

**Westbrook PTA Meeting  
Tuesday, May 2, 2017**

1. Meeting was called to order at 8:13 p.m.
2. March minutes were approved and added to the record.
3. **Treasurer's Report: Ed Valado**
  - **Trash Free Lunch:** There was an accidental double payment for the Trash Free Lunch prices. We are working to rectify the double payment, so right now it looks like they are over budget.
  - **PTA Dues:** We have paid our PTA dues. This payment is currently listed under "Planning and Priorities," but it should be listed as an expense under "PTA Dues." This will be corrected and recoded.
  - **Teacher Stipends:** Each teacher has been sent an email regarding their balance. The spreadsheet will be updated once receipts have been submitted.
4. **Co-President's Report: Jesse Nickelson and Karen Thornton**
  - **Review of and Vote to Approve the 2017 – 2018 PTA Budget:**
    - **Budget Update:** There is one budget change from the Budget Meeting in April. Ms. Palmer and Mr. Ely have agreed to lead Aqua Eagles next year. Therefore, we increased the teacher stipend to \$400. Therefore, the budget total is now \$104,003. As of right now, the family contribution amount will remain the same. This may change when we get the final enrollment numbers in the fall. Right now, we know we'll have the same amount of the PEP students but roughly a drop of 20 students overall.
    - **Safe Routes to School:** We have decided to leave the Safe Routes to School Budget in case someone volunteers to lead this initiative.
    - **Science Committee:** We did not have a science committee this year, so some of the money will come out of Aqua Eagles. Maureen Kramer and Erin Harcourt will take over the Science Committee next year. We will then see which teachers will want to get involved. As we look forward to next year, we'll see what needs exist and what then needs to be augmented in the budget.
    - **Staff Appreciation:** We had thought this budget could be lowered due to the gift cards received from the A to Z School Directory sales.

We had built in the \$1,000 for teacher raffle cards, but we will keep this amount in the budget for now because the gift cards from A2Z I think it's safer to keep it and keep an eye on it. The quality of the gift cards from A to Z are random.

- Motion to approved, budget passed.
- I want to thank and Maureen Kramer and Erin Harcourt for all of their help with the budget.

- **Vote to Approve 2017-2018 Executive Board Slate**

- Motion to approve, slate approved.
- Thank you nominating committee.
- The incoming PTA Executive Board includes:
  - Co-president: Amanda Fuchs Miller (rising K and rising 2<sup>nd</sup> graders)
  - Co-president: Rachel Hirschberg Light (rising 2<sup>nd</sup> and rising 6<sup>th</sup> graders)
  - Co-vice president: Mike Buening (rising 1<sup>st</sup> and rising 5<sup>th</sup> graders)
  - Co-vice president: TBD
  - Treasurer: Christi Cox (rising 3<sup>rd</sup> and rising 4<sup>th</sup> graders)
  - Assistant Treasurer: Neil Goradia (rising K and rising 3<sup>rd</sup> graders)
  - Secretary: Regina Reilly (rising 3<sup>rd</sup> grader)

- **School/Parent Communication**

Building on the Principal Town Hall discussion, we also want to talk about communication. During the Town Hall, issue of connection and frequency was main topic. Therefore, I want to invite people to comment. As part of what I've seen this year, some communications methods work and some that aren't that great. We want to know what does the PTA membership want from the PTA, how we can work with Ms. Lane and how everyone's needs are being met. Comments from meeting attendees included:

- **School Calendar/Principal Newsletter:** I am a calendar planner type person. The calendars have been inconsistent. The monthly Principal

Newsletter has been unreliable. I keep the PTA calendar and I don't know what's going on, and Barbara Kahn doesn't know what is going on. Consistency with receiving information is an issue. The one that is really working is the This Week at Westbrook email, but it still doesn't have everything. We want everything in there but it's been hard to get information from the school on events and schedules. The Art Show is a really great event, but informing parents through a flyer in the back pack is really an outdated method of communication. The art liaison sent an email, but it was sent out too late.

- **Facebook:** If the flyers are outdated, we have also been posting information on Westbrook's Facebook page. There has been some feedback that it's a public site and that information is public, and there are some concerns. We wonder if it will work if we keep it private? And will it remain relevant? It must be private and I think we need a social media liaison. That could be a position that is well served. Unfortunately, private Facebook page may not be worth it because it adds additional steps to get the information. The Facebook page was initially suggested by the parent body. It probably has less members. Ms. Kahn took exception that her info was on her, but if you make it private, it makes it harder. If people are not receiving or reading emails from the school then they're not going to get the information from Facebook.
- **This Week at Westbrook:** Could we use headlines in the subject line of the email to highlight the "one" thing for each week? We could also put a call to action in the subject or an FYI. The problem is how do you then determine which headline? I love This Week at Westbrook, but it would be great if it was sent out on Friday so we can see the week ahead earlier. I'm plugged in enough, but it would have been helpful to get it ahead. If I don't know it two three weeks ahead it's hard to put it on the calendar and I would make my kids thing the priority. If there is a way if we get Maureen all the events and then everyone knows to go the Westbrook calendar, but she had trouble getting the dates from the school. The link the calendar is in the This Week at Westbrook email. It would also be great to highlight from each class in This Week at Westbrook.
- **PTA Communications Role/Gatekeeper:** Maybe we should have a dedicated communications role. There are many communications channels between the school and the PTA, ut some things still are missing. There is a tension between tradition and new ways to do things. People like one thing, but find another means of communication more engaging. No one just wants to see just a list anymore. Someone made a comment about the 8 million emails that we all have to filter through. You can get a digest, but then you miss timely information. In a broader context, how do you reach more people? It seems organizationally that

there could be an argument for a person to oversee communications, when you have someone only focused on one thing.

- **PTA Patter Newsletter:** Maybe one of the things, as a community building perspective and way to advocate for events is to combine the PTA Patter and Westbrook this Week, killing two birds with one stone. It will provide the big picture and weekly reminder. The PTA Patter can build community. They used to have students write about field trips, but it is a lot of work and a lot of editing. After you get it going, maybe it is a bit of plug and play.
- **How to Identify the Best/Most Useful Communications Methods:** This would be good for the communications person to do the strategy and determine the best channel, look at FB and other channels. Then have students provide content. We could look at how many people join, then they could look at all the things we try and see what works. There's always the circle of people who know what is going on, but it's a challenge to communicate with all the families/parents. We need to try and find ways to reach the most people and figure out ways with what they want to see. That could get us to a better level of cohesiveness.
- **Amount of School Activities:** Two thoughts—things missing in the calendar and how to convey all the messages. Does anyone think there are too many activities and events? I really don't care to come, not because I don't care about West brook but I just think that there are too many things. I am not the only one, there are not 300 families here. Reaching out by survey and email and getting feedback, maybe people don't really care for all of the activities.
- **Lack of Inclusiveness:** I like This Week at Westbrook, but I want to go back to the concept of building community. I like the idea of building out our communication channels, but I think we fail at in person communications. There is a core group of involved parents, we get in our comfortable worlds of social circles and we don't know other families. Those families don't feel involved. Those involved need to be ambassadors and bring other parents into the fold. Kindergarten had play dates before school, maybe we do that several times during the year. Maybe that can be an additional room parent roles. A lot of parents can't make PTA meetings and do other stuff, but if they felt more comfortable then they would get to know more families and have a better sense of community.
- **Welcoming School Environment:** Just being a warmer school environment, I often feel like this isn't a warm school. I am not greeted with a smile in the school office. I feel like I am being a pain if I ask

questions of anyone in the front office staff. My child's name isn't said correctly. And we get to know each other better, then we'll get the kind of warmth we want. The front office is a big part of it and it doesn't feel welcoming, it feels very, very cold. I contrast it with Westland that is so much bigger and if the front office doesn't know my name, they act like they do, it's friendly. Same with BCC. It feels sometimes like the school is holding us at arm's length. It's really helpful to me, when people say it doesn't feel welcoming in the front office. There are ways that I can help people understand that, I try to model that for the staff. It's one the main things that the main office should do – make people feel welcome.

- **Role of Room Parents:** In-school volunteering, with busy schedules, is one impactful, touchpoint parents can have. If we could encourage the room parents, one of the room parents should be required to come to the PTA meetings. When room parents don't come to PTA meetings there is a disconnect because room parents should be the liaison between PTA and families. (Kerry Lawrence noted that people can always bring questions to her and let her know as room parent coordinator, if your room parents aren't delivering.)
- **Teacher Involvement Outside of the School Day:** During the week of Book fair, they did cookies and milk with teachers, and Mrs. Atkinson read three books. When I was here and was listening, I was so proud of our community and I let people know that I work with. It was such a proud Westbrook moment. It requires a teacher that's willing to go above and beyond. That was a great idea, but we need more of it. Some of our other evening events, bingo, talent show, and international night, we were missing teachers. I think the principals in the past had the teachers pick two evening events to go to. At 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, their kindergarten teachers came back. Last year there were not many teachers there. It was noticed that teachers weren't at the talent show and international night. It's a job, but these are kids and we should be here because we love these kids. These evening events are part of their educational experience. This year was the first year that it hit me. One teacher mentioned to me, that one parent didn't know it was going on. Should we give the teacher liaison more information? I try to advocate for them to join the school list serve and I'll be more proactive about that. If it's a community event, it's incumbent upon us to say are you going to come. Whoever's chairing the event should send an email through Barbara. It's just a personal touch. Include "all community members welcome" but say the teachers too and other groups. We've talked a lot about more formal ways to community, but what feels different is the more informal ways to communicate have disappeared. This is a cozy little village, people look at the principal of this school as a

leader of this community. Seeing you at dismissal or pick up or seeing teachers, these are where the informal hard to quantify communications happen. It's particular to the culture of our school. It's like a small town, some good things and some bad things. I think that's part of the warmth that people are referring to and that's what we are seeing slip away. The PTA can only do so much to be that bridge, so figuring out a way to help you and the faculty and staff, we can have all the newsletter and strategies but if that is missing then we can't do anything. The other thing that we could very well do, if we have a calendar of all the special PTA events, we just put it up in preservice and have the teachers sign up for some events and make at least one mandatory. And then they just get in the groove. But I also want to add on to a comment about what are we doing, I do understand that it feels different and we've had a change in teachers. I do feel like Jenny Lopez had a lot of institutional knowledge, knew siblings and that is a hole in the school. She would know every child by name. Again, I do think we have people to grow into that but it will take time. The other thing I want to say I hope that when teachers are constantly told that they are not enough or not as good as someone who's been here before, it doesn't make them want to go the extra mile. There are ways we can communicate and support our staff. We do have a really, great staff and caring people. I know that you desire them to be part of the community, there are ways we can welcome them into the community. Thank you for the feedback. A plug to that kind of communications, Ms. Celano, a reading specialist, is changing a personal class so that she can attend the 5<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. When you make that personal outreach, it's a good reminder. For example, when Ms. Pattakos who came to McDonalds night and Ms. Palmer was at the Principal Town Hall.

I want to thank everyone for coming night and sharing. I think it's the start a new movement. It's going to be work, it's going to take time, people are going to grow into the role, and have your kids ask teachers to come to events. We all agreed that this was a necessary conversation. We had heard from membership that some were feeling anxious and upset, so thank you for providing ideas. I hope that you will continue to do so. Asks questions of the new slate and Ms. Lane. We have some good ideas to act on for the next few weeks.

- **Thank You's**

- Alison Goradia, Katie McLaughlin, and Jacquie Moen for serving on the PTA Executive Board Nominating Committee and providing us with the executive slate
- Crissy Upston and Kristin O'Brien for another great Westbrook Skate Night

- Kelly Fraser for coordinating Trash Free Lunch.
- Kerry Lawrence for her tireless organization of the room parents
- The 5<sup>th</sup> grade transition team for their hard work at the bake sales, other fundraising efforts, and continued planning
- Erin Harcourt and Jamie Brown for their support on making Flower Day a success

## 6. Principal's Update: Jennifer Lane

- **Science Standards:** MCPS is rolling out its next generation science standards. This is a great time to rejuvenate the science committee. The new science standards will look different and teachers will be trained over the summer. As a principal, they previewed it for us and it is very engaging and creative.
- **Articulation Process:** Please fill out the checklists on your child's strengths, struggles, as well as issues with classmates. For the articulation process, we first look at academics. Please note that your current teacher does not assign next year's classes. That may be a rumor, but that was not even the case with Ms. Jones. The current teacher provide input on what they notice in the classroom. For the second-grade parents, please be reassured that she will learn a lot about your children quickly. At the June the meeting, I will let you know of any staff changes. A parent asked, if their child had been in a class with a long-term substitute is there any consideration for placing that child with a more senior teacher, or a teacher that is less likely to go on leave, during the next academic year. A lot of information is given from the teachers. When doing class placements, I listen to the teachers, I talk a lot with Ms. Vogel and discuss the needs of each child. I don't necessarily consider if they had a long-term substitute. If you have more than one child and you had teacher x and you do or don't want that teacher, you can send that email to me and I will keep it confidential. If you know that that a person is not a match for your or your family, then I will take that into consideration. There are no guarantees. The school does keep the forms on file, because of last minute changes but we don't pull old forms for next year's class make up. The form has been changed to be more open ended and not so depended on asking about how your child is in class, since parents aren't in the class and may not have that insight.

## 7. Teacher Liaison Report: Colleen Dahlem

- **Quarterly Planning:** Our teaching teams are very thankful for the time that you're giving us for quarterly planning.
- **Performance Matters Training:** I had the opportunity through the Professional Development Fund to participate in a training on Performance Matters student

assessment tool. This technology will put all these pieces in one place and look at growth and indicators.

## **8. Committee Reports/General Comments**

- **Carnival:** There is a 100% chance of thunderstorms on Friday. The rain date is Friday, June 2 and when a decision is made about Friday an email will be sent.
- **BCC Cluster Meeting:** One parent mentioned that they attended the the BCC cluster reps meeting regarding Woodward High School. They noted that this is a really big deal, because it's more than just a high school is being opened. There was an email sent out with a survey. It's a very confusing survey, they're going to take that info from the survey and give you what you don't want. The survey is clearly just a legal requirement and the county is just checking the box.

## **9. Closing Remarks: Karen Thornton**

This is my final PTA meeting so I just want to offer one closing remark: I do a school tour every month for new families moving into our neighborhood. They've heard wonderful stories and are dying to get inside to see how our students are learning. I start each tour by offering some historical perspective for what community means at Westbrook. I grew up in the community behind the Glen Echo fire house and went to Brookmont Elementary School on Sangamore Road. In the 1980's when student population dropped, MCPS decided it was going to close either Westbrook or Brookmont. The families at Westbrook banded together and with hard work and passion, fought to keep Westbrook open. So even as a kid I felt the power of the Westbrook community spirit. As I conclude my service on this exec board, I encourage us all to work together to keep that Westbrook spirit alive. Let's support our teachers and our volunteers, too. If you love this school, I think we heard a lot of opportunities tonight to band together to keep Westbrook strong.

## **10. Upcoming Events:**

- **May 3 - May 26th:** PARCC Testing (see detailed PARCC schedule)
- **May 3:** Art Show, Westbrook, 6 p.m.
- **Friday, May 5:** Bring a Card for Your Teacher (any day during Teacher Appreciation week)
- **Friday, May 5:** Carnival, 3:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.
- **Friday, May 12:** Dad's Pub Crawl, 6 p.m.
- **Wednesday, May 17:** Tea to honor Westbrook Volunteers, 8:15 a.m.
- **Thursday, May 18:** 4th Grade Chorus Performance, 7 p.m. (family) Westbrook  
APR



- **Saturday, May 20:** Mom's UnWined, 7 p.m.
- **Monday, May 29:** Memorial Day No School
- **Monday, June 5:** 5th Grade Musical (Cast A), 7 p.m. Westbrook APR
- **Tuesday, June 6:** 5th Grade Musical (Cast B), 7 p.m. Westbrook APR
- **Wednesday June 7:** Field Day (K-Grade 2), 9-11 a.m.
- **Thursday, June 8:** Field Day (Grades 3-5), 9-11 a.m. Tug O War, 2-3 p.m.
- **Saturday, June 10:** 5th Grade Parent Student Farewell Party, 7 p.m. Jane Lawton Community Center
- **Monday, June 12:** Principal Town Hall, 7 p.m., Media Center followed by PTA Meeting (7:30 p.m.)
- **Wednesday, June 14:** 5th Grade Farewell Ceremony, 7 p.m. Westland
- **Thursday, June 15:** Last Day of School for PEP
- **Friday, June 16:** Early Release - Last Day of School

11. Meeting Adjourned at 9:28 p.m.