

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
Minutes
March 20, 2007

PTSA co-President **Sarah Koines** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and noted that her co-chair, **Laura Cecala**, was on vacation “somewhere warm.” She recognized this month’s Exceptional Viking volunteers: Harini Shandilya, who organized International Night, and co-recording secretaries Karen Judson and Janice Mehler, for providing minutes of PTSA meetings. The January minutes were voted on and approved.

SGA report

SGA President **Chloe Bethel** reported that the Student Government Association was about to shut down for spring break. Elections for next year’s SGA board will begin after the break. School-wide officials – president, vice president, two secretaries, and treasurer – will be elected first. Students will have the opportunity to run for class officers later in the spring. In other SGA news, she reported that:

- After a wildly successful blood drive in December, SGA will sponsor another one this spring, open to donors who are at least 17 years old and 110 pounds.
- The Leadership class has been talking to students who are new to the school (i.e., arrived after the start of the school year)
- The program “Every 15 Minutes” will take place on March 22-23; by illustrating what it would be like for a Whitman student to be killed in a drunk-driving accident every 15 minutes (the national statistic is now every 31 minutes) on Thursday. Parents may come to a follow-up assembly for students on Friday at 8:35 and 9:40.

New Police Officer Assigned to Whitman

Principal **Alan Goodwin** reported Officer Aubrey, known to most of the school, has been assigned to police recruiting and may or may not return to Whitman after 6 months. He introduced Officer Daugherty, who spoke and led a lively discussion, including the following points:

- She has already dealt with three students who had drugs in their possession and one person responsible for several thefts.
- Asked whether students are aware of the punishments, Dr. Goodwin replied that “word spreads.” Typically students are given a 10-day suspension with a recommendation for expulsion from Whitman. Officer Daugherty added that students are taken away in handcuffs and enter the juvenile justice system.
- Parents asked about consequences for non-drinkers at a party with alcohol, and sober teenage drivers of underage kids who have been drinking. These students will be given breath tests, but presumably will pass them.
- Parents commented on the vulnerability to theft of possessions in the locker room. Even locked rooms do not guarantee safety, and bags left out of lockers are “sitting ducks.”
- Dr. Goodwin has been getting confidential reports of parties without adult supervision; in one recent case, there is a police investigation because the parents want compensation for

damage done by students who urinated on the sofa, poured bleach on the parents' clothes, and other really bad ideas. Now that cell phones are ubiquitous, word of an unsupervised party spreads fast and it can quickly get out of control.

- The concluding advice for parents was: Keep track of your own child.

Assistant Principals' Reports

Kathlyn Carroll gave information about the seniors' upcoming graduation: Parents will receive a package describing all the events, beginning with the Senior Banquet on March 26. Each student receives six tickets for the June 6 graduation and may request additional tickets, which are distributed based on the requests received.

Jennifer Baker reported on plans for next year's courses and commended the guidance counselors for their work. Three classes – CPR/First Aid, Asian Studies, and Art History – were canceled because not enough students signed up. The SAT Preparation class will be given for a semester, with one quarter apiece for math and English. A new class in Philosophy will be offered, taught by Colin O'Brien. She mentioned the HSA [High School Assessment] Preparation course for next year's 10th graders, which Mr. OuYang described in greater detail.

Benjamin OuYang said that the HSA Prep course will be offered for students who score low on the MAP-R, considered in combination with their grades and their PSAT and SAT scores. He expects that one session of the class will be offered for about 20 students, and will be team taught. He noted that the class will be helpful for other HSAs that involve writing, including Biology and History. Parents can check lexile.com for information about the grade level of books and journals (e.g., *Harry Potter* is 7th grade level, *The New York Times* is 12th grade). Books assigned by MCPS are all grade-appropriate.

Principal's Report

Alan Goodwin celebrated some student achievements: several students competed in national track events, and the debate team (with a fabulous volunteer coach) scored first out of 60 schools. He asked parent Ellen Kominers to report on the Whitman students who participated in Science Montgomery. All five (a senior, a junior, and three freshman) won numerous awards (from government agencies, professional groups, and corporations). In the overall competition, Paul Kominers came in first in Mathematics, and David Chen came in second in Biochemistry.

Dr. Goodwin continued with other celebrations: at the East Coast competition in Chantilly, Whitman's jazz band came in first, and other music groups got all 1's in various competitions. Whitman again was first in the county for SAT results. These achievements come in what he sees as the three areas of high school activities: scholastic, athletic, and extracurricular.

Next year Whitman will lose 4-7 teachers as a result of MCPS staffing decisions following the Montgomery County Council's cutting of \$20 million from the proposed budget. Since Superintendent Weast is committed to giving healthy pay raises to retain good teachers, the risk is that budget reductions will cut planned additions of guidance counselors in middle and high school, and assistant principals in elementary schools. Major cuts might lead to the canceling of

the HSA Prep course and reduction of inclusion classes. Current teachers who are cut are guaranteed jobs elsewhere in the system, so the staffing reduction will reduce the hiring of new teachers.

Some policies are increasing the need for additional teachers. Starting next year, the No Child Left Behind Act will require that special education teachers be certified in both special ed and the subject they teach; previously special ed teachers were generalists who taught multiple subjects. If the high school learning centers close and students return to their home schools, more teachers will be needed in those schools. Similarly, the plan to have each high school offer its own night school will require more teachers overall.

Dr. Goodwin reported that the Denchfield family, which has previously donated landscaping services, has planted a cherry tree in memory of Latin teacher Maria Cherry.

Cluster Coordinators

The Whitman Cluster consists of Whitman and all its feeder schools (Pyle MS and the six elementary schools). It is the step above the school-level PTA, followed by the Quad Cluster (Whitman, BCC, Walter Johnson, and Wheaton clusters), the MCCPTA (Montgomery County Council of PTAs), the Maryland PTA, and the national PTA.

Whitman's three cluster coordinators are **Deborah DeMille-Wagman** and **Carley Lee**, both of whom will have served the maximum 4 years by the end of this school year, and **Paula Robinson**, who is in her first year as cluster coordinator. Paula explained what the position entails (see attached handout at the end, "What can your cluster coordinators do for you?") She noted the challenge of putting aside their desires for their own school to consider the needs of other schools, but they "stand together and ask for it all." Cluster coordinators make requests to the Board of Education, and then stand with the BOE in testimony before the County Council. Parents interested in serving as cluster coordinator next year (or learning more about it) should contact Paula at phrmom@aol.com.

The entire PTSA thanked Deborah, Carley and Paula for all their hard work over the years.

Committee Reports

Treasurer **Lise Bernhard** reported that the budget was in good shape. At next month's PTSA meeting she will discuss options for using excess funds.

On behalf of the Guidance Advisory Committee, **Beth Isen** thanked the cluster coordinators for helping to advocate for an increase in the number of guidance counselors. Upcoming events include a college panel for juniors and a May 23 meeting for seniors on the transition to college.

Alice Weiss, reporting on plans for Post-Prom, said that students are needed to earn Student Service Learning hours by working at the Post-Prom yard sale on Saturday, April 14. Information will be posted on whitnet.

On behalf of Stressbusters, **Bekki Sims** gently reminded Dr. Goodwin that teachers should not schedule tests on March 22-23 because of the Every 15 Minutes program. She reported that the first after-school meditation class was successful, so it will be offered again.

Maddy Killefer, senior networking organizer, said that Officer Dempsey would return for the third year of a senior/parent meeting on Beach Week. Interested volunteers for Festival of the Arts should contact Maddy. Prom and party dresses are being collected for Once Upon A Prom program which donates the dresses to needy schools.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:06 p.m.

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