



Blind Brook Parent-Teacher Association

Meeting Minutes

Thursday, 16 January 2025 | 9 AM | BMP Ridge Street School Cafetorium

1. Welcome

Blind Brook PTA Co-President Lisa Benoit called the meeting to order at 9:05 AM.

2. Special Guest: Heard in Rye President Jen Meli-O'Connor

Heard in Rye President Jen Meli-O'Connor attended to reintroduce the organization and its mission to this group. Though Heard in Rye is in its twenty-fifth year, there is always a new audience for their programming as new families join the community.

Jen spoke about her introduction to the organization, and the impact that their programming, provided free of charge to the community, had on her and her family.

One of Heard in Rye's goals is to value the education of parents just as this community values the education of its children. To that end, they hold about five events each school year where experts speak on a variety of topics on the subject of parenting.

The committee which runs the organization is unique in that it unites representatives from both public and private schools, as well as other local organizations. This committee meets approximately once a month to bring forward information from their constituents and what they see and hear in their communities. They are currently working on the 2025–26 school year event calendar, brainstorming topics which should cover a broad range of interests.

Last year, Heard in Rye created a Junior Board, with the idea that juniors from local high schools would come together to deliver an additional event each year, inviting a speaker to present on a topic important to students to the parent community.

Heard in Rye will hold three more events this school year. The next lecture, on nutrition, will be held Thursday, 23 January. Lenore Skenazy, author and co-founder of the organization Let Grow, will speak on 6 March in the BMP Ridge Street School cafetorium. Aliza Pressman will be the last speaker of the year, also in March.

Anyone interested in Heard in Rye's events can join their email distribution list, check their Instagram account, or speak with their local representative.

PTA Co-President Loren Becher asked whether their events are ever held on Zoom. Jen explained that events were indeed moved to Zoom during the covid lockdown period; though

those events and meetings often had a good turnout, attendees sometimes felt disconnected from one another, and events are transitioning back to being fully in-person.

A PTA member asked where Heard in Rye's events are held. Jen explained that it depends on the size of the audience that they expect; the next event will be held at the Rye library, which has a maximum capacity of about 100 people.

Lisa added that anyone with further questions can reach out to the Heard in Rye representative for Rye Brook, Alexandra Patchen.

Loren added that the PTA will use its own email distribution list to publicize upcoming Heard in Rye events to its constituency moving forward as well.

3. Superintendent's report, Dr. Colin Byrne

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Colin Byrne began his report with a reminder that a community forum will be held as part of the search for his replacement on Monday, 3 February, at 6:30 PM in the middle school/high school library as well as on Zoom. He reminded the group that he is not actively involved in the search.

He announced that the high school would be holding a School-SPIRIT program (School-Student Problem Identification and Resolution of Issues Together), which is facilitated by the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service. High school volunteers will participate in the full day program, and will discuss issues that they see in their school environment. Adult facilitators who are not school employees will be needed to lead each group in discussion. Anyone interested in volunteering or with questions about the program can contact Dr. Byrne. The program is currently scheduled for Friday, 28 February; volunteers will also need to complete training, which should be available virtually.

Dr. Byrne said that the Board of Education hopes to be able to begin work on the baseball field soon, as soon as they can secure approval from the State Education Department. A contingency plan is in place to use the baseball fields at Purchase College, SUNY, should the school fields not be complete in time for early practices.

Dr. Byrne reiterated news that two of the high school's three chillers, essential for cooling the building, are not functioning. The Board has started the process to replace these chillers, but this requires some lead time; they are also looking into temporary units to use until replacements can be installed.

The district will see a number of staff members retiring this year, and is actively seeking people to fill these roles.

Dr. Byrne highlighted a feature on lohud.com on the elementary school courtyard, including photos and videos.

The high school band and choir had held their concert the night prior; the middle school band is scheduled to perform tonight.

In response to a question, Dr. Bryne reported that the calendar for the coming school year is still in the works.

He also replied to a request for more information regarding the School-SPIRIT program, adding that they will initially be looking for fifteen to twenty volunteers: once they know how many students will be participating, they will be able to determine exactly how many parent volunteers are needed to cover all of the student groups.

Dr. Bryne also addressed a question regarding parental involvement in district security concerns. He confirmed that there is indeed a district safety team, which meets a few times per year, comprising parents and community members, as well as additional internal groups focusing on safety concerns. Discussion followed regarding a specific safety concern. Dr. Byrne added that the district is in some transition since their assigned representative from their security consulting group left the firm. This firm did conduct a full review last year, which requires some followup.

4. Acceptance of the minutes of the December meeting

PTA Corresponding Secretary Allison Baumrind made a motion to approve the minutes.

Programming Committee Co-Chair Pamela Huang seconded the motion. Motion carried.

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

Lisa began her report by thanking the Programming team for their work in organizing the recent magic shows, and their effort to include older students in these events.

There will be an opportunity to support the PTA by buying tickets to the upcoming Westchester Knicks game at the Westchester County Center on Friday, 24 January.

Lisa issued a warning regarding phishing emails purporting to be from PTA board members. Loren described the consistent formatting of the real email addresses for PTA board roles, and reminded everyone that these email addresses are posted on the PTA's website.

Lisa closed by announcing that the PTA would be running a Square 1 Art fundraiser again.

6. Treasurer's report, Taylor Gutierrez

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

Deposits have been made for an event featuring the Harlem Wizards, scheduled for Friday, 16 May.

Work is currently in progress to file last year's tax return for the PTA.

7. Fundraising Committee report, Dea Fisher and Jessica Trosterman

Fundraising Committee Co-Chair Jess Trosterman added that the scheduling of the Harlem Wizards' visit took into account many requests to hold the event on a Friday this year.

A new read-a-thon fundraiser will be held at the end of January.

The booster-a-thon will be held 18–27 March, culminating in a glow run.

The winter Flex program has begun, and plans are already being made for the spring.

8. Programming Committee report, Mary Barbagli and Pamela Huang

Pamela began by reporting on the prior month's bingo events, three in all. More than 150 students registered: seventy-seven from kindergarten and first and second grade, fifty-one from the third through fifth grades, and twenty-five in grades six through eight.

The Programming Committee solicited feedback from the middle school attendees; they enjoyed the addition of a DJ to their event, and the opportunity to see friends outside of school hours. Some suggested that all participants should receive a prize, and that more students should attend.

Cookie decorating events were also held in December: these were sold-out events for the younger grades, with more modest attendance by older students.

Two magic shows were held earlier in the week, with one more scheduled for the following week. The show for kindergarteners, first-, and second-graders was sold out at a capacity of 100 students; thirty students registered for the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade show later the same evening.

Next week's show was originally planned for third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders, but has recently been expanded to include kindergarteners, first-, and second-graders. Because this week's K–2 show had sold out almost immediately, and about twenty tickets remained for the upcoming grades 3–5 show, the Programming Committee had decided to offer these remaining seats to the younger grades as well, to give those who hadn't been able to purchase a ticket to the earlier event another opportunity. Pamela noted that some people who had purchased tickets for the earlier event were upset that they could not now switch to the later one. Pamela explained that their ultimate goal had been to allow as many children to attend as possible. The registration platform, CommunityPass, does not facilitate this kind of flexibility, which would have meant processing these changes manually. Doing so is not only difficult and time-consuming but could also compromise student safety, which is of paramount concern, as manual mistakes could lead to errors in emergency contact information.

Pamela noted that the Programming Committee would be reconsidering their volunteer sign-up system. Previously, they had reserved these positions for high school students first, calling on parents to fill remaining slots. In the future, they will consider issuing a volunteer signup sheet to everyone at the outset, along with the event announcement.

Additionally, in response to community feedback, registration for upcoming events will open at 8 PM, rather than noon.

Looking ahead, again, one additional magic show will be held the following week, and another Fun Night event is in the works for February.

Discussion followed regarding the lower turnout of older students to these events, what factors might be driving lower turnout, and what could be done differently in the future to encourage greater participation.

9. Liaison reports

a. Elementary School, Afton Rosenfeld and Ann Sedrish

PTA Elementary School Liaison to Class Parents Afton Rosenfeld reported that she had held a successful holiday gathering for the elementary school class parents.

Loren delivered an additional report on behalf of Elementary School Liaison to the Principal Ann Sedrish. Indoor recess began the prior week. Two art classes had originally been offered during indoor recess; with the addition of a third, all students who signed up have now been accommodated.

The Amazon wish lists created by teachers to request indoor recess supplies was a huge success: ninety items were purchased within thirty minutes of the lists being sent to families. Some classrooms still have unpurchased items on their lists.

About twenty adult volunteers will be needed on Thursday, 13 February, from 9–11 AM to assemble bags with materials for the Creating Connections program.

There was a lot of interest in the Shared Decision Making committee; three individuals will represent the elementary school grades.

There will be no school on Wednesday, 29 January, in observation of the Lunar New Year; the lion dance assembly will be held again this year around this time.

Students will be dismissed early, at 1:30 PM, on Wednesday, 5 February, to accommodate a staff professional development day.

Report cards for the marking period ending 31 January will be available on the parent portal on Friday, 7 February, at 3 PM.

With the success of the indoor recess supply Amazon wish lists, and coinciding with the upcoming Pick a Reading Partner (PARP) week, elementary school Principal Tracy Taylor will be compiling book wish lists which will allow books to be purchased directly for classroom libraries.

Discussion followed regarding indoor recess programming, and whether it might be useful to alert parents when their children opt in to special indoor recess programming.

b. Middle School, Leah Mittelman

PTA Middle School Liaison Leah Mittelman reported that the third quarter will begin on Friday, 24 January.

Mid-year and STAR screening assessments are coming up in the next few weeks.

The AMC 8 math competition will be held after school on Wednesday, 22 January.

The next Principal's Conversation will be held on Wednesday, 5 February, at 9 AM; there will also be early dismissal that day.

Students in grades five and up will attend an internet safety program on Monday, 10 February. The same presenter, Katie Greer, will also run a parent workshop that evening.

c. Pupil Services, Marni Ford and Sarah Shiboski

Loren reported on behalf of Pupil Services Liaisons Marni Ford and Sarah Shiboski that Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) has rented a room in the Crawford Mansion in which to offer Extended School Year (ESY) services during the summer.

The PTA recently sent an email reintroducing Supporting Every Individual Difference (SEID), and listing upcoming events.

PPS will be adding a document with information about SEID to their mailings for families with 504s and IEPs.

The director and assistant director of Pupil Personnel Services, Karen Vitti and Jennifer Castelli, will host a webinar on Monday, 27 January, to kick off the annual review season.

Westchester Living will be running webinars on school avoidance and anxiety on 3 February, and another on 12 March, Difficult Behaviors in Young Children.

The Homework Helpers program has been expanded to serve third-grade students, and is now serving about 40 students.

SEID will host a night out for any interested parents on Thursday, 23 January at 7:30 PM at Fortina in the Rye Ridge Shopping Center.

10. Membership Committee report, Rachel Boyman and Lindsay Noymer

Membership Committee Co-Chair Rachel Boyman reported on their recent campaign focused on registering new PTA members among families with students enrolled in the district. They began by identifying families who were not already PTA members, and segmented their outreach by the age of the students in these families. This campaign resulted in five new members. They felt that, in the future, similar outreach might be more fruitful closer to the beginning of the school year.

In response to a question, Rachel described the shift that they had tried to make in their language for this membership campaign, both from how they had tried to drive membership at the beginning of the year and how it has been promoted in past years, focusing more on dues-supported programming, and less on access to the school directories.

This campaign also facilitated another test of the Givebacks platform, which is among the platforms under consideration by the PTA for future fundraising and membership registration. The committee has done a thorough vetting of alternative platforms, and Givebacks may be the most promising. There will be further consideration of a new directory platform, however.

Further discussion followed regarding how PTA membership might be marketed in the future, and making the link clear between membership and the programming supported by PTA funds. Lisa announced that the PTA intends to start publishing a newsletter, highlighting the ways that the organization supports the district and its students.

Rachel also suggested that this could be a vehicle for encouraging families who don't join the PTA at the outset of each school year to join or otherwise contribute and support ongoing programming.

11. New business

Lisa addressed two issues to do with school supplies. There will be a program at the end of this school year to help direct unused school supplies to students in need in other districts. She also addressed the PTA school supplies fundraiser vendor: the one used this past spring and summer has also been used in the past, but the company found itself under a different management structure over this past year, which caused some issues with our order fulfillment.

Allison asked whether a group might rally support for victims of the recent wildfires in Southern California, particularly finding a way to involve students.

Leah suggested that the student council might be the best vehicle to organize students, and suggested speaking with their faculty advisor.

A PTA member noted that any fundraising should endeavor to focus on the communities with the most need, as there is a wide discrepancy in resources in the communities affected.

Board of Education Member Correy Stephenson encouraged everyone to be involved with the process of finding a new superintendent to replace Dr. Byrne following his retirement at the end of the year. A link to an online survey was sent by email earlier in the morning; this message also reiterated the invitation to join the community forum on this subject on Monday, 3 February, at 6:30 PM, either in person in the middle school/high school library, or on Zoom. Correy assured everyone that survey feedback would be anonymized and aggregated. She also emphasized the importance of this selection process, as superintendent contracts average three to five years in duration, impacting the district for a significant period of time.

12. Adjournment

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

Attending

Allison Baumrind
Loren Becher
Lisa Benoit
Rachel Boyman
Colin Bryne
Pamela Huang
Karen Lin
Leah Mittelman
Alexandra Patchen
Lauren Posner
Afton Rosenfeld
Ashley Schlemmer
Meghan Shaw
Melissa Sheinheit
Pooja R. Singh
Correy Stephenson
Jessica Trosterman