

District PTO Meeting Minutes

January 13, 2025 / 6:00 PM / Kelly STEAM Middle School Community Room

Purpose:

To align district-wide PTO efforts, share updates, and brainstorm ideas to foster family engagement and student success. Printed copies of the District PTO Meeting Agenda were distributed.

Attendees:

Sign-in sheets were made available for volunteers, and they are listed here.

(There were others in attendance who opted not to fill out a form)

Susan Lessard

Brandi Lumpris

Yelitza Brooks

Mark Kulos

Trisha Averso

Dominique Aviles

Robin Sieczkowski

Lynn Marceau

Kailin Cote

Solitaire Marie Carmelle

Cleevans Almeus

Sarah Nelson

Avery James Jr

Omar Javid

Sharon Dorestan

Valencia Auguste

Ruth Dovenska

Mathurin Auguste

Samuel Sebastian

Alan Stevenson

Steveky Alain

Agenda

Old Business

This is the first District PTO Meeting. No previous minutes to report and approve.

New Business

1. Welcome & Introductions

- *School representatives and attendees' introduction*
 - Went around the room and stated our names, schools involved in, titles, etc.
 - Book Recommendation: Robert's Rules of Order
- *Bylaws overview was presented by Dominique*
 - Printed copies of generic examples of PTO ByLaws(Based on Teacher's Memorial PTO ByLaws) were made available for anyone interested in reading them to help with setting up their own bylaws for their schools
 - Discussion included: New Bylaws would need to be written up for each PTO that is just starting up and doesn't have any. There would need to be a vote that takes place to put the Bylaws into effect. A minimum of three votes from volunteers are needed. If any changes are to be made, volunteers would need a minimum of a month to review the changes before voting again. You would need votes to be able to allocated funds
- *EIN number and Non-profit status overview was presented by Dominique*
 - EIN Number discussion included: Each of the schools has a generic EIN number but we are not allowed to use it so it is very important that each school's PTO applies for their own EIN number and non-profit status if they wish to obtain the status. You are able to look up EINs online. It is free to apply for an EIN and you are assigned an EIN right away when you apply. Some businesses will not make any donations unless you have an EIN
 - Non-profit status discussion included: 501(c)(3) is the primary nonprofit status through which donations made to an organization are tax-deductible. It costs \$275 to apply for 501(c)(3) tax exempt status. You can use initial fundraisers to pay for this application fee. There are more tax benefits with this status and more businesses are willing to donate to a non-profit organization due to the tax deductions. A 990-N form will need to be filled out, it is a one time fee, however you must file annually or you will lose your status.
 - Reach out to other PTOs in schools in the district for help with filing status

2. District Updates

- *District Upcoming Events* overview presented by Yelitza Brooks
 - There are approximately 80 volunteers in the district. Interested parents can see Yelitza at 90 Town St to sign up and a background check is required.
 - “What’s Happening” informational calendar for all events will be posted monthly on the NPS website
 - Discussion included: Upcoming Coffee Chat event on February 27th. Usually parents, teachers, local businesses, community members, principals, mayor, fire marshal, pre-k coordinator, family & youth recreation etc have been in attendance in the past. District Talent Show money raised will go back into paying for more upcoming events. Norwich Transitional Academy will be organizing “The Loft” at Bishop shop and will provide clothes, shoes, baby stuff, hygiene products etc. They are not set up for food donations at this time because there are already 2 food pantry locations in the district but eventually the plan is to have one central location. This upcoming Friday there will be a luncheon at NFA. MLK Jr is coming up the following Monday. Several chorus and band concerts will be coming up on the 16th, 22, and 23rd. It was asked, “Why are concerts for different schools on the same night?” When you have students in multiple schools it makes it hard to attend them, especially if it is an elementary and middle school on the same day. This brings up a good concern and Susan stated that in the future they will try to coordinate dates better between schools for events like this. It was asked, “Can we put all the schools’ PTO meetings on the “What’s Happening” calendar?” Yelitza said that any PTO can just email her meeting dates and she will update the calendar and post to the NPS website at School>Community>PTO
 - Yelitza wanted to organize this district PTO meeting to allow for everyone to ask questions and give feedback so everyone at different schools can share ideas and help to set up things like emails, facebook, events. She is going to try and combine district and individual school calendars. It is recommended to use parent square to share information with parents, there is an app available to download, Dominique offered to help anyone with downloading it after the meeting. It is suggested to put out a survey on Parent Square to find out from parents if a certain day or time is better for PTO meetings or events, or if it is easier to do virtual or in person meetings. In person meetings can also be shown on facebook live through PTO business pages. The live stream can later be shared, turn off the delete after 30 days, this will leave it up permanently for parents to view at their leisure if they have scheduling conflicts. Options like this will especially come in handy in the spring when activities like sports get busier.

3. PTO Best Practices Sharing

- *Successful events or programs from each school*

- *Challenges and strategies*

4. Family Engagement Initiatives

- *Discussion on ways to increase family participation in PTO activities*
- *Brainstorm district-wide events*
- Open Discussion from 3 & 4 included:
 - Keep a master binder for Each PTO so as kids age out of schools and the PTO loses the parent members, the next group taking over doesn't have to start from nothing. Binder can be used to archive meeting minutes, organize papers like calendars, sign up sheets, event flyers, forms, letters etc. Originals can be kept in the binders and copies can be made from them. Digital versions are also useful. Google Docs and email is a good option for digital archives.m PTO webpages, facebook pages are great for making announcements, sharing information, and member engagement.
 - Set up your own bank account separate from the school. Use your EIN number to open the bank account. Find a bank local to the school to help build the community. At a minimum you will need the PTO treasurer name on the account and at least one other member that is not a principal or someone associated with the school. A parent that is also a teacher within the district is allowed though. When the treasurer leaves they will need to transfer the account over to the new treasurer for the next year. This should be voted on and arranged in June for a smoother transition. Most banks also offer notary services if it is ever needed for PTO paperwork. One parent is an attorney, who can notarize, and also offered his services.
 - When writing new bylaws, virtual meetings should be addressed.
 - When running meetings, previous meeting minutes should be read and voted on to approve, then go on to new business.
 - Arrange to hold a PTO meeting on the same day as a band concert or other school event since the parents will already be there.
 - Offer raffles for gas/groceries/ gift cards etc to get parents to attend PTO meetings.
 - Offer coffee and cookies at PTO meetings.
 - Make a binder that holds PTO event information(past and future) to leave out during meetings or by the sign in sheet, for parents to flip through and get excited.
 - Host events that are educational, ask for volunteers while parents are there.

- Past successful events included-Bring your Favorite Adult Dance, Glow Stick Party, decorating different rooms as different countries and traveling around the world and exploring while you walk. Bingo Nights, Pain nights
- Krispy Kreme Fundraiser
- Attendance coordinator at each school organizes the educational events that each school requires once a month or every other month (math, literacy, science nights), can meet with them and plan to piggyback off of events. Can have an event where you read a book and then watch the movie based on it, would combine the educational component as well as provide a fun affordable family activity. These events allow kids to hang out with their family and their friends. Parents can meet each other and their kids. It is a good opportunity to build connections and community that could even extend into summer breaks hanging out outside of school.
- Bingo Night
- Paint Night-step by step instructions how to paint on canvases
- Can hand out donation letters to businesses seeking prize donations to give away at these events. Wequonoc was able to arrange to get a donation of carnations to be given away at the upcoming winter concert. PTO can ask for donations or raise funds to buy small gifts for students and teachers.

5. Fundraising

- *Fundraising ideas and sharing success stories*
- *Robin-Guest Speaker*
- Open discussion included:
 - Dine-in nights at local restaurants where the school gets a percentage of the sales that night
 - Domino's discount cards-PTO buys the cards for \$1 each and then sells for \$10, \$9 profit. Each card has 10 codes on it. The codes are good for 1 free pizza with the purchase of a pizza. You can use the profit of first batch of cards to reinvest and buy more cards. Since they are a large chain, the cards can be used at any location. This makes it easy for relatives and friends from far away to support the school. Could use venmo to collect money and mail the cards out to be used on the other side of the country. Could scratch off the codes on the back and send a picture to the recipient and they keep track of which codes they have used. Domino's also offers discounts on bulk pizza orders if you ever want to order pizzas for teachers and students.
 - Tom's Coffee Truck can do a 10% give back at events, same with the hot dog cart. Robin passed out business cards and fliers to contact her if interested. She can also help with setting up events from her history of running fundraisers.

- Bingo can be with or without kids. Bingo can be held at the schools since it is not considered gambling as long as there is no cash involved. Superintendent will confirm with the business coordinator that this wouldn't be an issue.
- If you are not giving out any cash prizes at events like bingo or quarter auctions, then you do not need to worry about all of the tax documents. A physical gift basket is just a simple form that needs to be filled out with the town hall. Need to get this form blank copy to keep in PTO binders for when it is needed.
- At events we can have sign up sheets for parent volunteers
- Can you the "Remind" app for scheduling reminders of upcoming events. It sends out a blast text to phone numbers.
- Can ask local businesses to pledge a certain donation amount by signing up for different tiers of donation amounts and decide where the funds get allocated. Can give the businesses a shout out such as "DJ services paid for by X business for school dance"
- Could start a go fund me or direction donation account and send out flyers to parents saying they could be a PTO member by attending meetings or by making a cash donation
- PTO Expo will be March 25th in Massachusetts at the Royal Plaza Trade Center(about a 1 hour drive from Norwich). The expo will be all things specific to PTOs such as fundraising, leadership stations, samples, and information to bring back and share with your PTO. There is an \$8 per person fee to sign up to attend. Dominique will be sending out Expo info with the meeting minutes.

6. Closing Remarks

- *Recap/Questions*
- *Ask do we want a next meeting date*

The next District PTO Meeting will be held on:

Monday, March 10, from 6 pm-7 pm at Kelly STEAM Middle School Community Room

Can reach out to Dominique Aviles, PTO president at Teachers Global/Wequonnoc, at 860-625-4015 or send an email to daviles@norwichpublicschools.org or Yelitza Brooks, Communication & Family Engagement Coordinator, at ybrooks@norwichpublicschools.org.