

Claremont Immersion School  
PTA General Membership Meeting  
February 2, 2016

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**PTA President-Elect Introduction: Jorge Figueredo**

Jorge opened the meeting followed by Jessica, who presented her Principal's Update. She announced the following activities for February: Team Kids, International Dinner Dance, report cards (Feb 19), and Valentine's Day parties (Feb 12). She then opened the discussion on APS capacity by noting that the PTA advocates as one voice but parents can speak out, send letters, etc. as individuals. She also emphasized that the school board sets policy and Claremont staff implements it.

**Capacity: Bill Gillen**

Bill Gillen presented data on capacity. Claremont is currently the third largest school (population) in Arlington. 599 is our official capacity and we're now 130 seats over capacity. Claremont will have the highest "seat deficit" among elementary schools next year, when six kindergarten classes enter. The following schools/programs currently have guaranteed enrollment: VPI and cluster schools (Abingdon, Oak Ridge, Hoffman Boston). Bill said that if parents are concerned about this policy, they should speak up and push for data (such as that in his report) to drive policy decisions.

**James Lander, Arlington County School Board**

James Lander, school board member, reiterated that Claremont will get six kindergarten classes next year and that the cluster schools will still have priority over siblings. However, even though the policy will not be changed, he says that siblings will be accommodated with six kindergarten classes. This projection is based on historical enrollment from cluster schools. In fall 2016, APS will re-evaluate policy and will continue to do so year-to-year as changes take place, e.g., new elementary school in S. Arlington and movement of Montessori program from Drew. Mr. Lander noted that if six classrooms cannot accommodate the siblings, they would give some cluster students the chance to go to Key, so that siblings would have priority at Claremont.

Middle school: There is some discussion about having another site for middle school immersion.

High school: There is discussion underway about the need for a 4<sup>th</sup> comprehensive high school. The projected price tag is \$150 million.

Parents posed a number of questions around (1) why the enrollment policy is not being changed to give siblings preference; (2) what can be done about kids in non-cluster school neighborhoods a chance for Spanish immersion; (3) how to address a seat deficit that seems especially high for Claremont.

Mr. Lander commented that a program has not yet been chosen for what will exist at Drew, and he would welcome a robust foreign language immersion program there. Regardless of residence location, the pipeline should be Randolph, Jefferson, Washington Lee for those interested in the IB program, in the same way that Claremont is a draw for the language program, and language programs are where he sees a spike for people coming to Arlington. Another group of parents, however, believes we should be

more focused on raising up our neighborhood schools. This can't be the board's decision; it has to be the community's decision.

A parent commented that there are two schools that are projected to be under capacity in ten years, and one of them is ATS. Mr. Lander replied that discussions have already begun to raise ATS enrollment next year. The parent further commented that there are ways to improve diversity using our choice school system such as reducing the size of the preferred area, and that issues also exist around walkability so every school ought to have a small walk zone and leave the rest as lottery. Looking at free and reduced lunch rates, we can fast track them.

Mr. Lander commented that he has never talked to anyone who has said "we don't want those kids," but they do say what their own kids' need. Because we are changing as a community, the board's role is to make sure that you get what your kid needs no matter where you live within the county. Kindergarten night is where the numbers change, because parents get to meet the leaders and principals of the schools. Everyone has to feel like their kids are getting a great education.

Another parent commented that there are a lot of nuances in the way parents talk about the schools. If people didn't feel the way they feel about Green Valley, we never would have had an issue with Drew having so many seats. Recruitment must be addressed. If Jessica knows that she had an information night with the Drew community about Claremont, but the parents couldn't make it there, the parents do not get the information.

Mr. Lander said that under 2% is normal growth, 2% to 3% is high, and over 3% is extraordinarily high. There is no model to plan for more than 3% growth; anything after five years is just a guessing game. School principals really make the difference. Drew had 5 principals in 6 years; there was a leadership problem, and it takes time for us to get to a place where people feel comfortable taking the next step.

Mr. Lander thanked the group, and encouraged everyone to get involved now with the community facilities committee and discussions about high school, even if only to listen, for when their kids will be in high school. We will make sure the sibling conversation and other conversations fit in with the future, not just what works for right now.

Jorge proceeded to call for VP reports:

**Fundraising: Melissa Schwaber**

The auction will be a hybrid this year, both online and a party on April 9 at the North Fairlington Community Center. Mr. Lander offered to pay for lunch. Readathon kicks off on March 2<sup>nd</sup>, which is "Read Across America" day. Parents Night Out was delayed because of the blizzard.

**Communications: Marjorie K. Araya**

Ms. Araya was absent but someone spoke on her behalf to say that the two Yahoo email groups will merge into one, and the listserve guidelines will be re-sent.

**Treasurer: Elizabeth Addington**

We have almost \$41K in the bank after January, 2016 income/expenses, and our available balance after reserve/carry forward is almost \$9,000. Please continue to buy through Amazon Smile and link your Harris Teeter and Giant cards.

After the Treasurer's report a parent from kindergarten asked what types of things does Claremont does for Black History Month, and whether there any events for families that we should know about. Jessica Panfil replied that at this time we do not have many events planned, however, we will provide more information in the near future. Another parent mentioned that there was an amazing panel discussion tonight, available on Youtube, about how Stratford was one of the first integrated schools in all of Virginia. They had a program with 3 of the 4 students who were there.

Another parent commented that 725 is the ideal cap for Arlington elementary schools, and asked what is the maximum classroom size, and who determines that? Jessica stated that caps for kindergarten classrooms is 24, so we won't ever go over that. The number goes up in the upper grades. For students who join Claremont in 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade, a Spanish assessment is required.

Jorge thanked everyone for coming to the meeting, and commented that it was very informative, everyone learned a lot, and that we have a lot to think about.