

## MIDDLEBROOK PTA MINUTES 1/19/17

- I. Call to Order - 9:06 a.m. in Media Center. In attendance were: Laura Rowley, Victoria Kantor, Chandra Ring, Dean Higgins, Nina DePeugh, Mary Andrews, Kim Rogg, Carolina Corrigan, Kristen Schestag, Ginna Yerrell, Kim Lynn, Amy Palma, Nicole Thornbrough, Salysa Magusa, Jen Acerra-Markey, Laine Hattenbach, Ronni Sayewitz, Lauren Yoon, Terry Ellis, Mary Jones, Julianna Scheurkogel, Deirde Tangorra, Valerie Kirincich, Lauren Feltz, Carolyn Lyon, Vanessa Elias, Surbhi Madhavani, Margot Levy, Jackie Jackson, Nancy Sharpe, Maria Miranda Koutsoukos, Amy Pietrasanto, Ashley Gentilozzi, Cindy Beck-Moore, Peg Sheehan, Natalia Ramirez, Lisa Finn, Johnna Reuter
- II. Approval of 11/17/16 minutes - a motion to approve was made Kim Lynn and seconded by Kim Rogue. Motion carried unanimously.
- III. Teacher Representative-Ashley Gentilozzi
  - a. 6G is reading across genres. They've read over 600 books as a team
  - b. 6R completed Spanish raps for friends. They also examined pond water under microscopes and created posters of their findings.
  - c. 7R studied African countries, creating a map and learning about French in Senegal. French students attended a talk with Catherine Higgins of the French Ballet.
  - d. 8Y read *To Kill A Mockingbird*, discussing empathy and point of view. Also did a "Feel the Beat" lab exercise to examine fear and the circulatory system.
  - e. 8G is currently participating in a community service project, collecting clothes for the Bridgeport Rescue Mission.
  - f. The Student Leadership Team met to discuss bullying and expectations in the school. Students participated in a program on name-calling, learning empathy and increased awareness. Bill Prebble of New England College and his staff run these sessions, as they do for all schools in the District.
- IV. Principal's Report-Lauren Feltz
  - a. Spoke with Team Leaders regarding homework. More on that during homework discussion. 7<sup>th</sup> grade Team Leaders will be here for that discussion.
  - b. Winter Concerts and Art Shows were a success.
  - c. Successful and impressive Geography Bee.
  - d. 8<sup>th</sup> graders are working on their Great Debates Projects
  - e. Community Service: During the year there are school community service programs and each team has an opportunity to do their own community service project during the year. Currently there's a clothing drive for Bridgeport Rescue Mission.
  - f. Students are publishing their writing and doing high-level reading, such as *To Kill A Mockingbird*
  - g. In Art students are doing a Colorwash Project on how animals camouflage.
  - h. Ms. Feltz will begin to email out a Tuesday Newsday to share what is happening with parents.
- V. President's Report-Laura Rowley

- a. Thank you to our Hospitality Committee and those who donated for making the Winter Solstice a success.
- b. Thank you to Kim Yang, our MB Reflections Committee chair and to all the students that participated. Students did wonderful work.
- c. Thank you to Cristin Wallace for finding the Shutterfly fundraiser, garnering about \$250 for the school.
- d. 143 people are registered for the Stop & Shop A+ program. Thus far, this has brought in almost \$700.00 this year to MB.
- e. The Middlebrook Yearbook costs \$33 for a 200-page yearbook created by the student Yearbook Club. No extras will be ordered. All orders must be placed by March 17, 2017.
- f. For next year, we will need people to volunteer for a variety of roles, including President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Parent-at-Large. Please talk to or consider shadowing current officers if you are interested.

## VI. Officer Reports

- a. Vice President-Mary Jones: 371 total members. 350 are on Mobile Arq.
- b. Treasurer-Maria Wilcox
  - 1. Turnover Shop donated \$11,250 to each school PTA this year.
  - 2. Online catalog sales brought in close to \$900
  - 3. \$500 was paid to Student Financial Aid
- c. Parent At Large-Kim Lynn
  - 1. All Board of Education meetings are viewable on Channel 78. There are also public comments at the start and end of each meeting.
  - 2. Board of Finance asked the Board of Education to present a budget with a decrease of about 1% for 2017-2018. Board of Education came in flat. This budget is available on the website. If you have a voice on the budget, now is the time to share that with both of these boards.

## VII. Committee Reports

- a. Box Tops - Kim Rogg – This role needs to be filled next year. We've collected 328 Box Tops to date. The next submission deadline is March 1, 2017. Our goal is to earn \$1,000 thru Box Tops. If every student brings in 10 we'd reach this goal. Box Tops can be turned into Teambase, Booth at school entrance, Media Center and Main Office.
- b. Special Education – Carolina Corrigan – there's an attorney coming in to do a Workshop at the Wilton Library for parents of students with an IEP. The presentation will also be on the website. Also looking to survey what works and what doesn't during transitions from year-to-year for students on IEPs and PPTs. Creating a form for parents to complete to help ease these transitions and for use at PPT Meetings. More information and resources found at [www.pabwilton.com](http://www.pabwilton.com)
- c. WYC- Vanessa Elias – Youth-to-Youth has 2 remaining ski trips on January 20, 2017 and January 27, 2017. See Tanya Leonard if interested in attending. WYC is currently planning for next year and is fortunate to have been chosen as a recipient of the Wilton Women's Club Fashion Show Fundraiser. Upcoming events include:

\*February 1, 2017 – Raise Your Child to be a Resilient Adult at 10am in the Weston Library and 7pm in the Wilton Library

\*February 15, 2017 – The Hunting Ground Program on dating violence

\*March 7, 2017 – Delay Your Gray

\*April 20, 2017 – program for 8<sup>th</sup> graders moving on to high school

## VIII. New Business

### a. Homework Discussion:

- i. Ms. Feltz shared the District Homework Time Guides. Homework standards are currently a topic up for conversation at the district level. The district guidelines reference time on task doing homework (time getting supplies, etc do not factor into this timeframe). These homework guidelines embed silent sustained reading into them.
- ii. Ms. Feltz explained the purpose behind assigning homework as being to prepare for the future, solidify self-reliance, explore different media than in the classrooms, finish classwork and to prepare our students to be lifelong learners.
- iii. Parents expressed concern about how variant the amount of homework is across teams on the same grade level. The curriculum is designed to be aligned across colors, sharing similar content and homework.
- iv. Ms. Feltz and 7<sup>th</sup> grade Team Leaders expressed a need for teachers to know when students are spending too long on homework. There are many reasons students won't want teachers to know this. If our students aren't self-advocating, parents should be doing so. Teachers at each grade level should have a shared response to this, getting stricter as students move up in grade level. 6<sup>th</sup> graders are taught strategies for organizing and learning the necessary skills as a team and also from Guidance on an individual basis. Our students have supports available.
- v. Recently during Friday Flex, 7R students discussed how to ensure homework success. For instance, if a Map Project is assigned over a 5-night period some kids will divide their work into chunks nightly, some will complete it in one night. A majority of students completed this larger project and it was dealt with individually for those that didn't.
- vi. Team Leaders asked that parents email the teacher or team leader if there is a concern with homework. A meeting with the team can be held if it isn't able to be resolved via email. Homework is designed to take 20-30 minutes per night per subject (Advanced Math is an exception and may take longer). After 30 minutes, if homework remains incomplete students should let the teacher know both why they stopped and what the challenge was. Also, if a student reaches a level of frustration that they can't go on, they should stop and tell teachers what was happening. If students are unable to address this on their own, parents should advocate for them. We also need to teach our children to advocate for themselves. When teachers know why students' struggled to complete homework they can teach into this.

- vii. A parent asked why District guidelines are higher than the national recommendations for homework timeframes.
- viii. MB has had major curricular shifts at all layers. Teachers are doing as they feel is absolutely best for their students. It needs to be a partnership.
- ix. Students learn life skills by learning to chunk homework, using a planner, and so forth. When a student struggles we need to ask if the assignment is achievable for them then find the impediment.
- x. Teachers know how long an assignment is designed to take, but if it is taking students much longer they only know this when it is communicated.
- xi. Every student should have one adult they trust and can talk to at Middlebrook. When facing excessive pressure from homework, they should talk to this person. They can also talk to Guidance.
- xii. Teams plan their homework as a group. They try not to have more than 2 assessments daily.
- xiii. Parents asked if students would be penalized for not completing homework that's taking too long or bringing them to complete frustration. Students are also concerned about teacher's pointing out that they didn't finish the assignment in front of peers. They also said homework levels can be highly variant week-to-week.
- xiv. Team leaders are currently working on a list of recommendations for parents as regards to homework. MB leadership have discussed homework twice this year as well.
- xv. Ms. Feltz expressed understanding that students need time to be kids. MB students lead rich lives outside of school and their play is learning. The District must look at if the homework guidelines still fit the needs of kids.
- xvi. All teams are moving towards using Google Classroom and posting homework there.
- xvii. Homework must be evaluated for its value, not to fulfill guidelines. Most teachers feel they are assigning less homework than in years past. Teachers are working on coaching in assigning the right homework. Homework should be looked at in a cost-benefit way and also at how homework builds from K-12.
- xviii. Parents expressed a concern about the level of anxiety/stress of MB students, with homework as a major cause of stress. It is also important to consider what homework stress does to the parent-child relationship.
- xix. At least 3 teams surveyed students on how long it took them to complete homework. A request was made to also survey parents.
- xx. A discussion on the value of team-building days and spirit in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade teams and possibly continuing this up grade levels took place in terms of student's emotional health.
- xxi. Parents raised the need for students to learn how to study while at MB. Students need the executive functioning skills and organization to be

prepared for the transition to High School. Teaching study skills is more important than the quantity of homework.

IX. Meeting Adjourned at 11:08 a.m.