

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting  
February 19, 2008

PTSA co-President **Laura Cecala** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and welcomed the members who were there. She acknowledged this month's Exceptional Viking Volunteers – the very dedicated group who are in charge of the Guidance Advisory Committee and Stressbusters: **Beth Isen, Terese Bernstein, Anne Hollander, and Bekki Sims.**

Laura encouraged parents and students to look at the school website, which has had a lot of information added, including clubs and athletics. Co-president **Sarah Koines** added that anyone with ideas for additional information or with corrections or updates should let the PTSA presidents know, and they will channel the information to the webmaster. A parent commented on how much improved that website was.

### **Student Government Association**

**Eve Rosenbaum**, president of the Student Government Association, reported on recent and forthcoming events.

- The Whitman Idol competition, held in January, was fun as always and raised money for charity. Laya Putri won, and Dan Miller was runner-up.
- SGA has stepped up its recycling of bottles, paper, and so on, with recycling centers on all three floors and in Whittier Woods.
- Pennies for Patients will raise money to combat leukemia. Only pennies count toward the competition for the greatest amount; students (or even teachers) may sabotage other collections by adding nickels, dimes – anything but pennies – which are then subtracted from the total.
- Spring Fair will be held at the end of May, with events such as a ducking tank for teachers; the SGA is open to suggestions for other events.
- Senior Banquet will be on March 5.
- Juniors raised money around Valentine's Day with iFlurtz (matchmaking), and Sophomores sold carnations.

In response to a question about where to learn about Student Service Learning opportunities, Sarah Koines suggested looking on the SSL page on the website, Bekki Sims mentioned that some are announced on whitnet, and Eve suggested that students look in the Career Information Center (CIC).

A parent asked about SGA expenditures. Eve reported that SGA contributed \$2,000 for new panels for the Arts Festival and responds to requests from clubs.

### **Assistant Principal's Report**

In the absence of principal Alan Goodwin, Assistant Principal **Jen Webster** reported to the PTSA. She noted that a large part of her responsibility is to manage scheduling, and 8<sup>th</sup> through 11<sup>th</sup> graders have been submitting their schedule requests for next year. Staffing allocations

throughout the county will be announced in March and are likely to be tight; students should make thoughtful choices in their schedule requests because those requests will determine which classes are staffed.

Much good news includes the continual successes of the dynamite debate team; the state championship in the Science Bowl; good results in It's Academic; the wrestling team won the regionals; and the track team is competing in the state finals today.

The bad news is that in the past 2 days 10 students (boys and girls in grades 9, 10, and 11) were suspended after being observed by school security or police using marijuana on school grounds. This number is unusually high—last month there was one suspension, and there were about 15 for the 2006-07 school year. The students are subject to the school's zero tolerance provision, and at the end of the 10-day suspension they face an expulsion hearing. Suspended students are encouraged to spend their days at SHARP, a program located at Bethesda Presbyterian Church that lets students keep up school work and get counseling. Depending on the student's history, he or she may return to Whitman, transfer to a different school, or—in extreme cases—be expelled from Montgomery County Public Schools. Parents are encouraged to be vigilant and to remain in communication with the school; for example, if a student says s/he was accidentally marked absent, don't hesitate to check with the school.

### **Student Assistance Program; Will Kapner, Speaker**

Guidance counselor **Will Kapner** described the Maryland Student Assistance Program. Referrals may be made anonymously by leaving messages in locked bins. Students concerned about a student's change in mood, rejection of former friends, or other signs of problems may use this method to seek help. After talking to the student's teachers, guidance counselor, and administrator, the MSAP team decides whether there is a concern that should be referred to the student's parents. Parents are provided with information about resources, but the decision about follow-up is left to the family.

The availability of MSAP was presented in every NSL [National-State-Local Government] class today, and it is presented to all 9<sup>th</sup> graders in the fall. At present there are two MSAP comment boxes; a third recently disappeared from the gym. Sarah Koines suggested putting one in the CIC, which is less visible and might make it easier to leave notes anonymously.

### **Shirley Brandman, Board of Education, Guest Speaker**

Laura Cecala introduced **Shirley Brandman**, who was elected to the Montgomery County Board of Education last year. Laura noted that they had served as elementary school PTA presidents together, and that Shirley is a current Whitman parent.

Shirley Brandman began by noting that having come up through levels of PTA activities, she thought she'd be well prepared for serving on the Board of Education (BOE). In fact, being a member of BOE is completely different. Parents who once felt free to stop her in the hall for a conversation view BOE members differently. The challenge is to stay connected to a broad variety of parents across the county. Regarding the discussion about suspensions, she said that

BOE has a quasi-judicial role as the last appeal before expulsion. The Board is concerned about the high level of suspensions across the county.

To give a flavor of her job, she described the issues she had dealt with that day. She met with new teacher inductees and noted the importance of teacher retention—which faces challenges from external factors such as the cost of living in Montgomery County. Since the school’s budget becomes public before tax revenues are known, decisions are made with incomplete information. Since students are only in 6<sup>th</sup> grade once (ideally), middle school reform is getting a lot of BOE’s attention. BOE is pursuing a mentoring program as a way to help students. Recognizing that consistency is not the highest virtue in a diverse county, BOE wants to meet the needs of all their students. BOE is discussing what they feel should be available in every community (such as music or help with homework)—where is the greatest need? They view education as a county issue and are working to mobilize other county agencies with overlapping interests.

In response to questions, Shirley made the following points:

- Public BOE meetings are time-limited, but committee meetings are open to the public and offer a good opportunity to communicate with the Board.
- The Special Education Committee uses the Collaborative Action Process to consult various resources before labeling a student “special ed.” Attorneys recently gave a presentation on avoiding litigation. BOE is currently looking into suspension rates among special ed students. Universal Design for Learning is a technology program aimed at making materials accessible to all students (e.g., information on a computer can be made into larger type).
- Shirley is pushing publicly for improvements in the writing curriculum. BOE is hearing presentations about what is and is not worth keeping in the curriculum. They are moving toward offering choices, for example, in summer reading instead of requiring everyone to read the same book.
- Each curriculum should be reviewed every 5 years (and more frequently for math).
- Her advice to parents is to be vocal. If BOE receives 20 emails on a subject, that’s a lot—especially if they are personalized. If you have a concern, send a 3- to 4-sentence email to [boe@mcps.md.org](mailto:boe@mcps.md.org). She will eventually get all emails sent to that address, or write to her directly at [Shirley.brandman@mcps.md.org](mailto:Shirley.brandman@mcps.md.org).

### **PTSA Committee Reports**

The minutes of the January PTSA meeting were approved.

**Treasurer Lise Bernhard** reported that the PTSA is in good shape for the year. The last check she wrote was \$1,300 to the Media Center for books. Professional enhancement requests tend to come toward the end of the year, and money is available in the budget.

**Beth Isen** reported that the **Guidance Advisory Committee** planned a meeting the next evening for Sophomore parents [which ended up being canceled twice by snow-caused closures]. The monthly meeting scheduled for February 27 had as invited guests Judy Amick and Jen Higgins, Whitman school psychologist and counselor, respectively.

**Anne Hollander** reported on a **Stressbusters** program about sleep, attended by about 50 parents. Speaker Helene Emsellem had described a study in which a group of students learned a game at 10 am and were tested on their performance at that game later that day, the next day, and 2 days later. Students did best after getting two good nights of sleep. Information from the National Sleep Foundation recommends staying close to a regular sleep schedule; it is not healthy for students to get insufficient sleep during the week and sleep until noon or later on the weekend. Anne invited suggestions for future Stressbusters topics.

The Guidance Advisory Committee and Stressbusters have prepared a number of Tip Sheets, including one on course selection. They are available in the CIC and on the web site.

**MCCPTA representative Mary Staley** presented a resolution proposed by the MCCPTA regarding the PSAT. Currently the county pays for 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders to take the PSAT. 11<sup>th</sup> graders either pay for the test or don't take it. Shirley Brandman noted that an objective of giving the PSAT to 9<sup>th</sup> graders is to identify "under-performing gems." The MCCPTA resolution would give a practice PSAT to 9<sup>th</sup> graders (thus accomplishing the same objective while reducing stress on 9<sup>th</sup> graders) and pay for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> graders to take the PSAT. The Whitman PTSA agreed to support the MCCPTA resolution.

**Maryam Hedayati, International Night chair**, reported on plans for International Night on March 13. Food sampling will be available from 6:30-7:30 pm, and a show with traditional and contemporary performances begins at 7:30. A donation of \$5 is requested to support Save the Children.

Under new business, it was reported that Dine Out for Post-Prom would be held in different locations on March 11 and April 14.

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Janice Mehler, Recording Secretary*