

Blind Brook PTA
General Meeting
Thursday, March 17, 2021
7:00pm
Blind Brook MS/HS IMC (In Person) and Via Zoom
MINUTES

I. Acting Superintendent Update and Q&A: Dr. Colin Byrne

A. Construction

- i. Progress has been focused on the cafetorium roof and kitchen.
- ii. The courtyard is taking shape. We were concerned because it looked like so much concrete, but there were supposed to be plantings and places to grow things. We are starting to see more dirt for planting.
- iii. We are keeping up with the Temporary Certificates of Occupancy (TCO's). We have been getting extensions as we need them. We can't get a full Certificate of Occupancy until the project is complete. Our current TCo expires 4/15.

B. You should see an email soon regarding COVID protocol adjustments. We're not putting masks on everyone, but if someone tests positive at home, any siblings must mask. Also, if you take a rapid test, you're supposed to take a second test 24 hours later.

C. We had our Saturday budget meeting the other day. There are no major changes or additions to what was announced. We're looking at hiring another maintenance person at RSS. That way, we'll have someone in-house to do things a contractor might otherwise do.

D. Governor Hochul recently shared information on how to get grants for mental health. We've been working on implementing the Yale RULER program. We're working on identifying, naming, and dealing with emotions. The idea is to change the climate/environment of the schools by establishing a common language and understanding around emotions. Eventually, it will grow to be more than that.

E. It's getting harder and harder to hire people in the educational world for certain positions, especially in the sciences, technology, and library. We are looking for substitutes. RSS is especially having a hard time. There is a MS Spanish leave. Mr. Horowitz is trying hard to fill it. We have reached out to various hiring groups and platforms. We've had limited success, though Mr. Horowitz just received an application that looks promising. There seems to be a general shift away from careers in education. Hopefully it will shift back.

F. **Q: Related to staffing and hiring people, I know you're in contact with neighboring superintendents. I assume they're experiencing the same thing?**

There is a local, a county, and a tri-county superintendents' group. They are all running into the same problem. For example, nationwide, it's hard to hire substitutes. It seems like a pretty scary issue. In the elementary school, there was a shortage of aides. **Response: I would love to hear about how you guys are brainstorming.** I have posted on Indeed, and LoHud/Journal News, without much of a response.

- G. **Q: In the last PTA meeting, you said that there were some corrections that needed to be made from the February board meeting. I haven't seen them publicly shared. I would love to get an understanding of that.** I will make sure to share that soon.
- H. **Q: Was RULER purchased through COVID relief funds?** The Ruler program was part of the COVID funds, specifically the Cursor grant, the first grant we had. Right now, we're just in the training phase. We did talk about using the money to support our students in other ways. We're talking with grade level teachers about expanding the summer program. We're talking about doing something for school. The conversation is going on, I wish it could go faster. They've brought up not just the academic needs, but the social skills perhaps students didn't pick up in the past couple of years. **Response: I would encourage that because they go hand in hand. If the students who are falling behind have the opportunity to learn with the other students, they can interact and it makes things much more inclusive.**
- I. **Q: Do we have dates for the summer program?** I'd like to design a program around the dates teachers are available. We are working it out. **Response: This is also our children's time - I just want to be sure we get things in place sooner rather than later. If they fall behind, that does affect their mental health.**
- J. **Q: Regarding the teacher shortage problem, how does our pay compare with other districts? Is it possible to offer more to entice the teachers we need?** If a teacher is hired, they are hired on a scale level based on their experience. I don't think candidates are looking at salary- people can look at our contract online - it's available. Salary is usually the last step in the hiring process. We have upped our substitute pay, though, and we've gotten a few more people.
- K. **Q: A lot of schools do job fairs, maybe that's another good option to explore- you could go to different universities in Manhattan - they have a lot of talent.** We participated in a diversity fair to try to attract a more diverse employee pool. I talked to probably 8 or 9 different people to talk about the different positions we have open. We'll look for things like that and see if we can attend.
- L. **Q: Have you thought about hiring from overseas? Is that something you're allowed to do?** I have never fully looked into it. The certification would be a question. They would need certain certifications. There may be a program

where, sometimes you can hire someone if they are working on it, or sometimes a certification can transfer over. Sometimes an employer can sponsor a visa.

II. Co-Presidents' Report: Cameron Sager and Correy Stephenson

- A. Please use School Bee appropriately, to stay in touch with fellow members of the Blind Brook community. We can't use it for advertising, politics, etc.
- B. Going forward, at PTA sponsored K-5 events, we will have a no-device policy. Elementary students who bring a device will drop it off in a basket at the door, and we will return the student's device at the conclusion of the event. We had kids mis-using devices at a recent PTA paint night.

III. Acceptance of last month's minutes: Approved.

IV. Treasurer: Lynn Glantz

- A. February 2022: Net loss of \$(1690)
- B. Major Revenues: Gross Profit/Loss \$1555

Clothing	\$447
Minted	\$500
Programming Revenue	\$617

- C. Expense Total: \$3248

Programming Expenses	\$1075
RSS - Indoor Recess	\$773
PTA Board Expense (Meet & Greet)	\$471
Accountant Fees	\$425

Bank Fees	\$311
MS Candygrams	\$193

D. Total Net Revenue (Loss) \$1690

V. Ways and Means: Alicia Scala and Kate Marino

- A. We will sell clothing next week at the Nitroball game, 5:30-7:00pm.
- B. The FLEX Registration email, for afterschool activities at RSS, went out today.
- C. We are planning a plant sale for May.
- D. We are planning afterschool programs for the May parent-teacher conference half-days at RSS.
- E. We are looking forward to organizing special ways to honor our teachers during Teacher Appreciation Week in May.
- F. The Square Art fund-raiser sale is coming up.

VI. Programming: Amanda Gitkind and Shana Koransky

- A. We have great programs coming up! There will be a virtual cookie-decorating night at the end of March.
- B. We're doing an event with Coach Christina on the blacktop at the end of April. It will involve relay races and team-building activities. If it rains, we can move it indoors.
- C. We just got approval to host the Harlem Wizards in May, for grades 2-5.
- D. We're talking about another special event in June, more soon.

VII. RSS Liaison: Rachel Lerner

- A. Thank you so much to all of the families, the 4th and 5th grade Student Council, and Mrs. Fernandez who made our Feeding Westchester "Snacks for Seniors" campaign a great success! The Feeding Westchester van picked up the donations today!
- B. Thank you to the parents who have volunteered to unpack, sort, and shelve our elementary school library books! Library circulation should begin next week!

- C. Kindergarten registration has moved to online as has registration for anyone new to the school, regardless of grade. Incoming kindergarten registration is in the low 80s. There will be 4 kindergarten classes, 4 first grade classes, 5 second grade classes, 5 third grade classes, 5 fourth grade classes, 4 fifth grade classes, and a K/1 self-contained class.
- D. Big news: play dates are now allowed on buses, except for half days or early dismissal. We waited a little while after the mask mandate was lifted just to make sure case numbers didn't rise.
- E. Visitors are now welcome by appointment only. They must wear a visitor badge while in the building.
- F. There is a new school monitor. His name is Joe Sannella. He has been a welcome addition with a background in safety and security.
- G. The 2nd graders planned a fun school spirit week this week, which the kids are really enjoying. Tomorrow is tie dye day. Wear something tie dye or a variety of different colors.
- H. The PTA has brought back some indoor recess options for the 2nd-5th graders. The classes take place in the library. Marla Beth of Marla Beth Designs has been generously donating her time Mondays and Wednesdays planning fun art projects for each class. Josh Colas from the National Scholastic Chess Foundation is leading recess chess classes Tuesdays and Thursdays until April 7th . The art and chess recess classes are offered on a sign-up basis with your child's teacher and are held regardless of whether there's outdoor recess. With regards to outdoor recess, the kids are enjoying the new recess equipment.
- I. Next month parent placement input forms are going out. While they're not mandatory it's highly encouraged. Your responses are only seen by Tracy and Teresa. This is not meant to hand pick the teacher you would like your child to have next year. Any negative direct experience you have had you can mention.
- J. If anyone is interested in learning more about ICT classes please reach out to Tracy and Teresa as they are happy to hold an information meeting in the coming months. ICT classes are offered for grades 1-4.
- K. A parent meeting on social media and devices is in the works for an upcoming bluebird chat. Hopefully in-person with masks optional.
- L. There is a 5th grade presentation also being worked on.

- M. Now that more places are opening up to the public, teachers are able to schedule educational field trips. This is not mandatory, it's to enhance curriculum.
- N. We're hoping to bring back the newspaper club soon; however, it's dependent on a faculty advisor volunteering.
- O. An email with parent teacher conferences was sent out last week. The in-person conferences are Friday 5/6 and Thursday 5/12. These days are ½ (8:30-11:30am). Conferences on 5/6 are 12:30-3:30pm and 5/12 are 5:00-8:00pm.

VIII. MS Liaison: Alex Boruch

- A. Thank you to the Community Coalition for having the JCK Foundation come work with our students next week. Seventh grade met with the speaker this week, and next week grades 6 and 8 will meet with the speaker.
- B. Next week is wellness week. Thank you to the Community Coalition for organizing some wellness activities next week.
- C. 914 Cares came to school yesterday to meet with the Youth Leadership Club and other interested students. They are planning a sneaker drive.
- D. Course requests are due tomorrow - please submit them.
- E. Next week, the MS will hold a Nitroball tournament. Students who want to participate should register by tomorrow.
- F. Students entering grade six will come for an orientation and building tour soon.

IX. HS Liaison: Jen Savner

- A. The High School has had some fun student/faculty badminton and volleyball tournaments lately. They plan to follow up with a corn hole tournament and a dodgeball tournament this spring.
- B. The senior class is running a fundraiser.
- C. Senior options will begin at the beginning of May.
- D. Graduation will take place on the football field in June.
- E. The junior class has a College Night coming up.

X. Pupil Services Liaison: Kiki DeBari

- A. SEID is hosting an informal gathering on March 30th at the Crawford Mansion at 7pm. It will be an opportunity to meet fellow parents and network. Everyone is welcome. We look forward to getting together, sharing ideas, and further advocating for our children.
- B. The High School is hosting an event on March 23rd on Zoom: College Planning for Students with Disabilities. The invite went out to grades 11 and 12, but everyone is welcome.

- C. Erica and I haven't met with Pupil Services this month - we'll meet next week. You can still send me questions.
- D. You can hear the Pupil Services budget information [here](#), hourmarks 2:30-2:57. Sometimes you don't know what's being planned. I encourage parents to listen and learn what's being planned so that you are better prepared to ask more questions.

XI. Membership: Stacy Kapner-Lerch and Bree Candee

- A. We have two new members of the PTA.

XII. Community Coalition: Monique Tricario, Student Assistance Counselor and Prevention Coordinator

- A. We had the JCK foundation speak with parents this week on Mental Health. There will be presentations for the MS/HS next week.
- B. It's our fifth year of Wellness Week. We have a lot of fun activities planned:
 - 1. Monday: Kick your Stress to the Herb
 - 2. Tuesday: The Complement Door: Write complements to each other, post them together to create an affirmative space in an entryway all students pass through.
 - 3. Wednesday: Relaxation Station: Tea and clay and aromatherapy
 - 4. Thursday: Ice pops
 - 5. Friday: Therapy Dogs
 - 6. We'll also have the JCK Foundation and the Nitroball tournament going on.
 - 7. Thank you to the parents who have volunteered to help out at Wellness Week!

XIII. New Business: Nomination of PTA Executive Board 2022-2024

- A. Thank you to the nomination committee. We did our best to choose the best people for the jobs:
 - 1. Co-Presidents: Correy Stephenson and Cameron Sager
 - 2. Treasurer: Lynn Glantz
 - 3. Legal: Shari Turner
 - 4. Special Events:
 - a) Large Events: Jamie Spielberg

- b) Smaller Programs: Linda Itani
 - c) Smaller Fund Raisers: Karen Erb
 - d) School Spirit: Shana Koransky
5. Liaisons:
 - a) Pupil Services: Mariela Cohen Sabban Waisburg
 - b) HS: Naomi Riley
 - c) MS: ToniAnne Rigano
 - d) RSS: Amanda Gitkind
 6. Membership: Stephanie Biderman and Katie Wolff
 7. Recording Secretary: Kate Marino
 8. Corresponding Secretary: Nethra Bhatt
 9. Advisors: Johanna Gonzalez and Alicia Scala

Attendance	
In Person	On Zoom
Nethra Bhatt	Stephanie Biderman
Alexandra Boruch	Bree Candee
Rick Buzin	Mindy Friedman
Colin Byrne	Seth Horowitz
Hedy Cardozo	Rachel Lerner
Kiki DeBari	Nancy Parra
Deb Ebenstein	Perri Ross
Lynn Glantz	Patricia Schofield
Johanna Gonzalez	Pooja Singh
Katherine Hallissy Ayala	Samantha Smith
Barrie Hammer	Victoria
Linda Itani	Erica Wiener
Shana Koransky	Luci Zimmerman
Karen Lin	
Kate Marino	
ToniAnne Rigano	
Naomi Riley	
Cameron Sager	
Jen Savner	
Alicia Scala	
Correy Stephenson	
Monique Tricario	
Shari Turner	
Katie Wolff	