

**Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
November 21, 2006
Minutes**

PTSA co-President **Sarah Koines** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm.

Student Requests and Reports

Sam Oldak, president of the Robotics Team, reported that the team competes annually in a NASA-sponsored competition. Each team has 6 weeks to build a robot; the approximate cost is \$6,000 plus a little more for parts. The team has some local sponsors (Lockheed Martin, Pepco, Euro Motor Cars) but hoped that the PTSA would also contribute. The PTSA agreed to fund an amount as we had in the past and let them know.

Andrew Berger, vice president of the Student Government Association, gave the SGA report in lieu of president Chloe Bethel. The homecoming dance, which is the SGA's major fundraiser, made a little over \$14,000. Upcoming activities include Whitman Idol on December 7 and a blood drive (for those at least 17 years old and 110 pounds) on December 14. Other activities supported by SGA include student activities such as robotics, programs to benefit charity, and prizes to the classrooms that collect the most BoxTops for Education (which are given to Washington Grove Elementary School).

Equipment for Whitman Shorts

Geoff Schaefer, supervisor for the Whitman Shorts TV show (which is offered as the TV Production class) requested PTSA funds to purchase new equipment. He showed a clip from the first episode, which had poor sound, and then showed how much better the second episode was – because it was done on equipment borrowed from the students. He presented a list of the minimum equipment he hopes to purchase (3 miniDV camcorders, 2 tripods, and an iMAC computer), for a total cost of \$3,913.75.

Comments and responses to questions included: although most of the school uses PCs, some specialized iMAC applications are supported; tripods are not available from the art department; Apple Computer gives education discounts; funds for equipment will be raised from a dodgeball tournament, and companies and the SGA have also been asked for funds. It was moved, seconded, and approved to give \$2,000 for equipment for Whitman Shorts (\$500 from the PTSA technology budget and \$1,500 from the PTSA classroom budget). Mr. Schaefer was invited to return later in the year if he still needs funding, and the PTSA will consider further support if funds are available.

Guidance Department

Terese Bernstein, co-chair of the Guidance Advisory Committee, reported that juniors should have received a letter from the Guidance Department about starting the college process. Guidance counselor Rob Putt will discuss the PSAT at the next GAC meeting, scheduled for November 29 at 2:15 pm. She introduced Fran Landau, head of the Guidance Dept.

Mrs. Landau showed a new, elegant and informative brochure about the Whitman Guidance Dept. Guidance activities have become more comprehensive (serving all students) and development-oriented, and are aligned with standards from the American School Counseling Association plus additional requirements from the Montgomery County Public Schools. MCPS has school counseling standards in five areas:

- academic development (e.g., organization & study skills, course selection)
- personal development (e.g., truancy, domestic violence, moving, grief, anxiety)
- interpersonal development (e.g., bullying, social skills, conflict resolution)
- career development (e.g., letters of recommendation; information on careers, colleges, financial aid)
- healthy development (e.g., alcohol, eating disorders, ADHD, suicide, self-mutilation)

Ideally, the following guidance services are ordered from most frequent to least: prevention, early intervention, intensive intervention, and crisis response. One risk of understaffed guidance departments is that with less time available for prevention, there will be greater demand for intervention and crisis response.

Guidance interventions include individual meetings to discuss student questions; guidance lessons (e.g., options for college financial aid), often taught during English class; consultations involving parents and staff, school program support (e.g., Stressbusters); and referral to outside resources. Detailed data are available from 2004-05 on the number of students serviced and consultations by concern (e.g., 3 suicide attempts, 64 cases where all of a student's teachers met to address behavior management).

The recommended maximum is 250 students per counselor; at Whitman, in order for Mrs. Landau to have a half-load and fulfill her responsibilities as department head, other counselors have about 300 students apiece. Assistant Principal Jennifer Baker said that Whitman's request for an additional .5 counselor was denied. GAC co-president Beth Isen reported on testifying at the school board about counselor overload and was optimistic that the .5 counselor might be approved before the next school year. Students have been effective when they testify.

Issues covered in the discussion period included: Some 9th graders are anxious about changing classes midyear, and the guidance dept. meets with 9th grade classes to discuss the process. Now is the time to see counselors with concerns about second-semester classes. It is always a challenge to meet the needs of "the middle 70%" of students, but counselors try to see everyone at least once or twice a year, in addition to in-classroom guidance programs. Guidance offers career self-assessment instruments available on the Naviance program, which is changing its name to WorkspaceK12.

Assistant Principals' Reports

Kathlyn Carroll reported on the Middle States Accreditation process, which took "a microscopic look" at Whitman in early November. Students, parents, and staff interviewed by the accreditation team could not name any aspects of the school that they wanted to change! Dr. Carroll will provide a more formal report later, but she mentioned that in an overall positive assessment, the areas where Whitman could do more are in meeting the needs of at-risk and special needs students. She also said that the schedule of final exams will be posted after Thanksgiving and that exams will start January 12.

Jennifer Baker mentioned the policy for visitors to Whitman, which requires advance approval and should not be the day before a major holiday. Students who will be absent for vacation should also get pre-approval, and students gone for a long trip (e.g., a month visiting relatives overseas) might withdraw and re-enroll.

Reports from the Treasurer, MCCPTA Representative, Class Networking, Viking Voice

Treasurer **Lise Bernhard** reported that the membership committee did a great job, bringing in \$4,000 more than expected (a number made obsolete when the membership co-chair held up two new memberships received that day).

Mary Staley reported on the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. The MCPS requirement that students complete 60 hours of student-service learning is not in compliance with the state standard of 75 hours, and the MCCPTA is requesting that the 75-hour requirement begin with this year's 8th graders (and not, as suggested, 10th graders). The MCCPTA is also urging MCPS to make Health Tech Aides throughout the county available for the entire school day, including half an hour before and after school hours. Each month the MCCPTA has a guest speaker one hour before its meeting, and parents are invited to attend the meeting or just come hear the speaker. Last month's pre-meeting event was a Board of Education forum, and the speakers were all well-prepared.

Mary Beth Schiffman reported that the previous week's 11th grade networking addressed the balance between setting limits and "letting go" of kids who will be in college after the following year. A large group attended and expressed interest in meeting again.

Eckhard Hellbeck, who with his wife Mindy edits the PTSA newsletter, reported that the next issue was about to go to press and that the *Viking Voice* is now available online in color. They hope to offer an "opt-out" option for people who read the newsletter online and do not need it in print. There was a discussion of the need to create our own database in this case, because it would be onerous for the distribution volunteers to cull unneeded labels from the batch provided by the MCPS central office. An alternative suggested was to ask the students to pick up copies and bring them home, as a one-month experiment after the online version has been available for at least a few months. Lise noted that the *Viking Voice* is the largest item in the budget.

Other Business

Sarah Koines recognized this month's Exceptional Viking Volunteers: the staff appreciation chairs, Emily Bartlett, Lorri Veidenheimer, and Jan Hohenboken; and the *Viking Voice* editors, Mindy & Eckhard Hellbeck.

An option to be discussed at the New and International Parent Coffee on November 29 is to pair new parents and old parents (possibly PTSA board members) for "settling in" advice. As a separate effort, the students are brainstorming for ways to welcome new students. Pyle's successful program that matches families seems inappropriate in high school; parent and student programs will not pair the same families. Dr. Carroll suggested reinstating the Peer Mentors program previously at Whitman.

A parent asked what the PTSA does with the issues raised on whitcom, such as family-friendly school schedules, or limiting the number of tests in one day. Sarah Koines replied that the idea of a later start time was discussed at the September meeting, and interested parents were referred to a 1996 study of the effect of changing the MCPS daily hours, as a starting point for raising the issue again. She said that the co-presidents are happy to champion any causes that are common to many, brought up at a meeting, and agreed upon by the membership. Another parent commented that it's a great result if a champion emerges from whitcom discussions, but that the PTSA cannot be expected to shoulder responsibility for organizing responses to ideas raised there.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice Mehler, Co-recording Secretary