

Claremont Immersion School
PTA General Membership Meeting
January 5, 2016

PTA President Introduction: Amber Dungan

Amber began the meeting by welcoming everyone, and introducing Dr. Lori Wiggins, the principal of Gunston Middle School, and Dr. Chrisitan Wilmore, the principal of Wakefield High School.

Amber then made some general school-related announcements. First, that following Friday is a CIS movie night. The movie "Inside-Out" (in English) will be shown. The International Dinner/Dance would be held on Friday, Jan 22nd. Parents will receive info via the list-serves, and are asked to volunteer or bring dishes that serve eight to ten people. Julie Kluge and Jen Kamber are the coordinators, and they are looking for volunteers. The APS World Languages open house is tomorrow at Williamsburg Library, beginning at 6:30 pm. At this function, parents can find information about studying languages in middle and high school.

Finally, she thanked those that participated in the Giving Tree. There was a great turnout, and CIS collected over 90 coats for those in need of them. And a final thanks to Kyra Walford who put on the book fair.

Discussion: Dr. Laurie Wiggins from Gunston Middle

Dr. Wiggins began by discussing a recent 'In Niche' survey, in which they ranked Virginia school districts and middle schools. In the survey, Arlington was ranked number 1, and Gunston was ranked number 3. She then stated that she would be talking about the schedule at Gunston, as well as answering questions today.

She explained that students in 5th grade at Key and Claremont were recently invited to come to Gunston on 12/17 to tour and get a sense of the school. She discussed the general structure of the school day, which consists of eight periods.

For the immersion students, the classes held in Spanish are Social Studies, Science, and Spanish Language Arts (which serves as an elective). The immersion students are randomly distributed across the other classes. Claremont math teachers will recommend a math section for the graduating 5th graders to be placed in. January 20th will be an open house session at Gunston as well. There was a question about whether the open house was for parents and students, and Dr. Wiggins answered that both are welcome. She then distributed the open house information, as well as information on the Gunston blog and website.

There was a question about the percentage of immersion graduates that go on to the immersion program versus the regular track at Gunston. Dr. Wiggins stated that while there aren't exact numbers, most of the student do continue in the immersion program. Another attendee asked if everyone from Claremont/Key is guaranteed admission. She answered yes, and there are exceptions made for students that need to focus on their English skills, which they work through on a case-by-case basis.

Discussion: Dr. Christian Willmore from Wakefield High School

Dr. Willmore explained that this was his 13th year at Wakefield HS, and his 6th year as principal. He taught in the immersion program at Gunston, and taught at the immersion program at Key. In both schools he taught a mix of subjects.

He went through a summary of the students' day, the number of periods and the length of each. In addition, the students also have a free 27 minute period ('Warrior's period') for students to get homework done, meet with teachers, go to the library, etc. Teachers and staff also have these periods available.

For the immersion students, they have a Spanish Immersion 1 class available to them in 9th grade. One of the observations that they have made of the immersion program graduates is while they have a near native proficiency, there is a pattern of grammatical errors that Wakefield focuses on correcting. There is also a range of other Spanish classes that students can take, such as Intensified Biology in 9th grade. Having more students in the program will allow them to offer more classes, and they can tinker with the type of classes offered as well. The staff at Wakefield have also observed that the immersion students tend to take a more rigorous course load, including more AP courses. Economics and personal finance (in Spanish) is a graduation requirement for the immersion students. 11th grade is spent continuing the language, but there is not a content level course because they don't want to force them into a specific track.

Immersion students also do a senior project in their last year. It is a year long independently developed project. They are asked to find a subject matter expert in the field, and the proposal needs to be approved. The student earn sign-out privledges so that they can explore their topic outside of school. Immersion students are directed to do their topic either partially or completely in Spanish-. They encourage the students to use this opourtunity to use their Spanish.

In 11th grade, students can take the "DELE," which is the Spanish ministry of Education's equivalent of the TOEFFL, and it is scaled with other of the Ministry of Education's tests. Last year, 17 students opted to take the exam and all passed it at the B1 level (which is advanced proviciency). Several of the Wakefield immersion program graduates go to college abroad.

Wakefield offers over 30 clubs and activities to students, and they can start their own club as well. Sports (specifically basketball) tend to be very competitive for entry, as well as soccer.

An attendee asked what the outlook is for offering an IB diploma at Wakefield in the next 5 years. Dr. Willmore explained the staff at Wakefield currently don't feel strongly in favor of it. They feel that the AP classes offer more oppourtunity, and bringing in an IB program starts dilluting it, as the IB curriculum is more rigid than the AP program.

Another question was raised in terms of the breakdown between native English and native Spanish speakers. Dr. Willmore estimated that it was approximately 60% english and 40% spanish speakers.

He also discussed their work with NOVA Community College to try to teach classes and allow the immersion students to get college credit, for example through a "Latin American Civics" class in

Spanish. However, they do need a critical mass so that there are enough students to take a class. He discussed the new building, and that it was designed to have a “heart” and have a common area. He wanted chairs and tables that would facilitate conversation and interaction as well.

A question was raised about immersion students and college. Dr. Willmore said that the immersion students often study abroad and “CLEP-out” of their Spanish language courses. Many of them go beyond Spanish and explore other languages. Dr. Wiggins added that at Gunston, students can take French, Latin (via distance learning), Arabic, and Chinese (also via distance learning). At Wakefield, students can study Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, and American Sign Language (all with facilitators), as well as German (via distance learning).

General PTA updates

Susie Wallin began, and mentioned the Reflections program, which is an artistic expressions program that has several winners from CIS that went on to the County level competition. There will be a breakfast celebrating the students on 1/14. In the after school enrichment program, 18 classes have reached the minimum number of enrollees in order to take place. In addition, by having a scholarship donation button, CIS raised \$195 for scholarships.

The Green Kids club will start on 1/15. Odyssey of the Mind began- there are two teams, a younger one and an older one, along with two coaches. Junior Great Books continues as well. In this group, students meet up to read and discuss books. Volunteers are needed.

Melissa Schwaber said that CIS had a great book fair, and thanked the teachers of McKinley Elementary that volunteered. She explained that there would be an ‘Armchair Fundraising’ opportunity, which is a time that supporters of the PTA could use to write a check and not feel forced to participate in other fundraising events. Parent’s Night out will be held the day before Valentine’s Day, and will be staffed by extended day staff. In March, CIS will hold the “Readathon,” with more information coming soon. Kids will get sponsors to sign them up to read books. In late April, the Silent Auction will be held. Amber and Melissa will chair it this year. She also made an announcement for the Parent Resource Center, through which ADHD parent resource classes will be held.

Amber then explained that parents will soon receive a survey from APS on Peachjar. Everyone will continue to get flyers electronically unless you are one of the families that has elected to receive them via paper. Also, CIS has 2 list-serves which will be merged. This will happen in early February, and they will be un-moderated, meaning you can post any information you’d like.

A question was asked as to why CIS uses list-serves and not Facebook. The PTA members explained that some people don’t use Facebook and some don’t use the CIS Facebook page at this time.

Amber then stated that at the next PTA meeting, James Lander, the CIS/APS School Board representative will be in attendance. He will have an open agenda.

Principal/Assistant Principal's Update: Carlos Ramirez

Carlos began by showing the group pictures of the Winter Celebration, and thanked the PTA.

He introduced "Team Kids" which is a set of challenges that 5th graders go through. They meet and discuss these every Friday, and then facilitate a carnival. The 5th grade group is facilitated by the school resource officer.

Soon the 2nd graders will get their Ipads, and there will be a parent information session about them. They will also be increasing access to students for books and will continue to have the principals visit the classes to read.

Mr. Ramirez discussed the weather and asked that parents please note that on the website there is a link to the inclement weather page. A parent asked what happens when the kids don't go out due to weather. He explained that by county policy, when it is below 32 degrees they are not allowed out. The staff use their best judgement in regards to weather and having the students outside.