

Walt Whitman High School PTSA Meeting
September 18, 2007
Minutes

PTSA co-President **Laura Cecala** called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm and introduced her co-president **Sarah Koines**. The minutes of the May 15, 2007, PTSA meeting were approved.

Report from the SGA President

Eve Rosenberg, president of the Student Government Association, reported that the SGA is currently focused on the homecoming events that take place next week. The homecoming dance, scheduled for Saturday, September 29, is \$17 per person or \$32 per couple. Eve encouraged parents to let their students know that a date is not necessary and that it is common for friends to pair up to get the \$2 discount on two tickets. Students dress up (dresses and suits), and a Homecoming FAQ is being developed for the Whitman website.

Welcome to Whitman Night will take place on October 2, right after Homecoming. It's a chance to learn about the many clubs at Whitman – more than 85 choices (something for everyone!).

Directories were offered for sale at the meeting (\$6 for one, \$10 for two) and will continue to be available at future PTSA meetings. BoxTops for Education are collected in second period classes, and prizes are offered to the classes that collect the highest value. Used ink cartridges may be brought to PTSA meetings or the Whitman office; these are turned into the central MCPS office for recycling, and the school receives \$1 per cartridge.

Principal Alan Goodwin praised Eve's wonderful leadership; she is well respected by her peers.

Principal's State of the School Report and Introduction of Assistant Principals

Alan Goodwin began by requesting a moment of silence in memory of three Whitman students: senior Nima Toossi and recent graduates Jamie Greenberg and Kate McManus.

Dr. Goodwin had many good things to report. Although there are still some large classes, Whitman has fewer of them than most high schools. Whitman again has the highest SAT scores in the county, and 12 students are National Merit Semifinalists. The football team is "doing as well as the Redskins." (That's good this year.) On the more sobering side, there has been one drug bust and two students who consulted counselors over suicidal feelings.

With the promotions of former assistant principals Ben OuYang and Jennifer Baker to being principals elsewhere, his administrative team has one senior and two new administrators. The senior Assistant Principal, **Kathlyn Carroll**, introduced herself and identified her responsibilities: the senior class, graduation, staff, EMT, IEPs, calendar, English, social studies and special education. Regarding special ed, Dr. Goodwin apologized for a letter sent to special ed parents that mistakenly contained too much information. He said they were contacting all parents who had received the letters and correcting the mistake.

Assistant Principal **Kathy McHale** is returning to Whitman, where she was a physical education teacher for many years, after spending the past 3 years as an administrator at North Bethesda Middle School. Her responsibilities include the junior class, English 10, foreign language, ESOL, art, business, health, physical education, technology education, family and consumer science, music, and possibly other things the PTSA secretary failed to record.

Assistant Principal **Jennifer Webster**, a social studies teacher at Whitman for the past 8 years, has taken over the master schedule, which has been a challenge at the beginning of the year. Dr. Goodwin praised her for holding down the number of large classes. Ms. Webster reported that she is also responsible for the sophomore class, math, computer science, Pinnacle, assemblies, field trips, and the Student Government Association.

Be cautious! In anticipation of the Homecoming Dance, **Dr. Goodwin** urged parents to be aware of where their children are before and after the dance and to make sure the parent in charge has a good philosophy. Homecoming tends to be a time when teens consider making unwise decisions. The dance will have officers with a breathalyzer, and purses and bags will be checked.

Last year Whitman earned \$7,000 through Giant Food's Bonus Bucks program. Dr. Goodwin noted that Whitman is in a school cluster with BCC, Walter Johnson, and Wheaton high schools and their feeder schools, and that Wheaton has fewer resources than the others. In a spirit of helping our sister schools, Dr. Goodwin encouraged parents to add Wheaton High School to share our Bonus Bucks rewards from Giant. He will put a note on whitnet on how to do that.

Pam Garcia, Presentation on Foreign Languages at Whitman

Pam Garcia, the invited faculty speaker, is the foreign language department's resource teacher, which is Whitman-speak for head of the department. After 11 years at Whitman, she was hired by the MCPS central office to supervise language programs county-wide. After 3 years of what Ms. Garcia called her "stint in hell" she was able to return to the Whitman classroom, where she is now happily in her fifth year of her second tour.

Ms. Garcia noted that the PTSA used to invite a resource teacher to speak at every meeting, which she thought was a good way to keep parents informed.

For students having problems in a particular class (e.g., if the teacher doesn't seem to relate to the student's needs), the resource teacher is the best person to contact for help. The resource teacher will approach the teacher to help identify and solve the problem. Sarah Koines noted that the resource teacher is at the top of each departmental faculty list on the Whitman website.

At the beginning of the school year, the foreign language department wrote a consensus mission statement. Ms. Garcia was pleased that another teacher suggested "lifelong language learning" as a goal. She feels strongly that the foreign language program should encourage kids to want to travel and continue to learn. She particularly likes to hear that her former students are minoring in a foreign language in college.

Whitman offers seven foreign languages: Japanese, Chinese, Russian, Italian, Spanish, French, and Latin. She noted how usual it is for a school to offer both Japanese and Chinese, but there is enough student interest to support both.

Videoconferences with Schools in Other Countries

Dr. Goodwin reported that Whitman students have had four videoconferences with a high school in Beijing and will continue to do so every other Tuesday. With a 12-hour time difference, the schools alternate 7:30 am and 7:30 pm time slots. In addition, we are starting a new partnership with Seoul High School in Korea. Three students from that school and their principal will be visiting our school on October 4-5. Our website has a link to theirs.

Whitman Education Foundation

Dr. Goodwin said that he is working with the Whitman Education Foundation to respond to Ms. Garcia's request for a language lab. **Kim Schifrin**, one of 10 voting-member parents on the board of the Education Foundation, reported that the foundation was created in Fall 2005 and that its first project was to raise funds to renovate the courtyard, with a matching grant from Josh Rales. The foundation has also raised money for panels for the Arts Festival and for computers. The language lab is its biggest project to date, and donations are welcome at any time. There is a link to the foundation under "parents" on the Whitman website.

Ms. Garcia noted that when the language lab was planned as a purchase, the technology was primitive so the money was used for other needs. Systems available now allow the teacher to listen while students converse and other high-tech options.

Treasurer's Report and Approval of 2007/2008 Budget

Treasurer **Lise Bernhard** led a discussion of the proposed 2007-08 PTSA budget. Among the items she commented on were a one-time grant of \$3,500 to improve the school website; doubling the budget for lunchtime speakers from \$200 to \$400 to include lunchtime speakers in lieu of the Youth Summit and Every 15 Minutes, neither of which will take place this year; and assumed income of \$40,000 (though dues and donations are behind last year – please send your membership form if you have not already done so).

Laura Cecala explained that the school PTSA's contribution to county and state PTSAs is used for meetings and publications. Dr. Goodwin commented on the line item for building appearance and security, which mainly goes for security at sports and other events. Denchfield Landscaping, owned by a Whitman family, has done a lot to improve the appearance of the grounds; this year the company, mainly the son, will create a blue W in stone. He also acknowledged the Voorthuis family, which had the idea to provide a book of Walt Whitman's poems to all incoming freshman and contributes a matching grant to cover half the cost of the books.

A motion to approve the budget was seconded and passed, with one abstention.

Co-Presidents' Report

Laura Cecala acknowledged this month's *Exceptional Viking Volunteers* for their recent contributions: Jay Kaufman and Betty Lee, Membership VPs, who streamlined the process for collecting PTSA dues; Kate Kuhn and her committee, who organized the 9th grade pizza party; and Elissa Oshinsky, who is responsible for the international and newcomers breakfast.

Sarah Koines encouraged "seasoned" (not "old") Whitman parents to serve as *New to Whitman Family Liaisons*. This rewarding, low-effort volunteer job involves making a few phone calls a year to a family that is new to the school (and not from Pyle) to give advice about such things as Welcome to Whitman Night and Homecoming. Eve Rosenbaum and the SGA are organizing a parallel effort to welcome new students. There are 120 new families to date this year. There are currently 1,878 students, compared with 1,886 last year, according to Dr. Goodwin; of these, 478 are seniors.

Sarah Koines commented on the *website initiative*, acknowledging Tyler Whitmore and her husband for designing the new look and working with the webmaster. The content has noticeably increased over last year, and new pages are being added.

Welcome to Whitman Night, from 7-9 pm on October 2, features live music, pizza and subs for sale, and information about Whitman's clubs. Last year students organized and ran more than 85 school clubs, including kickball, cricket, squash, foreign languages, drama, Shakespeare, Black & White (newspaper), Eidolon (creative writing), Whitman Shorts (film), and fantasy sci-fi writing. Humanitarian clubs include Best Buddies, Key Club, and Start with Art. Government, politics and debating clubs include the Mock Trial Team, Model United Nations, Young Democrats, and Whitman Republicans. Those interested in starting a club should contact one of the after school activities chairs: Judy Brookes (judy@brookes.com), Joan Wolf Chiaverini (joanwolfjoanwolf@aol.com), or Pat Lundelius (patlundelius@earthlink.net).

Membership

Jay Kaufman, co-VP for membership, reported that so far about 50 percent of Whitman's families have joined the PTSA. The budget assumes 1,000-1,100 members and the current total is at 800. The request for membership and donations at the beginning of the year is the only PTSA fundraising all year. Parents may send membership forms to school with their children; there is a drop-box for forms in the main office. A suggestion was made to send an email reminder to non-members (probably more gentle than "we know who you are and we know where you live").

PSAT

Dr. Goodwin said that the county pays for 9th and 10th graders to take the PSAT. The PSAT is strongly encouraged for 11th graders, but their fees are not covered by the county. This year's PSAT will be given on October 17; please be sure not to schedule doctor's appointments that day (except seniors, who can sleep late on October 17). Feedback will be mailed about 6 weeks later.

Guidance Advisory Committee (GAC)

Beth Isen, co-chair of the Guidance Advisory Committee along with Terese Bernstein, described GAC's role as helping students and parents to have a successful year. This year, in lieu of the Youth Summit (previously held biennially), there will be a number of lunch speakers on health issues.

Beth reported that Bekki Sims and Anne Hollander will continue to organize Stressbusters events for parents. All parents are invited to GAC meetings; the next one is tomorrow (Sept. 19) at 2:15 pm, with guidance counselor Will Kapner as invited speaker.

Each grade level typically holds two networking meetings a year for interested parents to discuss issues. Minutes are posted on whitnet for those who can't come.

Networking

Diana Dempster, who organized last year's 9th grade parents' meetings and will organize the meeting for 10th grade this year, noted that different issues come up each year. Even parents who don't plan to raise an issue are likely to learn from hearing about other parents' concerns and interests.

Sarah Koines said that the PTSA is working with the health department to identify speakers for parents and students for evening events a couple of times during the year to speak to issues relevant to both parents and students. Watch whitnet for dates and speakers.

Student Service Learning (SSL)

In place of the PTSA SSL representatives, who couldn't attend the meeting, Laura Cecala reported that the current freshman class is required to complete 75 SSL hours in order to graduate. For the sophomore class and beyond, the old requirement of 60 SSL hours remains in effect. It is never too early to earn SSL hours, and students may discover a new passion through their volunteer activities. Dr. Goodwin noted that volunteering for a for-profit organization, no matter how noble the work, is no longer eligible for SSL hours. September 28 is the deadline for reporting SSL hours earned over the summer.

Whitnet

Whitnet moderator John Floyd encouraged parents to find out and follow the rules (e.g., signing names to messages, posting for-sale items on whitcom instead of whitnet). He said that he usually checks messages a few times a day, but don't expect messages to appear 10 minutes after being sent. Plan ahead!

Upcoming Events

Laura Cecala reminded parents that senior class pictures, the senior breakfast, and Dine Out for Drama at Parker's American Grill and Gifford's Ice Cream were all scheduled for the next day (Sept. 19).

Sarah Koines said that PTSA meetings are the third Tuesday of every month, and all dates are posted on the Whitman website. Whitman parent Dr. Jill Captain will be offering flu shots to parents, students, and staff for \$25, beginning 45 minutes before the next PTSA meeting, on October 16.

New Business

A parent asked how parents can get immediate notification when students skip class. She noted that her daughter had skipped classes half a dozen times last year before she found out. Dr. Goodwin said that there should be an automatic notification when even one class is skipped; if parents are concerned, they can call the attendance secretary and ask for a printout. Diana Dempster commented that that might be a good topic for the 11th grade parent networking meeting.

Laura Cecala read a statement:

Sarah and I and several committee chairs have recently been sued in our capacity as PTSA officers and committee chairs. We feel it is our duty to inform the PTSA membership of this pending lawsuit. The plaintiffs who filed the lawsuit were chairs of a PTSA committee in 2006/2007. All of the defendants that they named are officers or committee chairs of this PTSA, although not all officers and committee chairs of the PTSA were named as defendants.

The plaintiffs first asked the court for a temporary restraining order that would have stopped the current chairs of that committee from performing their duties, but the court denied their request. They are now pressing their claim to have the court order the PTSA to reinstate them as committee chairs. The date set for the hearing on their claim is October 4. The six of us who have been named as defendants request that the PTSA approve the expenditure of funds necessary to defend us in this lawsuit.

It was moved by Ellen Kominers and seconded by Carley Lee to authorize up to \$2,000 for legal expenses for officers and committee chairs involved in the current PTSA litigation. Discussion included the following points:

- The bylaws say nothing about potential lawsuits and legal fees, and the co-presidents are not aware of any precedents for former PTSA committee chairs to sue for reinstatement. The bylaws state that monies may be allocated outside of the budget with a vote and approval of a quorum of the membership at a meeting.
- A parent said that it would be a misallocation of funds to spend them for legal fees without having more information about the case. The co-Presidents replied that they did not want to discuss the details of the pending litigation before obtaining advice from legal counsel.

- The PTSA Officers¹ are being sued as individuals and have not retained counsel; several parents spoke on behalf of approving the funds to allow the defendants to obtain legal advice prior to the October 4 hearing.
- Two parents expressed the view that the PTSA should stand behind its officers so in the future others are not afraid to serve for fear of being sued.
- Although liability coverage is commonly provided for PTSA events, there is no separate coverage for PTSA Officers being sued as individuals. [The Maryland PTA is scheduled to vote this fall on whether to mandate liability insurance for officers of all PTSA's in the county.](#)
- A parent stated that the 14th largest law firm in Maryland offers \$20 advice; another parent said that there were income limits.
- A parent expressed discomfort at voting on the matter without involving the whole community. The co-presidents responded that the issue was being raised at a general membership meeting.
- It was moved by Katrice Stinson and seconded to table the vote until more details were provided. The vote on the motion to table the original motion was 8 in favor and 25 opposed.
- The motion to authorize up to \$2,000 for legal expenses for officers and committee chairs involved in the current PTSA litigation carried by a vote of 23 in favor, 7 opposed, and 2 abstentions.

Dr. Goodwin said to the parents attending their first PTSA meeting that this was not a typical meeting.

Mindy Buria-Hellbeck moved and it was seconded that a pile of copies of the bylaws and a copy of Robert's Rules of Order be made available at every PTSA meeting. Lise Bernhard moved and it was seconded to amend the motion to say that one copy of the bylaws and one copy of Robert's Rules of Order should be made available at every PTSA meeting. The amendment was adopted unanimously, and the amended motion that one copy of the bylaws and one copy of Robert's Rules of Order be made available at every PTSA meeting passed with one nay vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Janice E. Mehler
Recording Secretary

¹ In this discussion, "the PTSA Officers" refers to the co-presidents and four committee chairs who are being sued.