

Blind Brook PTA
General Meeting
Thursday, December 16, 2021
7:00pm
Ridge Street School Old Gym (In Person) and Via Zoom
MINUTES

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

- A. Q: The covid fund: There was government relief funding provided to the school district. I wanted to learn more about how the funds were used. I understand the program was used to purchase RULER, but from what I understand, that program will not go into effect until next year.** The funds were used to purchase RULER, and also iTutor, which is to be available for students who are quarantining. The funds also helped pay for PPE and cleaning equipment.
- B. Many parents feel that there has been a regression due to covid. What more can the district do to remediate the regression? Some districts have after school learning 3 days a week to bridge that gap. Perhaps you should survey the community to see who already pays privately for tutoring, and who feels that their child would benefit from a school-led program utilizing the covid funds.**
- C. Dr. Byrne: The RULER Program: the way the program works is that initially a team in each building trains on the precepts of Ruler, and then they train everyone else. It's an institutional program, a mind set, a shared vocabulary, so that staff can help students find the words to express their emotions and deal with them appropriately. Each team is working on developing a plan to train the faculty in the building. Going into next year is where the student roll-out comes in. It may feel like RULER is not directly affecting the students right now, but we are following RULER's established process.
- D. The iTutor program is available for students who are in quarantine, and we are looking into having access to it after school. We are thinking about doing another summer program, as well. I'm happy to do a parent survey and get feedback. I did get feedback from teachers. I didn't know people had private tutors- that is a valuable piece of the puzzle to know. I will reach out to the teachers again. If there are teachers who express a need for reinforcement or extra help, we want to get it to them.
- i. Follow up: Regarding the covid relief funds - if we have kids who were not fully in school for 1.5 years, these are children who probably don't have the skills to express how they're feeling. This process for providing social/emotional support should be accelerated. Regarding**

tutoring, it can feel isolating to have tutoring online at home. It feels better to do it as a group - it makes sense to do it at school with a cohort.

- ii. Follow up: My kids and I found that iTutor was useless. There was one tutor who was not familiar with our curriculum at all. Kids are not grouped by age– the one tutor serves all of the kids who are quarantining in the district all at once. The tutor does not have prior knowledge of the curriculum, and the tutor is there to answer kids' questions but does not deliver a lesson at all. Kids are not doing well on exams when they get back to school. Kids are suffering.** I did hear that feedback from parents on iTutor. The tutors should be getting more background from teachers when they are not working with students. I will follow up.

- E. I learned recently that NYS is offering to fund a free lunch program due to covid. Will the district follow through on this program?** We have an unfortunate situation where we are short a few administrators. I missed this. I will look into it, and I will try to take advantage of it.
- F. Superintendent's Report: The Bond vote is next Tuesday, December 21st, in the Fab Lab. When you vote in the fab lab, you get to see another new space!
- G. If you haven't heard, we currently have a power outage at the MS/HS. The power outage extends to the Village Offices and the Police Dept. I reached out to Con Ed. When other areas around Rye Brook lose power, we generally don't- we're on our own special circuit. Due to the power outage, we had to cancel a game and a practice tonight. There is a chance we might need to cancel school in the MS/HS tomorrow.
- H. Today, I re-sent the letter about the threat from TikTok. There were posts about possible violence to schools tomorrow 12/17. It was investigated by police, the post came from outside the US. The RB Police dept shares our caution and will have an increased police presence at school.
- I. We've seen rising numbers of covid. Many surrounding districts have been hit harder than us. Currently 8 students and 6 adults have tested positive in BB. It's climbing, and we are concerned. Please get vaccinated. We did send out an email this week: Westchester Medical Center has blocked out hours this Monday for Blind Brook students: Monday 12/20 5-7:00. See if they have times that fit your child's schedule. As a bonus, you can also get your booster when you go in. If you need additional info, reach out to me or Mr. Naccarato.
- J. People asked if we are doing remote learning before the break. The regulations are that we can only do that if we are in a COVID situation. We can't do a proactive shutdown right now.
- K. One more reminder: the bond vote is next Tuesday, 12/21, in the fab lab.

- L. **Q: Because Ryan Naccarato is leaving, and he's in charge of covid, who is going to take over the position since it seems to be a growing issue. Can we hire a contract nurse?** We have an athletic director search. Because of the short timeline we have before Mr. Naccarato is going to be done, we would not hire a permanent replacement unless the candidate was a home run. Among our applicants, there were no home runs. We do have the names of a few retired athletic directors who know the job really well and can come in as interim athletic director for the balance of the school year. Because of the short timeline, since we really need to bring somebody in, I may not go through our usual protocol for hiring an administrator.
- M. **Q: Covid screening. I reached out to Mr. Naccarato and the nurses. I want my son tested every week. I want him to be part of the screening program. Since we came back to school, I can't get anyone to help me.** I will make sure testing is being done, and I will make sure your son is on the list to get tested. We do have Mirimis as our company- the county has picked up the cost of the contract this year. If anyone wants screening testing, they can get it done.
- i. **Follow up: You should send an email to all families about the covid screening testing program - especially with the holidays, we could volunteer to test especially after vacation. Please remind the community and communicate the information effectively.**
- N. **Q: Regarding the decision tree diagram: if your child is exposed to covid, with the children 5+ vaccinated now, as per the Westchester Dept of Health, a vaccinated person does not need to quarantine if he or she was exposed. Will vaccinated RSS students need to quarantine if they are exposed to covid?** We have one flow chart for the entire district. It should be in the flow chart - vaccinated children are exempt from quarantining.
- O. **Q: One the tour, I noticed that water bottle filling stations are installed. When can children start using them?** The water bottle filling stations in the K/1 wing are in use! They are recessed into the wall. The stations in the older parts of the building need to be returned because their depth violates fire safety codes. Having a combination bottle-filling station/water fountain makes the station deeper, so if we can't recess into the wall, we actually need a bottle filling station that does not have the water fountain built into it.
- i. **Q: Why did Blind Brook order these water fountain/bottle filling stations if they did not comply with code?** The architect who designed that did it negligently. If you have an inspection, and you have something you didn't change, if it violates code, the code is typically not enforced because that was an existing condition. However, if you put in something NEW, like our new bottle filling stations/water fountains, it's no longer an

existing condition, and it becomes a violation that gets enforced. We didn't realize we had been violating a code.

- P. **Q: When we went on the tour, I didn't see glow-in-the-dark tape on the staircases.** All of the staircases have emergency lighting, but we can install the tape- it's easy.
- Q. **Q: We are getting more and more covid cases in the district- are administrates keeping track of how many people are actually having to quarantine? Is there a large group now quarantining?** I don't have the exact number of people quarantining right now, I'd have to look them up.
- i. **Follow up: Are you allowed to ask if these people are vaccinated?** We can ask, I'm not sure if we can require them to tell us.
 - ii. **Follow up: Is the district keeping track of who is vaccinated? I didn't realize I was supposed to send the vaccine card.** We had asked employees to share their vaccination status. I just asked administrators to collect that information for their students.
- R. **Q: Will Blind Brook be sending weekly covid cases in aggregate? At what point if any will the school shut down?** Last year, we only shut down when we ran out of qualified adults.
- i. **Follow up: Proactive communication would be helpful.**

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

- A. Thank you to everyone who helped organize and run the PTA Winter Fest! It was a lot of fun for everyone.
- B. A lot of people in the community came on a tour of the Ridge Street School this week. Thank you to everyone who came out. Some parents had never been in the building, so it was great to finally have parents visit!
- C. Blind Brook Board of Education members Jen Schlactus and Jeff Mensch are here to answer any questions about the bond vote.
- D. Jeff Mensch: Thanks to the PTA for having us, thanks to Correy for checking everyone in on the tours. We have a bond vote next week, on December 21st. What's on the ballot: we're not voting on board members, not covid, what IS on the ballot is financing an additional \$6 million to complete the school construction. What will the \$6 million get you? It will allow Blind Brook to complete the cafetorium- cafeteria, brand new kitchen, with better food prep equipment, plus a performance space. It will also include the courtyard, the greenhouse, an outdoor performance area, and outdoor classrooms. If the vote fails, some of those things might not get done. If the vote fails, we may opt to fund the project's completion by taking money from other programs.

- E. Q: Regarding the bulletin you mailed out: What will be the improvements to curriculum and extracurricular programs? Also, the update on the project in the pamphlet you mailed to residents did not seem accurate. The Fab Lab is in the pamphlet, but that is not part of the Ridge Street School. The STEAM Bar and courtyard learning space are checked off in the pamphlet, but they are not completed or available yet.** The Fab Lab was the first part of the project that was completed, at the MS/HS. The bond from 2017 included the Fab Lab, and that instructional space is complete, though it still needs furniture. The Fab Lab has machinery that is not yet up and running, so maybe even that check is premature. The plan is that all of these spaces are done or will be done.
- F. Q: You mentioned we are in danger of cutting programs if the bond doesn't pass. Which programs?** Jen Schlactus and Jeff Mensch: We would take suggestions from our business official. We have a consultant, and we are in the process of hiring a new business manager. We don't want to take money away from programs, the classrooms, the curriculum. Ultimately, if the bond doesn't pass, we'll probably close up the building and go for another bond in the spring. In my mind, there is no taking money away for other programs. We'd probably have to close it up and try again in the spring.
- G. Q: What concerns me is that the mailing was a little bit misleading. Communication and being right on point is so important for this community. You are trying to win back trust, so you really need to be accurate. The other part of my question was, what is being added to the curriculum through the bond, what enhancements are being made?**
- H. Colin Byrne: We are trying to help diversify instruction - creating more hand-on learning experiences. We're doing a literacy program review at RSS. We are evaluating the literacy program to see if there is a better program to bring in. The construction project will bring enhancements, but many spaces are not available yet.
- I. Comment: The estimate is that this bond might cost each homeowner about \$125 per year. That is the amount a family would spend on one meal at a restaurant. If it doesn't pass, our kids will still have to eat on the ground. We need to finish the school. If we don't pay for it, we will have an ugly, unfinished building, and you'll still be mad at the school board.**

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

IV. **Treasurer report: Lynn Glantz**

- A. If you are hosting a program, you should not use your own money for the program. Reach out to Lynn two weeks in advance so she can arrange to get you your funds.
- B. Report for November 2021: We had a net loss of \$(3,314). Here are highlights:
- C. Major Revenues:

- 1. Gross Profit/Loss: \$6668

Clothing	\$(2661)
Membership	\$2640
Programming	\$5694

- 2. Expense Total: \$9982

Programing	\$(2786)
Staff Lunch	\$(3031)
RSS Waters	\$(1124)
Fab Lab	\$(1920)

- 3. Total Net Revenue (Loss) - \$(3314)

V. Ways and Means: Alicia Scala and Kate Marino

- A. We had a successful PTA Winter Fest! It was really fun! Thank you to the HS band for performing!
- B. The book fair was insanelly successful.
- C. We have some new spirit wear coming.
- D. We are considering a big spring event.
- E. We will be handling teacher appreciation week - it's the first week of May. We're also planning a plant sale for Mother's Day. We want to sell plants in school and have students buy plants for their moms, grandmas, aunts, etc.
- F. PTA After School Activities (ASA) sign up is starting. ASA will start in January. Mrs. Murphy is back, Mr. DiMiceli is back, and more programs are available, too. It should be great!
- G. The pie sale was super successful! We sold 400 pies. We will look to do it again.

VI. Programming: Amanda Gitkind and Shana Koransky

- A. We hosted Middle School Paint Night earlier this week. They made a cute llama in a turtleneck. What we thought was going to be gingerbread decorating turned into paint night. Thank you to parent volunteers who helped accommodate this change in a tight time frame!
- B. We are looking into a girls' empowerment program for 5th grade in the new year.

VII. RSS Liaison: Rachel Lerner

- A. Before I give my report, I just want to thank the community for the overwhelming support of our holiday boutique a couple of weeks ago! Katie Wolff and I put a lot of time and effort into it, and we're extremely thankful that we met our fundraising goal for the PTA!
- B. About 200 people have toured the new K/1 wing at RSS, and the feedback is great. Families are excited. The prospects of what could be as we look ahead are wonderful.
- C. K/1 rooms have been completely moved as of today. There are 2 second grade and 2 third grade classes that remain to be moved. Specials are going to be moved to their respective rooms shortly, and the kids will go to the rooms for specials. After break, both gyms will be used as lunch rooms. In-person meetings are back in gym spaces.
- D. With respect to the rising cases of covid, the school is continuing to do what they can, keeping the kids 3 feet apart in the classroom and 6 feet apart when eating. Contact tracing is being done.
- E. RSS has decided to hold a Spirit Week each month, and each grade level will get a chance to select their theme days during Spirit Week. Our first grade to schedule Spirit Week for our entire school is 5th grade!
- F. Next week (Dec 20-23) is our first Spirit Week, and our 5th graders discussed some possible theme days. Here is next week's Spirit Week schedule:
 - 1. Monday 12/20: Sports Jersey Day or can wear something sports-related
 - 2. Tuesday, 12/21: Crazy hair day
 - 3. Wednesday, 12/22: Holiday Clothing Day: Wear something holiday-themed
 - 4. Thursday, 12/23: Pajama Day
- G. Thursday 12/23 will be a 1:30pm early dismissal
- H. I hope everyone has a healthy and happy holiday and New Year!

VIII. MS Liaison: Alex Boruch

- A. The middle school has been hosting a series of school spirit events throughout the month of December. Last week we enjoyed "Festive Flannel Family Photo Day" in which everyone wore their flannels and posed for homeroom family pictures.

The class with the most creative photo was treated to an ice cream party.
Tomorrow's Festive Friday theme is "Ugly Sweater Day."

- B. Earlier this week, middle school parents should have received a link to a ThoughtExchange. The purpose is to collect community feedback and ideas regarding what our school priorities should be as we think about and plan for the future. Please visit the ThoughtExchange between now and January 9th to provide your thoughts and to rate other peoples' ideas so that the Middle School can determine what our collective parent community sees as our areas of priority.
- C. Social media has, and continues to be, an area of importance to focus on with our students and families. Early next week, all middle school students will be completing a brief survey regarding social media use. Then, after vacation, the parents will receive a survey. The goal is to collect data regarding the types of social media being used in our community, as well as the positives and negatives associated with them. This data will be used to develop programs in order to support our students' safe and appropriate use of social media.
- D. Wishing everyone a happy and healthy new year!

IX. HS Liaison: Jen Savner

- A. Goal and idea planning for the district continue
- B. RULER training continues. The program will roll out to students next year
- C. The HS is focusing heavily on the mental health of the students and trying to support when and where needed.
- D. Graduation is still slated for outdoors. There is no rain date.

X. Pupil Services Liaison: Kiki DeBari

- A. Mr. Burg and Ms. Carpanzano sent out a questionnaire to parents of students in the ICT program. They got a lot of positive and encouraging feedback.
- B. We are organizing an event in January. It will be a workshop provided by Western New York Parent Network called Speaking Up: How to Advocate for Your Child. It's a SEID event, but I encourage all parents to attend. Some of you may have attended the latest Bluebird Coffee, which discussed special education and the Multi-Tiered AIS program, and there is often advocacy involved.

XI. Membership: Bree Candee and Stacy Kapner-Lerch

- A. We have had a few additions to the members lately. Our members are at 534.
- B. We also have 551 in the MemberHub, which includes teachers who have registered as well.

XII. Community Coalition: Debra Cohen

- A. In January we are bringing a speaker to the HS from The JCK Foundation, which will focus on mental health, wellness, building resilience, and the social stigma around mental health. If students have a friend who is suffering from something, they should know how to access professional help. There will also be breakout groups with faculty and staff. We are going to run each grade separately.
- B. We are also hoping to schedule a Friday night activity organized by the Youth Leadership Committee.

Attendance	
In Person	On Zoom
Bree Candee	Nethra Bhatt
Kiki DeBari	Stephanie Biderman
Alex Boruch	Hedy Cardozo
Debra Cohen	Catherine
Amanda Gitkind	MCD
Johanna Gonzalez	Concetta D’Inverno
Katherine Hallissy Ayala	Meredith Dolgins
Rachel Lerner	Allison Goldstein
Karen Lin	Kerri James
Kate Marino	Stacy Kapner
Jeff Mensch	Katie
ToniAnne Rigano	Leah
Jen Savner	Sara Levine
Alicia Scala	Steffany O’Neill
Jen Schlactus	Ella Rosenfeld
Patricia Schofield	Anne Rossmann Weisz
Samantha Smith	Cameron Sager
Correy Stephenson	Maya Seif
	Monique Tricario
	Erica Wiener
	Sara Wolf
	Cindy Zahl