

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
September 19, 2006
Minutes
Reported by Janice Mehler

PTSA co-President **Sarah Koines** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm. She summarized the evening's agenda and then, along with co-President **Laura Cecala**, introduced a number of PTSA volunteers and co-chairs who were present. The minutes of the May 2006 PTSA meeting were approved.

Report from the SGA President

Chloe Bethel, president of the Student Government Association, explained that SGA funds a number of student activities, as well as some requests from teachers. The main revenue source is the homecoming dance, which this year is scheduled for Saturday, November 4, after the homecoming game on November 3. A number of chaperones have already signed up, but others are welcome. A new SGA-sponsored activity this year is Battle of the Classes, which features friendly competitions in pie-eating, tug-of-war, and other fun activities. Battle of the Classes is scheduled for November 2.

Chloe reported that SGA sponsored two year-long drives: used ink cartridges, which may be left in the SGA mailbox or turned in at PTSA meetings; and Box Tops for Education, which may also be brought to PTSA meetings or left in the students' second period classrooms. Classrooms with the most Box Tops will be awarded prizes, and the Box Tops are given to Washington Grove Elementary School. SGA also recycles the whole school, which Chloe assured the PTSA was, in fact, interesting; SGA purchased new recycling bins this year.

Asked to describe the leadership class, Chloe explained that SGA is composed of the president, vice president, two secretaries, and treasurer; three officers for each grade; plus the 24 students in the leadership class. The leadership class is a full-period class open to grades 10-12; students in grades 9-11 apply for next year's class at the end of the school year.

Treasurer's Report and Approval of Budget

Treasurer **Lise Bernhard** reported on two new line items in the PTSA budget: First, the PTSA will contribute to the costs of the Academic Support Center, a new after-school homework club that meets Tuesdays - Thursdays. Second, the Middle States Accreditation team will visit for 4 days this November, and the PTSA is covering their travel expenses.

Points made in a discussion of the budget included the following: Students who need funds for school field trips should apply to the school office; that is not a PTSA expense.

The possibility of making the *Viking Voice* available only online as a way to save money was suggested and discussed.

A motion to approve the budget was seconded and passed.

Wendie Guterl, co-VP of Membership, reported that there were about 1200 PTSA members; the income expected of membership has been met and is continuing to grow. She proposed that the PTSA add to its budget a contribution for the Social Studies resource teacher, Bob Mathis, who is spending 6 weeks in York, England, on a Fulbright-funded exchange. A motion to provide \$250 toward his travel expenses was amended to provide up to \$500 as needed, depending on funds available from other sources. The amended motion passed.

Principal's Report, School Administrative Team, and Discussion

Principal **Alan Goodwin** had asked his administrative staff – “the envy of his peers” – to attend this meeting, and he asked them each to describe their roles.

Assistant Principal **Kathlyn Carroll** has been at Whitman 9-10 years and is currently the administrator for the 11th grade class (whom she will follow through graduation). She described her areas of responsibility:

- special education plans (IEPs, 504s)
- the master calendar
- teacher preparation
- graduation
- supervision of the social studies department, the Mark Twain satellite program, BASE (alternate activity for suspended students), and SGA
- updating the parent handbook every 2 years
- Academic Support Center (being tried this year as an experiment): Four or five teachers from each academic area offer help to students who come to them after school on Tuesday-Thursday; available teachers' names and locations will be posted.

Jennifer Baker, in her third year at Whitman, is the administrator for current 12th graders. She reported that she supervises the math, science, computer science, and art departments, and also building technology and tech support (including the recent mysterious problem with some of the printers). She is also responsible for:

- assemblies
- assisting Dr. Carroll with senior activities and graduation
- the master schedule of classes, which she noted worked well this year; very few classes are oversized
- announcements, which come to the main office and are read over the loud speaker in second period, then typed and sent over Whitnet by Elsa Khalil in the main office
- Edline: parents should have received their logon information from their students last Friday; any questions should be directed to Geoff Schaefer, a teacher who has

time set aside for Edline; teachers are asked to post scores at least every 2 weeks and provide current assignments

- report cards

Benjamin OuYang reported that he:

- supervises foreign language, PE, tech ed, ESOL
- handles the Middle States accreditation process, which will take place on November 7-10; the school prepares a huge book of information about Whitman High School, consisting of plans and programs to work on over the next 5 to 10 years to improve the school, which is reviewed in depth by five visiting educators
- attendance, emergency drills
- student assistance (the school's confidential program for drug use, eating disorders, emotional issues, etc.).
- PSAT: He noted that seniors will not have school the morning of October 18, when freshmen, sophomores and juniors take the PSAT; school will operate on a normal schedule that afternoon.

Dr. OuYang displayed and read the school's mission statement, and stressed the role of parents as partners.

Dr. Goodwin reported that there are about 14 new hires this year, including a secretary for the main office and more security personnel. He views celebrations as important to the school, and Whitman has many reasons to celebrate. Last year Whitman had the highest average SAT scores in the county: 1884 (out of 2400), with most seniors taking the test. On the High School Assessment, Whitman had the highest scores in government and English and second highest in biology and algebra. This year's senior class has 24 National Merit semifinalists, behind only Montgomery Blair and Richard Montgomery. He noted that there is still an achievement gap, and initiatives at Whitman include the availability of a math tutor at both lunches, the Academic Support Center, and a half-time literacy coach.

Present enrollment at Whitman is 1,987 students. Whitman was denied another half-time counselor this year, and there is concern that the current counselors are overextended, particularly as they do more work with groups.

Regarding *The Overachievers*, written by a Whitman alumna who followed several students at Whitman and described the pressures they faced, he provided copies to his staff so that they will see what has been written, and it will be discussed at a GAC [Guidance Advisory Council] program on October 30. Dr. Goodwin said that as long as colleges provide hoops for students to jump through and students are capable of handling the work, Whitman will provide the opportunities. An example is this year's experiment that the AP government class (NSL = national, state, local) previously restricted to 10th graders has been opened to 9th graders. The trick is to avoid having students turn themselves into pretzels trying to do more than they can handle. A parent who knew the students in the book commented that they were generally happy and supportive of each other.

There was a discussion of the early starting time for Whitman and other high schools, which has been the subject of numerous comments on Whitcom – all in favor of starting the school day later. Dr. Goodwin reported that a study conducted in 1998-99 estimated that a later starting time would cost the county an additional \$10 million for buses and drivers. A survey of students at that time found that they preferred a later starting time but wanted school not to end any later. Dr. Goodwin noted that for some students in the county, going to jobs right after school is essential to the family's financial support. A handful of students have notes from their doctors allowing them to miss first period and arrive at school for second period. He suggested that parents interested in pursuing the goal of a later starting time should start with that report.

The school plans to use videoconferencing to link Whitman students with students in other countries. Initial contact has been made with Uzbekistan, but with the 9-hour time difference it's likely that future links will be with countries in closer time zones, such as Mexico or Venezuela. Whitman's videoconferencing goes through Gallaudet University, and our great success has just been to connect to the MCPS central office. Today the central office, tomorrow Central Asia.

Discussion

After his presentation, Dr. Goodwin responded to questions and comments. A parent reported that the green sign pointing toward Whitman High School, formerly at the corner of Whittier and River, has been missing. As follow-up to the discussion of early start times, some parents commented on "family-friendly schedules" and the desirability of fewer half-days and scheduling teacher professional days to create 3-day weekends. A veteran MCPS parent noted that the number of half-days has been cut in half over the past 15 years (from 10 to 5).

Dr. Goodwin encouraged all 9th, 10th and 11th graders to take the PSAT. Since the county pays for 9th and 10th graders, the school is judged by how many students take the test. Some families are concerned about students who have not yet taken Geometry, which is covered on the PSAT; even for those students the test provides important data and useful practice. A parent reported that last year her 10th grader had a big exam on the afternoon of the PSAT; Dr. Goodwin said he would ask teachers not to schedule exams on October 18 this year.

Asked to comment on revisions to the zero tolerance policy, Dr. Goodwin explained that he inherited the policy, which was instituted after a fatal car crash involving Whitman students in the 1990s. He has revised the policy to offer an alternative to a full year's exclusion from extracurricular activities. In cases that he considers appropriate, Dr. Goodwin will allow a student to do 100 hours of community service at Whitman under the supervision of an administrator. In those cases, the student may apply for resumption of extracurricular activities after 6 months. Ms. Baker said that there were three students on zero tolerance last year, and one the year before.

Dr. Goodwin expressed dismay at parents who host underage drinking parties, noting that parents can be fined \$1500 *per underage student*. He agreed with the suggestion to publicize that fine on Whitnet again this year. He said that student groups have started a “safe ride” program, but he has misgivings about one student being out at midnight driving a second student, who is drunk.

After speculation about who would play Dr. Goodwin in the movie version of “The Overachievers,” the meeting adjourned at 9:10 pm.