall festival is a carnival that is held here at Claremont on a Friday night from 7-9 pm- the planned date is October 16th.

Sarah then shared that she has a kindergartener, and identifies with feeling lost in a new school environment. She reached out to all of the new parents new to Claremont, and offered her personal guidance and assistance if they feel they need it.

VP Membership and Outreach Introduction- Lyzbeth Monard

Lyzbeth introduced herself and asked parents to please join the PTA. She is also in charge of Claremont Spirit-wear, and is in search of a volunteer to assist her with that effort.

Vamos Adelante was introduced by one of its coordinators, Isa Anderson. She explained that the goal of the group is to support the Spanish language, and that the group is also led by Linley Mancilla.

VP for Educational and Green Initiatives Introduction- Susie Wallin

Susie introduced herself and began by explaining that there are many opportunities to volunteer at Claremont. Currently there is a need for people to lead groups like Junior Great Books and to join Viva Verde (a group of parents that come together to make Claremont more environmentally conscious). There is also an outdoor beautification group that welcomes the entire school community as volunteers and is run by a parent, Steve Duall. Finally, the after-school enrichment program needs a volunteer to shadow the current lead because this is her last year at Claremont.

Speaking of enrichment, Susie reminded everyone that registration will start tomorrow at 6:00 AM. It is online registration only, which is a new method we've never done before. If you don't have computer access, volunteers will be at the school tomorrow morning to assist families with registration.

In order to support programs that fund teachers' projects, the PTA sets aside \$3000 to give to teachers and Marci Frischkorn coordinates that effort.

Treasurer Introduction: Elizabeth (Beth) Addington

Beth introduced herself and explained that the final proposed budget was sent out via the list-serve. In the interest of time, she chose not to go through each line item, but welcomed questions if anyone had any. Currently, the Claremont PTA has a balanced budget, and also has a surplus of funds. This surplus was set aside to be used as a reserve for emergencies. There was a call to the group for questions, and there were no questions raised.

Lois Koontz moved to approve the budget, and Julie Kluge seconded the motion. There was no further discussion, and the motion was unanimously approved by the group present.

A question was then asked as to how our budget compares with other schools in Arlington County. Claremont's PTA 2014-15 budget is large in comparison, mostly because of the after school enrichment program. The 2015-16 budget is in line with the budgets from other Arlington elementary schools.

Amber stated that while this is the current budget we are presenting, the PTA will bring changes to members as a group to make adjustments to the budget regularly so that they are aware of these changes. Additionally, if the PTA is seeking funds over \$300, the general membership must approve it. She thanked Beth for taking over, and thanked Caroline Butler, the most recent treasurer, who took over after the previous treasurer of 8 years left.

Lily Mancilla and group of volunteers audited the budget- Lily will be presenting this to the PTA as a whole at our next meeting.

In addition, the topic of the 2013/14 audit and 2014/15 audit was presented to the Executive Board, and approved unanimously.

SEPTA Introduction-Caroline Butler

Caroline introduced herself as the representative to the countywide Special Education PTA (SEPTA) group. SEPTA is a special education PTA that is community based. Volunteers usually serve as volunteers to their school. SEPTA serves students that have a learning deviation, as well as those with accelerated needs. Parents can contact Caroline if they need more information, and she will communicate via the list serve.

CIP Introduction- Bill Gillen

Bill explained that there is a capacity issue here in Arlington, and that a group called the South Arlington Working Group (SAWG) has been charged to find a location for an elementary school. Bill Gillen is the Claremont representative to the group, and Emily Greco is the alternate. Dayna Davitz is the backup alternate. Emily also represents the Claremont neighborhood. A summary sheet of the issue was published and copies were available at the meeting. The community is welcome to attend these meetings, and the next one will be held at Thomas Jefferson Middle School, tomorrow evening from 7:00 to 9:00 pm.

Bill went on to explain that there are some constraints on the group's mission. One is that in order to complete construction on a school by 2019, the group needs to select a site by the end

of this year. Several different types of lots were considered, but only an APS site will be recommended. As of that day, four sites were selected for serious consideration, and one of those will need to be selected by the end of the year. The sites are: 1) the formerly considered lot adjacent to Thomas Jefferson Middle School (TJ), 2) the lot across the street from Claremont, adjacent to Wakefield High School, 3) a lot adjacent to Gunston Middle School, and 4) a lot adjacent to Drew Model Elementary School.

If parents are interested in reading more, the APS website has published the minutes and discussions from these group meetings. If parents would like to contact the school board with recommendations, he recommends their arguments focus on why a site would be a bad or good site, and to use examples. He stated that changes will be made, and those changes will have to be a compromise.

Bill also spoke about the Claremont enrollment policy, which is a separate but related issue. Claremont has a capacity problem, as it is 132 students over capacity. The school can't keep taking on more and more students. There is an enrollment policy because Claremont is a choice school, and right now we have 3 feeder (priority admission) schools: Abingdon, Oakridge, and Hoffman-Boston. At the end of last year, the PTA sent a letter requesting changes to the enrollment policy, because the feeder schools have had so many students entering Claremont that siblings may not get into the school in coming years. The PTA asked that siblings of current students have the highest preference in admission to Claremont. The letter also asked that we re-evaluate the preferred school policy because the school doesn't have the representation at the school from the other Claremont represented communities. Emily stated that school board policies differ regarding sibling preference, and there is a current conversation about harmonizing policies.

Amber added that the Arlington county decision makers need to hear from parents directly. Although the PTA wrote this letter, she called on families with future students to please let the school board know. The current liaison is James Lander (was formerly Emma Sanchez).

Lois Koontz then added that although today the SAWG is charged to choose a site, it is also looking at additional sites because it is likely that we will need another school immediately and this group may decide that as well.

A meeting attendee asked if one of the four choices is more likely. Bill stated that TJ has been most studied, but there was tremendous opposition to it because the community would lose the park. The school board went to the county with the TJ recommendation, and the county board said that they deferred the decision until due diligence was done. But all of the sites have some location-related difficulties. For TJ, the design of the new school was focused on a piece of a parking lot. The opposition thought that the parking lot was tied to the green space. In addition, most of the opposition did not want the new school to be a choice school. Bill does not think that the other sites will be easy sells to their respective neighborhoods either. In addition, Bill noted that APS is committing to build a school with 725 students, which is the maximum allowable. Even after establishing that new school, most current projections it would still put the school at 250 seats short. A meeting attendee stated that it seems there is always a shortage immediately, and that this is a theme across all of the schools.

Amber stated that because people are passionate about this issue, the PTA will be scheduling a meeting to address just this topic in the near future.

Principal update- Jessica Panfil

Jessica welcomed everyone and said that so far it has been a great start to the year. Claremont is a very special school because we are learning in two languages. Recently a delegation from Ukraine visited because they are considering starting their own language immersion program.

Jessica began a slide show and explained that in certain classrooms there was a discussion about the students' hopes and dreams for the new school year. She said that the faculty's hope for all Claremont students is that they become truly bilingual and go on to become global citizens. She also said that she is amazed that our students are good digital citizens, and to see that they are caring and are team players. For example, the staff is always surprised that morning recess goes better than imagined! In addition, Claremont's vision for students is that they become effective communicators, independent problem solvers, and lifelong learners.

Jessica showed the group some additional photos from the first week of school. Cynthia Johnson, the APS Superintendent came to visit on the first day of school. She also explained that they are currently tweaking the schedules in order to fit in more valuable instruction. One example is science- in third, fourth, and fifth grades, students will have 70 minutes of science this year. 4th and 5th grade art teachers also made some changes to those grades so that they are able to have a longer period of both subjects. This demonstrates that the collaborative and co-teaching model is a highlight of the school.

Claremont is now tweeting! Jessica sees it as a way to capture in real time what the staff is doing. Although some of the staff members were nervous at first, they are now engaged in the effort. In order to see these tweets you must open a twitter account and follow Claremont, although you can also see the tweets on the home page.

To close, Jessica reiterated the strong value the staff places on their partnership with parents, and explained that Claremont gets better because of parent involvement.

Amber closed the meeting by thanking everyone for attending, and reminding them to please make it out to another PTA meeting this year.

*****MEETING ADJOURNED*****