



## Blind Brook Parent-Teacher Association

### Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 14 November 2024 | 9 AM | BMP Ridge Street School Cafetorium

#### 1. Welcome

Blind Brook PTA Co-President Loren Becher called the meeting to order at 9:06.

#### 2. Special Guests

##### a. Ashley Schlemmer, Supporting Our Kids through the Holidays

Blind Brook PTA Co-President Lisa Benoit introduced the first speaker, Blind Brook Middle and High School Student Assistance Counselor Ashley Schlemmer.

Ashley announced that the Great American Smokeout campaign will fall on Thursday, 21 November this year.

Following that, Student Assistant Services will roll out a campaign called, When the Holidays Aren't So Happy, providing support and resources to students who may experience difficult feelings during the end-of-year holiday season.

Ashley distributed the Student Assistance Calendar of events to meeting attendees, which lists all of their events and initiatives planned for the school year.

There will be a focus on wellness activities from the end of November through December.

Programming Committee Co-Chair Mary Barbagli asked whether their office planned any activities for elementary school students. Ashley said no, but that she hopes to find ways to extend the middle and high school initiatives to the elementary school, as part of the older students' engagement.

A PTA member asked how parents can support these initiatives. Ashley said that she welcomes ideas and communication with parents.

##### b. Tracy Taylor, Getting the Most Out of Your Fifteen-Minute Parent-Teacher Conference

BMP Ridge Street School Principal Tracy Taylor began her presentation with a reminder that a Bluebird Chat will be held next week, focusing on the partnership between parents and the schools.

Second-grade teacher Kerri James gathered tips from other teachers to help parents make the most of their allotted parent-teacher conference time.

Ms. Taylor first explained that conference times are limited to fifteen minutes per student in teachers' contracts. If parents or teachers need more time to discuss an individual student, they can set up another meeting outside of the allotted conference times. Parent-teacher conference days are structured with each fifteen-minute meeting slot scheduled back-to-back; both parents and teachers must be mindful of the time, and can find a different time for followup, if necessary.

Ms. Taylor provided a number of suggestions for preparing for and participating in a successful conference meeting.

She reminded everyone to double-check their meeting time, and to call the front office if they need any assistance in doing so.

She also reminded everyone that students would only attend school for a half day, with dismissal at 11:30 AM, on the two scheduled parent-teacher conference days. She also thanked the PTA for sponsoring half-day activities for students on those days.

PTA Middle School Liaison Leah Mittelman asked why parents of fifth graders aren't offered conference times. Ms. Taylor clarified that parent-teacher conferences are available for fifth-grade parents by request. Since teachers teach fifth graders in teams of two, each one teaches around forty students, rather than around twenty, as it is in the lower grades. Because of the contractual limitation on conference times, there wouldn't be enough time allotted for each family to meet one-on-one with their student's teachers.

**c. Rachel Boyman, Okay to Delay**

PTA Membership Committee co-chair and Okay to Delay Rye Brook Chapter Leader Rachel Boyman presented on Okay to Delay's work to encourage and support parents who want to delay their children's access to social media.

Rachel runs the Rye Brook chapter, but hopes to identify grade-level captains, to create solidarity within each grade cohort.

So far Rachel has convened two kickoff meetings, in May and August of this year.

The group highlights the dangers that social media can pose, particularly to younger children, and promotes the consideration of alternative devices to smartphones.

Rachel described a presentation which was made at the last Board of Education meeting by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Colin Byrne, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment Dr. Michael Curtin, and Director of Technology Charles Von Hollen about the use of technology in all schools. An initiative to phase out the use of

personal devices for school activities by high school students was included in that presentation, and Rachel noted that Dr. Byrne is open to feedback on this topic.

Rachel encouraged anyone interested in and supportive of Okay to Delay's mission to attend upcoming events, which creates solidarity with fellow parents making similar decisions.

Some sharing of personal experiences with children's use of social media and devices, and discussion of federal and state legislation of social media followed.

Rachel also highlighted scripts available from Okay to Delay to help parents speak with kids about social media use and restrictions.

More discussion followed regarding the possibility and efficacy of placing restrictions on children's social media and personal device usage once they have already been granted access.

PTA Elementary School Liaison to Class Parents Afton Rosenfeld asked about the tablets used in the elementary schools. Ms. Taylor clarified that all chat features are turned off, and that some other functionalities are blocked. The tablets are programmed to allow access to certain educational websites and approved applications. Additional software alerts teachers to inappropriate student usage.

Ms. Taylor further explained that printed and other analog materials are still used in class, but that all academic programs and curriculum used by the school now has some online component, which also equips the district to pivot to online learning, should that ever be necessary, as it was at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rachel encouraged anyone interested in Okay to Delay to reach out to her at [okaytodelay.ryebrook@gmail.com](mailto:okaytodelay.ryebrook@gmail.com).

### **3. Superintendent's report, Dr. Colin Byrne**

Dr. Byrne began by adding to the previous discussion that any questions about the use of technology in the Blind Brook schools could be addressed to Mr. Von Hollen.

He then moved on with news from the high school, where many athletic teams have made sectionals, including the girls' volleyball team which won their section 1 championship match; they will compete next at regionals the following Saturday, 16 November, at 4:30 PM.

The high school musical, *Ranked*, will be performed this weekend, on Friday and Saturday.

Dr. Byrne has been working with the Port Chester Public Schools administration to find ways to connect the neighboring districts. In the past week, students from each high school met and had a productive meeting, generating new ideas and outlining further work to be done.

Dr. Byrne reminded the group that all schools will have an early dismissal on Wednesday, 27 November, leading into the Thanksgiving holiday.

Winter concerts are scheduled for December: the middle school choral concert will be on Wednesday, 4 December, middle school band on Wednesday, 11 December, high school band and choir concerts on Thursday, 12 December, and the fifth grade band concert on Wednesday, 18 December.

Dr. Byrne ended by clarifying that schools will not dismiss early on Friday, 20 December, the last day of school before holiday recess.

**4. Acceptance of the minutes of the 17 October 2024 meeting**

Fundraising Committee Co-Chair Dea Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes.

Mary seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**5. Co-Presidents' report, Loren Becher and Lisa Benoit**

Lisa thanked everyone for attending the meeting and noted that the PTA meeting schedule has been changed to a prior scheduling format, alternating morning and evening meetings each month.

Lisa also thanked the Fundraising Committee, the Friends of Blind Brook, and all of the volunteers who helped to bring together a successful Fall Fest this year.

She also thanked the Programming Committee and the volunteers who had hosted the middle school pumpkin carving event.

Lisa reported that the PTA executive board had voted to approve of a new funding model, which allocates a certain amount of money from the PTA's budget to each of the three schools in the district. Rather than each school's principal coming to the PTA with requests to fund particular programs and expenses throughout the year, making planning ahead and budgeting difficult on both sides, the PTA will offer this lump sum now for the principals to use at their discretion.

**6. Treasurer's report, Taylor Gutierrez**

Loren delivered the treasurer's report on behalf of PTA Treasurer Taylor Gutierrez.

The PTA's budget was finalized this month. It was built from the bottom up, based on historical actuals and estimates for the year ahead. A goal this year was to cut expenses and focus on high impact/low cost initiatives.

In doing so, the PTA has been able to grant each school a fair budget for PTA funding for the year.

Any questions about the budget can be directed to Taylor.

**7. Fundraising Committee report, Dea Fisher and Jessica Trosterman**

Dea reported that this year's Fall Fest had been a success.

She also highlighted the pie sale fundraiser, going on now. Orders must be made by Monday, 18 November; pick up is currently scheduled for Tuesday, 26 November, in the afternoon, with details to come. The ordering platform was different this year, and seemed to be easier to use, and well-received overall.

PTA-sponsored half-day programming offered for elementary school students on Friday, 22 November, and Thursday, 5 December, when students will be dismissed early for parent-teacher conferences, sold out within two minutes. While excitement for these programs is positive, Dea acknowledged the frustration some parents may have felt in finding these activities sold out so quickly. Dea explained that enrollment in these activities is necessarily limited by the space available at the school, and the mandated ratio of students to aides, but that they had already been pleased to offer additional spots to students on the waitlist.

An email will go out soon reminding parents of fundraisers which are ongoing throughout the year.

The fall after-school programs run by Flex Academies will soon come to a close; a preview of winter programs will be sent soon.

New spirit wear designs are in the works.

A glow run is planned for the spring, and the committee also hopes to plan fundraising events for adults throughout the community.

**8. Programming Committee report, Mary Barbagli and Pamela Huang**

Programming Committee co-chair Pamela Huang began her report with a look back on accomplishments since the PTA's October meeting.

The pumpkin-carving event held on Thursday, 24 October, the year's first event for middle school students, was a sold-out success, with fifty-five students participating. Pamela thanked the parent and high school volunteers who helped facilitate the event.

It is currently Kindness Week, and each school will display a “kindness chain” as a visual reminder. Households are also encouraged to make their own kindness chains, and to share photos on the PTA Facebook page.

The Fun Night subcommittee held their kickoff meeting, brainstorming future events, particularly ideas which might involve the wider community. Anyone interested in joining the subcommittee is welcome.

Mary presented upcoming programming, including more events than usual for December.

Holiday cookie-making events hosted by Baked in Color will be held on Thursday, 12 December, at 4:30 for grades two and three, and at six for grades four and five.

December is also the birth month of bingo, and the Fun Night subcommittee will be holding three bingo nights at 6 PM in the elementary school cafetorium: third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders can register to play on Tuesday, 3 December, kindergarteners, first-, and second-graders on Tuesday, 10 December, and middle schoolers on Tuesday, 17 December. The middle school event will be a special music bingo. An email with all of the event information has been scheduled for the day following this meeting, with registration opening the next day, Saturday, 16 November.

## **9. Liaison reports**

### **a. Elementary School, Afton Rosenfeld and Ann Sedrish**

Elementary School Liaison to the Principal Ann Sedrish reminded the group that a Bluebird Chat is scheduled for Tuesday, 19 November, at 6:30 PM, to discuss building a relationship with effective communication between parents and the school.

Elementary school students have two upcoming half days, on Friday, 22 November, and Thursday, 5 December, and will be dismissed at 11:30.

School pictures can be retaken on Monday, 18 November; the fifth grade photo will be taken the same day.

Elementary school teachers have been asked to make Amazon Wish Lists of items which they would like to have in their classroom for use during indoor recess; they will be sent to parents in about a week, so that parents can purchase items for their children’s classrooms, if they wish. Indoor recess will be held from January to March this year.

Ms. Taylor will lead the Creating Connections program this year, which looks like it will be held in April. Parent volunteers will be needed to assemble supplies beforehand, perhaps in March.

A PTA member asked how the photographer who takes student pictures was selected, and wondered why the quality of the digital photo files available for purchase was so low.

Board of Education member Correy Stephenson explained that Blind Brook has been using the same vendor for some time, and that they offer many benefits over their competitors, including an online ordering platform and a lower cost for the school.

**b. Middle School, Leah Mittelman**

Middle School Liaison Leah Mittelman reminded everyone that first quarter report cards have been posted to the parent portal.

The same day as this meeting, eighth-grade students will see a performance of the high school musical, *Ranked*.

The middle school is in the application process to join the Anti-Defamation League's No Place for Hate program, which helps schools to create a welcoming and inclusive environment, free of bullying and bias.

There will be a Principal's Conversation on Friday, 22 November, at 9 AM.

Middle school students will be dismissed early on Wednesday, 27 November, at 12:50.

**c. Pupil Services, Marni Ford**

Pupil Services Liaison Marni Ford reported that an event organized by Supporting Every Individual Difference, SEID, had been held the prior night with the Director and Assistant Director of Pupil Personnel Services, Karen Vitti and Jennifer Castelli, in attendance, discussing their goals and plans for the year.

In the spring, teachers will participate in workshops focusing on executive functioning, particularly in students with ADHD, and receive additional training on opposition, defiance, and response to authority.

SEID plans to hold more events for parents in the new year, including a book club, social events, coaching, and workshops.

**10. Membership Committee report, Rachel Boyman and Lindsay Noymer**

Rachel reported that PTA dues for the year have now come to \$13,650.

Seventy-four families and forty-six teachers purchased Dial-A-Friend printed school directories, bringing in an additional \$1,450. Extra copies are still available for purchase. Rachel noted that there is an error in the printing of the information on unused snow dates.

The Membership Committee is currently evaluating new software to replace SchoolBee, and possibly offer additional functionality, such as programming registration. So far they have tried Givebacks, and plan to look into VolunteerHub and Membership Toolkit next. They also plan to meet with Mr. Von Hollen to discuss logistics in making the switch.

Membership will test targeted email functionality from one of these new platforms by sending a message to class parents who have not yet joined the PTA or paid their annual dues.

#### **11. Liaison report, High School, ToniAnne Rigano**

First quarter grades will be posted on the parent portal in the afternoon.

High School Principal Mark Greenwald attended the National Blue Ribbon Award ceremony in Washington D.C. the prior week. Of the twenty-five high schools in New York awarded this honor, only two are in Westchester: Blind Brook and Scarsdale.

Mr. Greenwald has started a Principal's Student Advisory Group. The student participants were randomly selected, and will meet with Mr. Greenwald periodically to provide feedback and a general pulse of the student body. The first topic will be artificial intelligence.

The next Principal's Conversation will be held on Thursday, 19 December.

Tenth- and twelfth-grade students participated in their first high school American Math Competition.

School pictures can be retaken on Tuesday, 19 November.

The Model UN trip is scheduled for the following week.

#### **12. New business**

There was no new business.

#### **13. Future meeting dates**

The next meeting will be held Thursday, 19 December, at 7 PM in the Middle and High School.

#### **14. Adjournment**

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:16.

#### **Attending**

Meghan Avanzino  
Mary Barbagli  
Allison Baumrind  
Loren Becher  
Lisa Benoit  
Rachel Boyman



Colin Bryne  
Jen Buchwald  
Patricia Carbajal-Reis Mendes  
Dea Fischer  
Marni Ford  
Samantha Grutman  
Sabrina Haskell  
Pamela Huang  
Maryam Jadali-DeBiase  
Joe Laronga  
Karen Lin  
Leah Mittelman  
Amy Nathan  
Eneida Nikci  
Lauren Posner  
Afton Rosenfeld  
Cameron Sager  
Alicia Scala  
Ashley Schlemmer  
Ann Sedrish  
Meghan Shaw  
Melissa Sheinheit  
Correy Stephenson  
Tracy Taylor  
Jessica Trosterman  
Lauren Watt  
Emily Weinstein Mahoney  
Erica Wiener