

Claremont Immersion School
PTA General Membership Meeting
October 6, 2015

PTA President Introduction– Amber Dungan

Amber began the meeting by welcoming everyone, and introducing Maria Gomez, a teaching assistant here from Spain, as part of the Spanish Embassy Program. The program places a student from Spain with a Claremont family as their host. Maria introduced herself as being from Alicante, which is in the southeast part of Spain. If anyone is considering hosting someone through this program, please speak to Susie Wallin.

VP Fundraising – Melissa Schwaber

Melissa explained that the school is sponsoring a book drive, and has received a grant from the Dream Dog foundation with the goal of increasing book ownership. Through this process they have identified books that cannot be used, and these have been placed at the entrance of library- they are free for any child to take. Melissa asked everyone to please clean out their bookshelves and donate any books they can. The only exception to what can be accepted is anything torn, or any religious books. She added that they can accept books for young children (like board books), as well as books through the 5th grade level.

Picture day is coming up, and Melissa requested volunteers. Kristin Donaghy is chair of the event. Specifically, they need 6 volunteers for the morning and afternoon shifts. Also, an Artware chair is needed. The Artware event will be moved up in calendar so that the products are ready in time for the holidays. During this event, the chair will work with the art teachers to make sure the art is sent home, so that parents can send it to the company in time.

Finally, Melissa reminded everyone of Spiritwear, currently on display in the display case in the lobby. Catalogs for Spiritwear will be sent home shortly.

VP Fundraising – Sarah Bohl

Sarah stated that there are two big events coming up. The first is the Fall Fest, which will be on October 16th from 6:30 to 9 pm. The cost to enter will be \$5 a child, with a maximum cost of \$15 per family. There will be two food trucks there- the Empanada Truck and the Food Dude. There will also be fun attractions and bounce houses. The fair need volunteers, and parents should see a Sign-up Genius link soon.

The second event is the Marine Core Marathon, scheduled for October 24th, with a run time of 11:20. 240 children were signed up, and they will receive a t-shirt and race packet in their backpack. The Fall Fest has been occurring for 7 or 8 years, and it is not a fundraiser. The money raised is simply to cover the cost.

VP of educational and Green Initiatives: Susie Wallin

Susie first discussed the Junior Great Books program. It is sort of a kids' book club, where students participating are introduced to unique stories that they may not get exposed to in the classroom. The program is looking for parent volunteers, usually needed during lunch time. The program runs six to eight weeks long. Interested parents can contact Susie for more information.

Fall enrichment starts next Tuesday, and Susie asked parents to please remind their children to go to their classes after school.

VP of communications: Marjorie Araya

Marjorie spoke about merging both CIS list-serves, as well as the need for volunteers for translating.

Treasurer: Beth Addington

Beth reported that the PTA currently has more than \$40K in funds in the bank, and that at the present time we have \$9500 in available funds to spend for the PTA.

Audit report: Linley Mancilla

Linley explained that she has circulated the audit reports for CIS for the last 2 years. She thanked the committee members who worked to conduct the audit over the course of the past two years. She explained that to arrive at the final report, the audit team takes a standard template and uses it to do a bank reconciliation. They ask questions about the account and about the balance, and whether the records of the funds used and funds remaining match. All of the funds were reconciled, and the only differences were due to uncashed checks. In addition, the PTA needs to follow VA PTA best practices via a checklist. The audit team discovered that the PTA was doing one third of the practices on this list. Because the group is made up of volunteers, they are limited time-wise with what can be done in accordance with this list.

These findings and recommendations were shared with the CIS PTA Executive Board (EB), and the EB is currently putting together guidance based on those recommendations. The path forward is to present them to the general membership to have them adopted. Amber added that audits such as this one are required by the state of Virginia.

Linley explained that we could vote on this issue today, or we could wait until November 3rd to vote. The general membership agreed to vote. Julie Kluge motioned to accept, Kristin Donaghy seconded. There was no discussion, and the general membership unanimously approved. Linley stated that the audit reports will be posted online shortly.

There was a general thank you given to Linley, Beth, and others who have been working on this audit the entire summer.

Open Forum for general questions: Amber Dungan

Amber asked that we take a couple minutes out of the meeting to give new parents an opportunity to ask questions about the school. A question was raised about the parent teacher conferences and how they will work this year in terms of parents only being able to meet with one teacher (as opposed to the teacher team). Jessica Panfil explained that all of the elementary schools are doing this, mostly due to the 2015/16 APS calendar. There is a calendar committee that meets several times a year and establishes the calendar for all APS schools. The teachers are then given a window of time to use for conferences. Timing has been difficult, and in past years there were logistics issues due to a misalignment with the APS and Fairfax County schools calendars. Compromises needed to be made to align schedules, and changes to parent/teachers conferences were one of those changes. This is particularly hard on the kindergarten (K) teachers since many K parents are new to program and more actively seek information. But the CIS K teachers decided to stay late in order to allow for teacher team conferences. Fall parent teacher conference time is really for parents to come and share info with teachers. The schedule constraints are very challenging, and the CIS staff has been thinking through this a great deal.

A meeting participant asked how they could contact the calendar committee. Christine Murphy, the new APS assistant superintendent leads the calendar committee right now. APS has a timeline for their proposed calendar comment period, and usually there are a couple months to comment. Jessica also stated that both she and Carlos are available to meet with anyone in the school community, and that parents should not feel like they are intruding.

Amber then began discussing homeroom parents and their roles. Their roles are mainly to plan and organize celebrations, and sometimes they ask families to coordinate and plan for a gift. This will be organized differently this year, and now we will have grade level parents (as opposed to parents that work only with one class). All classes will do the same thing for all classroom celebrations. There will also be one teacher serving as the teacher liaison for that grade. Parents will work together to put that event on, and it will be communicated via email.

Jennifer Blum (1st grade parent) has volunteered to help kindergarten parents with their homeroom parties. This year is unique because there are three grade levels that have five classes each, and so there is a class in each grade that doesn't have a pair, and the idea is to not have that class be left out.

A question was asked about whether the jointly hosted party will be held in one space for all of the classes. Jessica explained that each class will remain in its own room, and each grade will vary slightly as far as the party logistics.

Another question was raised about who will reach out to parents to coordinate field trips. Jessica offered to follow up on that issue.

A discussion began about coordinating social activities and who would lead that, as well as what the guidelines as far as soliciting money for teachers gifts and for parties would be. Linley explained that APS has a gift policy which states that \$100 over the course of a year (monetarily) is allowable, and things like food-type gifts don't count. The policy is posted online. Some teachers don't want monetary gifts, and parents can try to bring in things that help the classroom. The discussion then moved towards doing away with class gift. Amber has experience being a homeroom parent, and explained that for some people it is easier to send in money, and she feels that we need to leave that up to each grade. In the past some homeroom parents have solicited for a class gift- the PTA would prefer to leave it up to each family to give a gift or not, and not have the homeroom parents soliciting.

Another question was raised about the times of the year that certain grade levels take responsibility for events like conferences and luncheons, and whether that was still being done. Amber answered yes -for example, there is a grab and go snack being provided by the fourth grade parents. While this is easy to do, we are now a bigger school, and will have to re-think some of these activities. In addition, how they will be paid for will depend on the activity. For example, funds were purposely put into the PTA budget for this activity as well as for others so that there is not so many small asks for money throughout the year. That is one of the goals this year – to try to save resources and limit the number of monetary asks.

A question was raised about homeroom parent ratios and the commitments required. The answer was that it is dependent on the event or activity and its associated need.

APS Capacity: Bill Gillen, South Arlington Working Group (SAWG) lead

Bill began by summarizing the mission of the SAWG, and explained that the group is close to a recommendation. A public meeting will be held tomorrow night in the Wakefield HS cafeteria from 7-9 pm. Four schools were mentioned as potential sites for a new APS elementary school (Thomas Jefferson Middle, Drew Elementary, Gunston Middle, and Wakefield High- across from CIS). The Wakefield site is now off of the list,

meaning the recommendation is not being considered now. The Thomas Jefferson site got the most number of votes in favor, mostly due to the fact that it is more centrally located and so may be more favorable based on the ability to help more schools alleviate over-crowding. There is also some interest in breaking up the Montessori program from Drew, as there are structural flaws having Montessori mixed in with the neighborhood school.

Bill reviewed the previously cited issues with TJ that made its consideration postponed. The School Board has said that the new school being built will become a neighborhood school and not a choice school. Some possible shifts could involve moving Henry students to the new school, and putting the Montessori program into Henry.

A question was asked as to whether the construction of the new school would involve re-districting. Bill said that it would, and that it will be a community-based process.

Another question was asked as to whether the admissions policy for CIS would be changed. Bill answered that at SAWG meetings, APS School Board members have been present and that he has pursued that question with them on several occasions. They have stated that they are actively looking at the CIS enrollment policy.

Linley commenting that there is discussion at these meetings regarding Claremont being seen as a neighborhood school with a countywide option, and well as an opposing voice that Claremont be available for everyone in Arlington, so there are voices on both sides.

If you have any questions, please ask any of the people involved in the capacity issues.

Principal update: Jessica Panfil

Jessica began by introducing Carlos Ramirez's summer idea of a 'Reading With The Principle' program. The idea is that the Principal and Assistant Principal make time to read books with every CIS class. For the first wave of the program, Jessica read in English, and Carlos read in Spanish. They put the books that they read in the library in a basket so that the students are able to look at them or check them out. The program is a great success so far, and has been great for relationship building with students. The next wave of sessions will start again in January.

Next, Jessica spoke about safety drills- they begin in the month of September. One of these drills is the lockdown drill. Virginia law dictates that it occurs once in September and once in January. The school safety officer Leslie Harden of APS works closely with CIS on the coordination and execution of these drills. The most recent lockdown drill worked smoothly. Second, there is a fire drill held once a week throughout September, and there are associated safety procedures that all teachers have.

Finally, there is an earthquake and a secure the building drill. Those would occur if there is something outside the school going on- for example, a robbery nearby. They would secure the building until police say it is clear (this is different than a lockdown during which they practice being quiet inside). Teachers introduce the “story” behind each drill depending on the class’s development level. In January there will be a surprise drill.

In October, there are several events occurring. First, tomorrow is bike/walk to school day, as well as an early release day. Early release days give teachers time to learn. There will be parent information sessions, which will run Tuesdays from 5 to 6 pm, as well as at scheduled times in the morning.

Jessica asked that parents please make sure they have their info up to date so that they receive the applicable communications via the Parentvue application.

There will also be a tech session, and CIS will have individual learning devices (I-pads) for second, third and fourth graders. They keep those IPADS throughout the school year. Second and third graders will start using them slowly, and will have complementary parent info sessions. They may or may not take them on to middle school, but they will keep them through their years at CIS. First graders will have some for use in class, but they won’t go home with them during the summer like the older grades.

CIS is using Twitter very often now, and parents can see the tweets on their website via the “gallery.”

Finally, “Spiritwear Fridays” will be started beginning first Friday in November.

Amber closed the meeting reminding everyone that the next PTA will be held on November 3rd. There is no school that day, but there is a PTA meeting that evening.