

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
January 16, 2007

PTSA co-President **Laura Cecala** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. The November minutes were voted on and approved. She introduced **Bob Mathis**, Whitman's social studies resource teacher, who recently returned from a 6-week Fulbright exchange with a teacher in York, England.

Report from York

Mr. Mathis showed a slide show of his trip to York:

- St. Peter's School, established 672 (!)
- His two daughters in their school uniforms
- Meeting the Archbishop of York Minster, the third highest official in the Church of England
- "Red Nose day," when students pay for the privilege of wearing costumes instead of uniforms
- Popular sports, including cricket, rugby, boys' field hockey, and lawn tennis
- The British equivalent of an ROTC unit
- York Minster lit up at night

Describing his experience and responding to questions, Mr. Mathis said:

- Each class has about 11-13 students
- Each teacher teaches 6 days a week and coaches a sport; chapel is 3 days a week
- students are in houses (like Harry Potter), and the house master gets involved if a student is having problems
- About 1/3 of the students are boarders (for \$40,000 a year), and 2/3 are day students (\$20,000 a year)
- By age 16, students have chosen their field of study and begun to specialize; they take four courses in their junior year and three in their senior year
- No senior slump: college applications are limited to six schools (which can include either Cambridge or Oxford but not both), and acceptance is contingent on the results of the senior exams taken in July
- British kids stand for grownups and yield the right of way; however, their good manners did not keep them from responding to his "bomb-throwing" teaching style trying to engage them in lively discussions.
- Ideally, Whitman and St. Peter's can continue their association, by exchanging students during spring breaks or teleconferencing

SGA report

SGA President **Chloe Bethel**, wearing her new Washington University sweatshirt in anticipation of next year, took a break from studying for finals and came to report that:

- Box Tops for Education collected about \$500 for Washington Grove Elementary School during the first semester; SGA matches this amount for a total of \$1,000

- Ink cartridges for recycling may be brought to PTSA meetings
- A number of activities are planned for Valentine's Day, including a matchmaking survey
- The December blood drive had a goal of 54 participants and got 64; the next blood drive will be in April

Principal's Report

Alan Goodwin reported that a video link was established with students in Azerbaijan, with the help of a Whitman parent and the embassy. Azerbaijani students were willing to stay late to accommodate the time difference; when they spoke it was 8:30 am in Bethesda and 5:30 pm there. The Azerbaijani First Lady was in town, and sent the Consul to join our end of the video conference. She brought a first-rate jazz pianist, who jammed with Whitman students after the call.

The Whitman chamber choir was invited to sing at Governor-elect O'Malley's inauguration.

College responses continue to arrive, resulting in some sadness and much joy around the school.

It is exam period, so things are fairly quiet for the teachers. In the past, there was a 2-day break between semesters, which was very helpful to teachers.

An appeal will go out to add a JV lacrosse program in the county. It costs about \$250,000 to create a new Junior varsity sport in MCPS.

A Whitman teacher, Joe Mornini, was named a 2006 Washingtonian of the Year for teaching soldiers recuperating at Walter Reed to kayak. His wife invited five of the soldiers to the last faculty meeting, and their perspective was interesting. They said they would return if their injuries didn't prohibit that, because with their experience they could help protect younger soldiers.

Dr. Goodwin was invited to accompany Superintendent Jerry Weast to Japan for a week as "an entourage of one." In fact, the two of them were the entirety of the U.S. delegation; others came from Japan, British Isles, and Australia. They visited a middle school in Tokyo and a high school in Yokohama. His slide show of the trip featured the following pictures and discussion points:

- A middle school classroom of 38-39 students, not dressed in uniforms (except at private schools)
- Schools are at four levels (A, B, C, D); national tests at the end of middle school determine the high school track
- Student suicides are a concern; one counselor visits the middle school once a week
- Scenes of Tokyo: large numbers of bicycles, McDonald's, sumo wrestler art, the Ulysses S Grant memorial (he planted a tree there), women arriving by bus to clean the shrine in the evening
- Scenes of students: electric car that they designed and built, manga cartoons
- High school principal entertaining Dr. Weast and Dr. Goodwin in his tearoom at school
- About 1 in 300 people wore masks; the number is higher in peak flu season

- Vending machine containing both hot and cold drinks
- Streets were extremely clean and free of litter, as were the schools
- Subways in Tokyo are as packed as their reputation suggests
- Teachers are greatly respected, and are highly paid relative to other government jobs
- There was less individuality in dress at all ages, but in class, the students expressed individual personalities
- Teacher training, parental involvement, and homework assignments are all less in Japan
- Japan is feeling pressure to reform education to compete with China and India; a strong teachers' union is protesting reform
- Students do not use calculators in math (but we're too far down the calculator road to go back)

Committee Reports

In the absence of Treasurer **Lise Bernhardt**, Co-president **Sarah Koines** gave the Treasurer's report. The membership approved in general giving a gift to honor Joe Mornini and to thank teacher Hong Wang for updating the Whitman website on her own time; the exact amount is at the Executive Board's discretion.

Sarah Koines introduced the new PTSA Public Relations chair, **Barbara Feuer**.

The PTSA has the names of about 140 students and families who are new to the Whitman cluster, and attendees were invited to sign up to serve as an advisor/friend to a new family.

Beth Isen reported on upcoming activities of the Guidance Advisory Committee (GAC): Nuts and Bolts of College (Jan. 24), Choosing Junior Year schedule (Feb. 1), and the next GAC meeting on the following Wednesday.

Cluster coordinator **Deborah DeMille-Wagman** reported going to the Board of Education meeting with Beth Isen and the other two Cluster coordinators, Carley Lee and Paula Robinson, to speak in support of further increasing the number of guidance positions in the County. Sarah said that Deborah's presentation got a standing ovation, and Deborah noted that parents turned out in unusually large numbers. The BOE is due to vote on this issue on Feb. 13.

Laura Cecala reported that the Whitman Education Foundation raised about \$16,500 in its campaign for art display panels. So far 175 panels have been ordered, and if more money is raised, we have until April 1 to get them in time for the Arts Festival.

Laura recognized this month's Valuable Viking Volunteers: Beth Isen and Terese Bernstein for GAC, and Deborah, Carley, and Paula as Whitman Cluster coordinators.

Anne Hollander and **Bekki Sims** reported on Stressbusters. Thirteen students signed up for the meditation and relaxation class, comprising a mix of classes and more boys than girls. One result of the earlier parent discussion of *the Overachievers* is that two parents are preparing tip sheets (e.g., when to see a counselor) that will be distributed on the website and in the guidance office. Dr. Stixrud approached Stressbusters about holding a community-wide program about

homework (how much is too much?) at Whitman on January 29, sponsored by Bethesda Magazine.

Maddy Killefer reporting from Senior Networking that Cliff Dempsey, a Dewey Beach police officer, will make a presentation in late March for the third year in a row. With this program, the school is not advocating for beach week, but for safety. Laura Cecala reported that 11th Grade Networking is scheduled for Feb. 26 and 10th Grade Networking for March 5, both at 7:30.

Tentative plans for the *Viking Voice* are to make the fourth (last) issue of the year (May) available online and for pickup at school, but it will not be mailed. This is an experiment to see whether the newsletter can reach parents at a cost savings. This plan will be announced in the third issue. Sarah and Laura want feedback from parents before the decision is made.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,
Janice Mehler, co-Recording Secretary*