

PTO MEETING
Thursday, January 10, 2008
Hapgood Room, Old public library

Cathryn Noyes, PTO co-president, called the meeting to order at 9:30 AM with 16 people in attendance.

The treasurer's report was first on the agenda. Beth Drummey reported that the PTO's cash balance is currently close to \$49K, with \$10.6K dedicated to distribute. Remaining budgeted expenses for the fiscal year total about \$28K, leaving a balance of about \$10K in distributable funds. Forecasted income for the remainder of the year stands at about \$13K. Scrip/gift card profit so far this year totals \$14.6K, which includes just under \$4K of unsold inventory. Beth reported that the majority of these funds have yet to be distributed, and have not yet been allocated towards any specific item(s).

Dr. Jefferson spoke next about the schools' technology plan. He reported that an updated version of the technology plan has been completed and is due tomorrow (1-11-08) at the State Department of Education. Goals of the three-year plan include providing teachers, students and administrators access to modern multi-media computers, connecting every classroom to the information superhighway, providing staff with the necessary training, providing effective software and online learning resources, expanding the lines of communication, and providing all community members access to modern technology. Dr. Jefferson reported that the budget includes \$25K for technology improvements, which he mentioned is a higher figure than has been included in past budgets. He estimates that \$25K would fund 25 new computers for the schools. He also plans to seek grant funding for additional improvements. He hopes this will help move the Harvard Schools in the right direction, and he is excited about the options ahead.

A question was raised about current inventory and the current status of technology in the Harvard Schools. Has an inventory been done to determine where each classroom stands as far as computers and access to modern technology? How do we know what to replace/improve if we don't know what we have? Dr. Jefferson replied that Mark LaVertue (network manager) is working on compiling that information as part of the technology plan. He reported that while each classroom has at least one computer, many of those machines are of limited capacity. There is also a very limited amount of projection software and Smart Board technology in the schools. Immediate needs of the schools include to annually replace about 20% of the existing computers (i.e., replace 70 computers) and to add at least 10 Smart Board stations. Other needs (pertaining to data management and operation) discussed by Dr. Jefferson include updating the student data base system, developing a fiber optic coverage plan with the town, hiring a student data system manager and providing data system training to all users.

A PTO member volunteered her services in tackling the job of translating the school's current technology inventory into some sort of understandable form for the public. The idea is to clearly articulate the problems/deficiencies and quantify the needs so townspeople can see exactly how they can help. This member will follow up on this idea with Dr. Jefferson and/or Jim O'Shea, Bromfield School principal.

Naomi Yano spoke next about the Festival of Cultures, a new PTO-sponsored event scheduled for March 14th at HES from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. The purpose of the festival is to celebrate and value the diversity that exists in our community. Naomi is one of the co-chairs of the event. She explained that the festival would consist of two parts. The first half of the event will take place in the HES gymnasium, where there will be individual booths showcasing various countries. Visitors will “travel” to these countries to learn about the cultures from “ambassadors.” Families, individuals or groups are invited to sign up to participate as ambassadors. Naomi indicated that there has been a good response so far. China, Greece, Japan and India will each be represented. The second half of the program will consist of entertainment in the HES cafetorium. Musical performances, traditional dances (including an Irish step dance), and a puppet show are some of the many performances that are scheduled to take place. Other performances are more than welcome! Naomi also mentioned that the committee hopes to offer a “passport” booklet for children. Children will receive a “stamp” at each country’s booth that they visit. Mr. O’Shea asked if Bromfield’s World of Culture club had been approached to help/participate. Andrea Hill, PTO co-president, confirmed that there has been contact with the club. Anyone else who would like to participate in this event (as an ambassador, a performer, or as a helper on the day of the event) should please contact one of the committee members: Naomi (nyanomama@hotmail.com), Deb Barton (deb.barton@mac.com), or Devika Kommineni (devikakommineni@yahoo.com).

The co-chairs of Movie Nights, the other new PTO event, were unable to attend the meeting. Andrea Hill provided a brief update. The first Movie Night, directed towards younger children, is scheduled for Sunday, January 20th from 2:00 to 5:00 PM in the Cronin Auditorium at the Bromfield School. The movie *Ice Age 2* will be shown. The second movie night, a showing of *The Simpsons Movie*, was originally scheduled for Friday, February 8th. However a conflict with the Bromfield Science Fair that evening will require that the date be rescheduled. Both of these movies will be offered free of charge to the public. Anyone who would like to help with these events is welcome to please contact one of the two co-chairs: Deb Lindberg (breesmom@charter.net) or Tammy Endicott (tamsenendicott@yahoo.com).

Next on the agenda was a discussion of the new school budget. Dr. Jefferson happily reported that progress has been made in achieving three of the budget’s previous priorities: strengthening intervention services, reducing class sizes at Bromfield, and offering more electives at Bromfield. Additional staff has helped with the first two priorities, while the addition of virtual high school courses has succeeded in bringing a wider range of electives to Bromfield students. New priorities established for the current budget include maintaining what the schools currently have, strengthening Middle School special education services, and updating the schools’ technology. Dr. Jefferson reported that the new budget includes a 5.5% increase, the majority of which is applied to contractual settlements. Also included in the budget are funding for technology improvements and for additional Middle School special education staff. Dr. Jefferson stated that for the most part, this budget is a level service budget.

Dr. Jefferson also reported that he hopes to offer spots for about 85 school choice students next year. Second, fifth and eleventh grade classes are areas where the addition of school choice students would be helpful. Dr. Jefferson explained that the addition of choice students to next year’s second grade, for example, would provide the revenue that is needed to fund another second grade teacher, thereby reducing second grade class sizes.

A PTO member present stressed that it is important for everyone to get involved with the issues that face our town. He urged everyone to come to town meeting and to come out and vote at the town election. Dr. Jefferson reiterated the motto “any place, any time, anywhere.” He and the members of the School Committee are available to speak to anyone at any time to help clarify any questions or concerns.

Dr. Jefferson spoke next about the adolescent sleep research study being done this year. A committee has been formed to examine the possibility of changing the starting times of the Harvard Schools. A later start at Bromfield and an earlier start at HES are under consideration. The committee, consisting of Harvard Schools’ staff, administrators and community members, has been meeting throughout the year. Members have reviewed research data and have collected data from other districts that have changed their start times. The committee members are presently developing a survey for all parents and faculty to solicit feedback. This survey will be implemented this month. Dr. Jefferson stressed that input is crucial in order for the committee to accurately assess public opinion and develop appropriate recommendations. If a change in school start times is indeed recommended, then there is a possibility the change could be implemented this fall.

Ms. Mary Beth Banios, Harvard Elementary School principal, spoke next on a funding request for math intervention software licenses. The computer lab is presently open every day after school (and one morning prior to school) for fourth and fifth grade students who are eligible for reading and math intervention services. The program being used is Successmaker, and it is in high demand at HES. The Harvard Schools currently own eleven licenses, which allows eleven students to use the program simultaneously. However there is a waiting list of children who would benefit from this extra instruction but cannot be serviced because of the shortage in licenses. Ms. Banios requested the PTO’s assistance in providing funding for the additional licenses. The PTO recently voted to fund two more licenses, bringing the total owned to thirteen. The goal is to have Successmaker available on every computer in the lab. To do that, 24 licenses are required.

Ms. Banios presented a description of the Successmaker program. A pre-test identifies a student’s area(s) of difficulty. A personalized program is then established for the student. Successmaker automatically monitors the student’s progress and generates reports to teachers. These reports allow the teachers to also monitor the student’s progress and intervene if sufficient progress is not being made.

A discussion ensued about general math intervention services at HES. A member asked why students struggling with math are not pulled out of the regular classroom and given small group instruction (as is currently the practice for students with reading difficulties). Ms. Banios explained that the problems kids experience with math are not typically as universal as those in reading. I.e., most students with reading problems struggle with decoding (and can be serviced together outside the regular classroom), but in math, several different problem areas have been identified that need to be addressed. Therefore math tutors at HES are assigned to individual classrooms to address individual needs within each unit.

Ms. Banios also explained that prior to this year, there was no systematic approach in place at HES for math intervention services. A three-tier model begun this year has helped identify and service students struggling with math:

- Differentiate instruction within the class
- Regular-education intervention options for strugglers (math tutors, after school programs)
- Special education services

Ms. Banios explained that the more kids that staff can help at the second tier with regular ed intervention services, the fewer number of students will need to be moved on to special education.

After a quick review of available PTO funds, a motion was made to fund five licenses, in order to service the students on the waiting list for Successmaker. This motion was seconded and passed with a majority vote.

Under new business, a member new to town proposed two additional fundraisers for the PTO. The first suggestion was for a PTO-sponsored camp fair, where various camps in the area advertise their programs and answer questions from interested parents. The suggestion was to have this fair in conjunction with a pancake breakfast or some other community event. The second idea was to organize a gently used children's clothing sale. Although the PTO has taken a new direction this year limiting fundraising in favor of more community-oriented events, both suggestions will be given further consideration.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 AM.

Respectively submitted,
Jayne Rowe, secretary