

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
February 20, 2007

Laura Cecala called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM. The January minutes were approved.

Dave Wall made order forms available to parents interested in purchasing mulch from the All- Sports Booster Club. The mulch sale is a fundraiser for the Booster Club. Order deadline February 22.

Chloe Bethel reported for the SGA. SGA fundraisers continue, including the on-going box tops and ink cartridge collections and several recent fundraisers related to Valentine's Day. She reported that the SGA web site is being improved and it will soon be possible to download some features, such as the calendar. The SGA has been involved recently in several outreach activities, helping welcome students new to Whitman find buddies and acclimate, and visiting the eighth graders at Pyle to talk about the transition to high school. Chloe reminded parents that the student leadership class, while primarily made up of elected class officers, does have a small number of spaces each year for other students. Students who are interested for next year can apply; the decision about who will get the extra slots will be made in May. Finally, Chloe reported on the upcoming drunk driving awareness program, "Every 15 Minutes". Scheduled for March 22 and 23, the program includes a mock crash, students being removed from class every 15 minutes to represent the fact that youth fatalities occur on our roads every 15 minutes, and a culminating assembly with speakers talking about drinking and driving. The program will not be publicized at school ahead of time so that it's message has maximum impact, however the program can be an intense experience for students and parents will be notified when it takes place.

Judy Amick, a school psychologist for MCPS, was introduced. Judy talked about the role of school psychologists. They are the next step after the guidance counselor for students in need of assistance and can make outside referrals, which guidance counselors cannot do. She talked about the school's Student Assistance Program (SAP). The SAP team, made up of administrators, teachers, school psychologists, pupil personnel workers, and guidance counselors discusses students who have been referred by school staff, parents, and other students, sometimes anonymously, who may be struggling with a substance abuse issue and then determine an appropriate course of action. She also talked about the school's Educational Management Team. The EMT meets to discuss students referred by teachers and counselors, again who appear to be struggling with academic and other issues.

Judy addressed many of the issues high school students face, including:

- adjustment to high school, academically and socially (9th grade particularly)
- work overload, high performance expectations, and college pressure
- family issues (divorce etc)
- depression and anxiety (related issues such as cutting which is on the increase)

- substance abuse
- eating disorders
- questions regarding sexual orientation

and so on. Judy stressed the importance of knowing the warning signs of a teen in trouble and getting help, including being open to the use of medication if recommended. Signs of a teenager in trouble include a loss of interest in friends and activities, a drop in grades, changes in eating and sleeping habits, and general withdrawal. She suggested that the best way to keep teens from getting in trouble is to encourage them to get involved in school and other activities, help them acquire good study skills, discourage them from overloading their class schedules, and most importantly to talk to them regularly (even if they don't disclose much, they do listen) and to keep the communication open, She emphasized that students should be aware that any Whitman staff member would be willing to listen and help if approached.

There was a discussion about how difficult it can be to get students to utilize peer counseling programs (one suggestion) or to get them to take advantage of groups run through the guidance office. It was noted however that there has been a positive reaction to the yoga and meditation class currently being offered at Whitman.

Some community resources include:

- www.mentalhealthamerica.net (from Mental Health Assoc.)
- www.nmha.org (National Mental Health Association)
- www.aacap.org (American Assoc for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry)
- www.nasponline.org (National Association of School Psychologists)
- www.findapsychologist.org

Additional community resources can be found in the Whitman directory.

Judy's e-mail is judith_amick@mcpsmd.org. The psychologist currently assigned to Whitman is Sharon O'Donnell at sharon_o'donnell@mcpsmd.org.

Standing in for Dr. Goodwin, Mr. OuYang, Ms. Baker, and Dr. Carroll gave the Principal's State of the School Report. Mr. Ouyang reported on the recent MAP-R testing. 150 9th graders participating in on-level English or new to the system were tested to identify reading skills that need to be improved. The test is used in middle school but is new to Whitman this year. Mr. OuYang reported that ESOL reading specialist Linda Galloway is also looking at ways to improve literacy in the building.

Jennifer Baker reported that the master schedule is being developed for next year so that student class choices can be entered into the system soon. Counselors have been meeting with 8th graders at Pyle and with Whitman students about choosing their classes. This is also the time of year when staffing decisions are made. MCPS uses zero-based staffing, meaning that each year staff is allotted based on enrollment, not just carried over from the previous year. Last year Whitman was assigned additional staff because enrollment went up and the hope is that the additional staff can be retained. Ms. Baker announced that

Colin O'Brien will be teaching a new one-semester philosophy class next year and that Wendy Eagan will be teaching a new one-semester Asian Studies class. Finally, Ms. Baker asked that while the seniors have several exciting events coming up, including the senior banquet on March 29 and graduation June 6 (details to be mailed out mid-March), parents help keep their seniors engaged in school for the remainder of the year.

Dr. Carroll gave some important dates from the master calendar. Those follow as well as some other dates to note:

- Monday February 26 – 11th and 12th grade networking (7:30 PM)
- Tuesday February 27 – 1/2 day for students (teacher planning day)
- Wednesday February 28 – Guidance Advisory Committee (2:15 PM)
- Thursday March 1 – Battle of the Bands
- Friday March 2 – Fashion Society fundraiser dance
- Saturday March 3 – Booster Club mulch sale (9-12 Noon)
- Monday March 5 – 10th grade networking (7:30 PM)
- Tuesday March 6 – Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery administered
- Tuesday March 6 - Music Boosters meeting
- Monday March 12 – spring sports parents meeting (7 PM)
- Tuesday March 13 – dine out for post prom
- Thursday March 15 – International Night (6:30-9:30 PM)
- Monday March 19 – gap year program (7:30 PM)
- Tuesday March 20 – PTSA meeting (7:30 PM)
- Thursday March 22 – “Senior Week” safety meeting with Dewey Beach police officer

Dr. Carroll also announced that interims, delayed due to the snow days, would go out the first full week of March.

Lise Bernhard gave the treasurer's report. Two professional enhancement grants related to preparing students for the AP Spanish and French exams were funded. Expenses associated with the Middle States Accreditation visit are still outstanding.

Bekki Simms gave part of the GAC report. She announced that the meditation class that has been so successful (and was covered in the press) would be offered a second time this year. She also talked about the gap year program, scheduled for March 19 at 7:30 PM, for students who might want to take a year off between high school and college. The program will include information on opportunities to make that year productive.

Marcy Berger reported on a program at Pyle February 28 that Sheryl Freedman (who teaches AP Psychology) is doing on study skills. The program is designed to help students decrease their stress about schoolwork before they get to Whitman.

Beth Isen reported that the program in January for juniors and their parents about the college admissions process was very good and that representatives from several colleges will be at Whitman April 12 from 7-9 PM to talk to students. She reported that the meeting February 21 for sophomores and their parents would focus on choosing a junior

year schedule. Finally she reported that at the February 28 GAC meeting, Jennifer Higgins will talk about her healthy relationships group.

Harini Shandilya reminded everyone that International Night is coming up on March 15. There will be student performances and great food. Volunteers are still needed.

Karla Dolan reported on preparations for post prom. The theme this year is James Bond 007. There are several fundraisers to support post prom coming up, including a dine-out event March 13 and a yard sale scheduled for April 14. Over 100 volunteers will be needed. There was a discussion about parents of juniors taking on more responsibility each year so that seniors can enjoy the evening without their parents present. The question was raised regarding whether or not the event has become too extravagant, as gifts and prizes are given out. The argument on the flip side is that Whitman apparently has the most students stay and participate compared to other county schools and there is concern that without the prizes students would be more likely to leave and perhaps get into trouble. It was agreed that the broader community should be encouraged to discuss the issue and a meeting will be held at the end of the school year, in late May or June.

Liz Sobrino reported as the cluster representative. One current issue being discussed involves the county's math program and what happens to students later on if middle school math is continually accelerated, what math options will exist later in high school for those students who take on advanced math earlier. The other current issue involves the county's learning centers. The cluster is not behind the plan to eliminate them and the cluster representatives have written a letter expressing concern.

Mary Staley gave the MCCPTA report. Some issues being discussed there include the High School Assessment tests (HSAs) and concern that they be used only to improve performance not to withhold diplomas, school safety and security, and whether a course on personal finance as an optional counterpart to health should be offered in high schools. She reported that the number of student service learning hours required by MSDE for graduation has been increased to 75, effective with this year's eighth grade class. Finally, MCCPTA will host a forum, for anyone who is interested, March 3 at Einstein on general issues related to high schools. The forum will begin at 10 AM.

Laura Cecala and Sarah Koines announced this month's Exceptional Viking Volunteers: Lise Bernhard for her work as PTSA Treasurer, Vicki Dorman and Elizabeth Seibel for their work on the Viking Voice, and John Floyd for his work as Corresponding Secretary and for moderating Whitnet.

There was no new business and the meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Judson
Co-Recording Secretary

