

Groveland Park PTO Meeting Minutes: March 15th, 2018

Present: Marjorie Bequette, Kerry Furtney, Sarah Murphy, Principal Rebecca Pedersen, Superintendent Dr. Joe Gothard, Erin Jude, Geoffrey Pursell, Ben Lang, Kristen Sherman, Dan Sateren Zeller, Tobie Vickers-Lee, Carlos, Karen Eberman, Anna Kirkness, Jamie and Ryland McKown, Tiffany Dreher, Chris Kelsey, Erin Kelsey, Amy Geisler, Emily Kahnert, Kathryn Wegner, Shanna Setter-Clarksen, Robert Clarksen, Regan Fox, Sue Tomczak, Neha Lang, Roopali Phadhe, Mike Arquin, Sarah Anderson, Phyllis Brashler, Ray Faust, Carrie Faust, Paige Barthcamp, Brandy Norman-Wieberg, Julie Hawkins, Marguerite Zauer, Iadumo Ibrahim, Cheryl Armstrong

1. Welcome and Introductions. Thank you for coming!

2. Groveland PTO: A brief overview of what we do

PTO meeting this time will look a little different. We meet monthly and it is an opportunity for parents to learn about the school and district, share ideas, and get involved in any capacity they choose.

3. Vote to Approve February Meeting Minutes and Today's Meeting Agenda.

February minutes are available at:

<https://www.spps.org/cms/lib/MN01910242/Centricity/Domain/4154/Meeting%20Minutes%2002.15.18.pdf>

Motion to approve minutes and second. Dr. Gothard was given a copy of all PTO Meeting Minutes from this year. Marjorie went over today's agenda. We will be broadcasting this on Facebook Live after the kids' portion of the performance.

4. Student Voices

Four 5th Grade students performed poems (from memory!) expressing what Groveland means to them. Poems included an excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, an excerpt from Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise," and in honor of National Women's History month, an excerpt from "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou.

5. Groveland Community Shares Our Voices

All parents and teachers were invited to share by completing the sentence: "I chose Groveland because..."

"We live 2 blocks away, we knew we wanted the neighborhood school, we learned about the schools we were interested in. We are both musicians and having a music teacher was important to us. Mr. Likeness sent pages about music education and about the school. Music is what drew us and we'll stay because we love the school."

"I grew up in the neighborhood and went here for Kindergarten. When it came time for us to move and raise our kids, we couldn't think of a neighborhood school we'd more like to live in. We are both musicians and music education is important to us. There are cyclical funding gaps that need to be addressed."

"We live over by J.J. Hill, when we made the decision it was before neighborhood schools. We had friends here and they said the teachers were phenomenal here. My husband and I are both teachers and we are so impressed with the teachers here. I could say so many things, but the Widgiwaggin trip was a life-changing experience for my daughter last year. 5th grade teachers take the kids for 3-4 days. Everyone participates."

“Small school, neighborhood school, I can tell the teachers are phenomenal. I had an opportunity to perhaps leave Groveland, and I chose Groveland a second time. Everyone knows my child and it’s a very closeknit community. My daughter has developed deep attachments to the teachers. I have a list of things I would like--music teacher, gifted and talented teacher, science teacher--but I trust that the principal makes the most out of every resource she has, teachers, parents,partner and make this school a community.”

“I have a senior at Central and a first grader, so I’ll be about 17 years at Groveland. The teachers here work really hard, I feel like I wish the administration would support them. I wish the higher-ups in administration reflected the energy of the teachers here.”

“My family comes from Mpls to go to Groveland. Kids aren’t in school just to learn to read, to be with people and get along with others. Appreciate how hard teachers and parents work to support community. Role models in the school.”

“Have 3 kids at Groveland. Appreciate all the energy PTO, teachers, staff put into the school. Have a special needs child and really appreciate all the caring staff here puts in for him. We feel that the safety of our school of late has not been what it should. One of my kids had an incident. The school’s mechanisms and school district’s mechanisms feel like they’re not there to support our kids and teachers. We want only the best for this school and would like to see positive change in this area.”

“The teachers are incredible and work hard to meet students’ individual needs, social/emotional and academic. There is a wonderful support staff with the counselor, social worker, behavior specialist etc. helping all children. Groveland reflects the diversity of St. Paul and it’s important to us that our children grow up interacting with children from all backgrounds.”

6. Superintendent Dr. Joe Gothard shares his vision for St. Paul Public Schools

Introduction:

Share about himself. Eastsider from Madison. Was a teacher, head football coach, and principal at his alma mater. Felt like part of a community there. Was a superintendent in Burnsville-Eagan-Savage for 3 years. I chose St. Paul. What I’ve recognized since I’ve been in St. Paul is what a caring community this is. How can we come to unity among SPPS? Sometimes needs/wants at different schools overlap, sometimes have different needs. I visited Groveland in November, visited every classroom, can attest to what parents shared about it being a wonderful school.

Will talk about Funding, Strategic Plan process that we’ve just started, trying to listen and get out into communities so that many people impact those decisions.

Funding:

Yesterday I participated in the walk-out at Harding High School, it moved me and continues to move me. I was so impressed by students. You won’t find classes that teach what our students authentically possess. Students spoke pretty passionately about the need for greater support. Funding

He was at the capitol testifying for additional funding. We have incredible funding gaps in the state of MN and SPPS definitely feels it. I’m not scapegoating children, their needs, or areas we need to fund. I want our schools to be whole and the educational experience of our students to be whole. We are about 25 million dollars behind in funding with inflation.

IN some of the categorical areas, we're underfunded to the tune of 48 million and 24 million. As the district tightens its belt there are many great programs that we're losing. This tremendous balance is hard, I'm feeling it 9 months in, this community has been feeling it for decades.

Makes me appreciate even more the work PTO, teachers, staff do. Proud to be with teachers who are committed. I've been able to experience it through the parent lens too. He has a senior in high school and a college student.

The exposure our students get to culture, diversity, is exceptional. It's worth talking about what it means to be a student in this community and SPPS. Education has changed a great deal. Personalized learning is about who students are, where they're going.

Strategic Plan

Strategic plan process--wanted to get to know students, staff, community partners before creating plan. I know for a fact we can't do everything and do it well. Figuring out what do we start, what do we stop, and what do we sustain? We get caught in the experience we are having now not being the same as that 4-5 years ago. Need to think about the sustain piece. Engagement sessions. Our school could have an engagement session, they could send out people.

Strategic plan--long-term outcomes. Strategic focus areas, broad categories. Bulk of work will come after have decided focus areas.

5 Focus areas in strategic plan

Positive school and district culture

Effective and culturally relevant instruction

Program evaluation and research--we need to know what we're doing has the desired impact, and if it doesn't it needs to change

College and career paths-involve business partners in that work exciting things can take place, interweave skills, opportunities, exposure

Family and partner community advocates- how do we really engage with our stakeholders

Board will approve strategic focus areas in April

First district wide focus session next week at Harding High School

25 focus groups already set up for groups of various sizes, look online, maybe you can attend one.

Strategic plan website is set up

This will not be the only thing that guides our work

Really want to focus on children and the interactions adults have with children in learning experiences

You've probably seen me in the community or on the news, it's all part of the learning experience for him. Snow day, teachers' contract. At times, things can seem like they are disjointed or there is great animosity, there are opportunities to strengthen connections and build relationships.

There are 4 Asst Superintendents who each have schools under them. I trust our team to work with our teachers, schools, always open to meeting with families. I'm a learner first. I don't know it all. Really looking forward to knowing how can support you.

7. Questions for Dr. Gothard from the Groveland Community

Parent: I'm a parent of 2 kids here. Wanted to talk about my experience volunteering at school choice fair. It was hard because prospective parents there and I had to tell them no, we don't have those things at our school (e.g. teacher's aide in Kgn, music, g & t). I'm worried because I heard resignation in your voice about funding issues. I want the strategic plan to be all about money. I was really struck by Los Angeles as an example. The LA school board and Superintendent set a goal to double per pupil funding by 2020. From 10K to 20 K per pupil. My question: would you be willing to set a per pupil goal to increase funding? Maybe partner with other superintendents in the state.

Dr. Gothard:

Had a meeting last night to talk about referendum possibilities. Met with teachers union to discuss an enrollment increase campaign. I will look into increasing goal. We do partner with other school districts. Some areas looking at are through school safety \$20 per student school safety levy. Looking at long-term facilities maintenance. Expand law so school districts can use it for safety updates as well. This November could change things in a lot of ways, future economy. Our voice will continue to be out there. Strategic Plan needs additional funding.

Parent:

I've been at this school for many years. We used to have a site council. Those meetings were packed, parents more engaged. Parents had more local power. I'm curious to know if you would consider giving more power back to local.

Dr. Gothard:

We don't have site-based funding. Don't have discretionary budgets for schools to have power. If we had that I would support. But I don't have a discretionary budget to provide each school. When I took over in 191 it had been a traditional site council and they had to move to centralized. For right now, your parent voice is advocacy, some contribution to decisions.

Parent:

We are functioning on basic instruction with funding, there is no margin, nothing else to cut. I don't know what you'd cut at this point.

Dr. Gothard:

The stop is what we're asking our teachers to do. Stop around prioritization.

Parent:

What are your priorities? We are so tight, have nothing left to cut. What are you going to do to get our enrollment up? I would like to see communication, being very overt about that.

Dr. Gothard:

Looking at feasibility study to raise funds. Looking at ways to increase enrollment. I want people to want to live in St. Paul because of not despite it's schools. We have excellence around the district. If you're not hearing from me in ways you need to, that's good feedback for me.

Parent:

I'm glad we're talking about this in this way. Cycle: budget cuts, lead to people leaving district, more budget cuts, etc. I want you and all superintendents to work hard to get legislature to give \$. To the extent budget problems are a structural problem with the way we fund schools at a state level. Want to see district use its clout at the legislature to figure this out.

I have 2 friends who are teachers on the eastside, behavior management challenges, they don't feel supported by district to manage behaviors. They don't think anyone's listening at the district.

Dr. Gothard:

There's strength in numbers. As you're challenging me to be the voice, I need you to be there too. I will guide you in how to reach legislature. We have a full-time lobbyist for SPPS, Mary Gilbert. She is in touch with me. She's very well-respected and well-known. I will get some prompts out to the community so you know who to contact. I know about these discipline issues, they are real. If there are things I can do I need to know about it and work to support them as best I can. I can sit down and collaborate and try to be a partner. I need to know. If things are happening in some places, that doesn't mean happening everywhere. We have to differentiate our support. Needs to be based on individual needs of children and what support we have in schools. It looks different from school to school. This is my challenge. Want to tighten up some things but needs some autonomy in the schools. Want to ensure all our kids have the right to learn.

Parent:

I have a strategic plan background. I read the strategic plan info on the website before tonight. Achievement gap. Seems like the long-term outcomes focus on that area. 1 in 10 students say they don't feel safe in school. Mass exodus from public schools. What is causing this? Strategic plan should address this. I feel like there's nothing in the strategic plan that addresses my kid, he's really smart.

Dr. Gothard

Efforts to rebuild enrollment is something that needs to happen, but might not be part of this strategic plan. If the plan gets too unwieldy. Want to make sure there's an operational plan and a learning plan (separate).

Parent:

What's your experience/expertise with trauma-informed classrooms?

Dr. Gothard:

It's hard because needs vary, and practitioners vary across schools. One of the things I've learned from high school students is need for greater mental health support. Multi-tiered support. Sometimes we don't have people or expertise to meet kids' needs.

Parent:

I have 3 kids in SPPS and I went to Central. How have you looked at past strategic plans to understand where they have been successful or not and how that's informing the current effort.

Dr. Gothard:

Beyond the last plan, haven't looked back. Last plan focused a lot on movement, big operational issues. Didn't have a lot in terms of what teachers need. I want it to be around what teachers need to be supported to give the best outcomes to our students. You won't find start times in this plan, but it's part of our operational plan. That's a question we have a lot. For me it's learning about the past, making sure we're making sound decisions around resources of time and money. We have to make sure that we know the effects of what doing. Team at district looking to modify some of those initiatives based on Dr. Gothard's perspective. Culture is very important to him. That's not something that's always been prioritized in this district. We need to make sure that our schools and workplace is joyful. Culture allows us to understand who we are, who students are.

Parent:

Has a Kindergartner. So far I'm very pleased with Groveland. What I'm struck with or concerned about is the lack of cohesion between staff, teachers, and leaders. I see that within our school and in district as a whole. Very strong staff but I feel lack of support and cohesiveness.

Dr. Gothard: Believe in distributive leadership. ?? Decisions/power/authority should never be in one person's hands. Need to come together and make sure decisions are made with input.

Teacher:

As a teacher here, I'm not sure anymore what the bottom line is in terms of behavior. What is a suspendable offence? I know there's a big push to not suspend students. What's your opinion? What's the bottom line?

Dr. Gothard:

We have a right to provide due process to students who have violated rules. In a perfect world, it would be black and white. Discretion can give us a lot of latitude but can result in decisions not good for kids. Sometimes suspension doesn't help the situation when the kid comes back. Need a plan. Restorative practices is in 12 of our schools. Not a game-changer, a tool to restore relationships. I would hope that it builds a community so things are prevented from taking place. So to say what's a bottom line behavior is going to be different based on every interaction and the details of what's happening. Physical assault of teacher? Maybe... We need to provide supports to our schools. I will take this feedback back to Asst. Sup.

Parent:

New parent to Groveland. I was a teacher in Baltimore schools. This is very similar to issues facing in Baltimore. What can you learn from the association of superintendents? You also mentioned feasibility study, would like to hear more.

Dr. Gothard:

Met with Congresswoman Betty McCollum recently. District belongs to council of great city schools. Has a greater place at the federal level. AMSD creates legislative platform, present to legislators, then hear from legislators. Relationships are there. What we fight for and get is shrinking. Need to think of better ways for state to prioritize funding at state level. 2% increases inadequate when costs increase 3-4%

Parent:

We've heard a lot about needs of students. I want to hear how you plan to support teachers. When teachers are supported, students needs are met.

Dr. Gothard:

Enrollment campaign, would invite you to be part of that as well. Feasibility study--intent of Federation of Teachers and District to explore funding possibilities by way of referendum. We have 3 more years to do referendum. 2018, 2019, 2020.

8. Upcoming Events at Groveland

Please see the back of this Agenda for dates and further information.

9. Motion to end meeting, vote to end meeting.

Please join us for the next PTO Meeting on Thursday, April 19th, 6:00-7:30

Groveland PTO Executive Committee

Marjorie Bequette, President groveland.pto.pres@gmail.com

Sarah Murphy, Vice President groveland.pto.vicepres@gmail.com

Heather Allison, Fundraising Chair groveland.pto.fundraising@gmail.com

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Please contact us with questions or if you would like to get involved with Groveland PTO!