

MES PTA Meeting Minutes
Wednesday October 21, 2020
6:30-8:45pm via Zoom

In attendance: Jenna Huntley, Yuna Kim, Ms. Lacy, Mrs. Camuto, Mr. VanHise, Mrs. Coffey, Ms. Evertsen, Ms. Heintz, Jennifer Harris, Unnati Patel, Chris Hoffman, Jennifer Lafaman, Maria Ryan, Asma Ahmed, Jennifer Volson, RoseAnn Sands, Patty Bajaj, Lara Katz, Andrew Chudy, Jackie Merritt, Samantha Strickland, Danielle O'Connor, Rania Elghazaly, Alex Clark, Jessica McDonnell, Kathleen Berger, Amy Chen, Joanna Wei, Logan Calulo, Juliette, Lin, MX, Ranju

PTA Administrative Business

- Meeting called to order by Yuna at 6:33
- Welcome

Monthly Reports

President's Report - Yuna Kim

- Nothing particular to report
- Please reach out if have any questions
- Linked in school website

VES Update – Ms. Lacy & Mrs. Camuto

- Smooth transition from virtual to hybrid
- Teachers had PD for tech set-up
- Teachers doing a great job in supporting both the kids in class and at home simultaneously
- Thank to the PTA for help during open house and for the balloons
- Had MSEPTA meet and greet
- New Families virtual meet and greet went well
- Back to School night went well
- Learning Toolkit and instrument pick-ups went smoothly
- Culturally responsive practices are ongoing
 - Councillors planning mindful lessons
- School spirit days coming up for week of respect
- Virtual UNICEF drive coming up
- BOO BASH next week
- District Leadership Team meeting tomorrow and will decide about Halloween
 - Virtual dress-up?
- Virtual days Nov 2-4 and NJEA Convention Nov 5-6 (school closed)
- Parents have been very responsive and following directions
- COVID forms are being filled out for all students (even virtual)

VES Teacher Liaison – Ms. Evertson & Ms. Heintz

- Transition going well

- Administration has been very supportive

OHES Update – Mr. VanHise

- Effort and work that everyone has been putting in has been great - for both teachers and parents
- Teachers have been amazing
- Appreciate the patience with the cohort assignments - really wanted to ensure was balanced
- Kindergarten back 4 days a week
- Code Blue Team did training in a socially distant manner
- Thank you to PTA for assistance with open house
- Transition to hybrid has gone smoothly
- Kids doing well - masks not a problem and are engaged with the teacher
- Back to School night tomorrow - will need to log in with a Google Account
- Halloween - the social-emotional team is coming up with virtual ideas

OHES Teacher Liaison – Mrs. Coffey

- Students have been amazing both in class and at home
 - Appreciate everything parents have been doing especially with all the patience and flexibility
 - Sent out Room Parent survey to teachers
 - Will send out WishList next week
 - Thought after a few weeks of hybrid teachers may have things to add
 - Social-emotional teams planning and some teachers planning Halloween activities
 - Email from Mrs. Scotti to go out to teachers so that there will be some consistency
 - Will give parents more info once teachers have been informed
- Parents really appreciate all the hard work that has gone into this year
- Any questions for the administration or teachers? No

Treasurer's Report – Chris Hoffman

- Numbers from Oct 7
- 78 members cleared through the bank (incl 2 staff): \$1145.28
- Sold a VES yearbook
- Events with a strikethrough are ones we can't run this year
- No new expenses
- Net Profit: \$322.48
- \$42,075.00 projected for this year
- Did better than expected with spirit wear sales at open houses (will be on next month's budget)
- Received a community donation
- Gave money to both schools for lanyards and plastic shields for support staff
- Grants

- Have made the Grant Committee
- New way of doing grants this year - rolling
- Applications were sent to Principals yesterday so will go out to the teachers soon
- Teachers must be a PTA member to receive grant money
 - Membership \$5 for staff
- Any questions?
 - Hospitality still has a strikethrough but was voted to reinstate since doing Welcome Week
 - Chrissy will check

MSEPTA – RoseAnn Sands

- 2 meetings since our last meeting
- Montgomery Special Education PTA - K through 12 organization that includes any child receiving any special service
- State mandates SEPAG - outreach program for parents active involvement at at District level
- Trying to work on increasing membership
- Focusing on representation and inclusion
 - BOO BASH - providing coloring pages and activities in a range of difficulties
 - Driving tour can be done by anyone
 - Need to ensure the virtual activities can be something that ALL students can at least try
- Any questions please reach out to RoseAnn

Halloween/Fall Events – RoseAnn Sands

- BOO BASH
 - Monday materials available online - parents can email the artwork and will make a presentation
 - Decorated house tour - google form to vote and will announce the winners
 - 10 houses - ½ with elementary kids and ½ without! (no names included just addresses)
 - Takes about 1hr
 - Lots of enthusiastic people
 - Virtual bash on Friday
 - Excited that so many local businesses wanted to be included (raffle and video)
 - Will ask for feedback from businesses and participants afterwards

Charleston Wrap – Jenn Lafaman

- Started Sept 26 and goes until Oct 26
- As of today sold \$4727, so our profit is \$1789.20
- 86 people registered by only a small percentage have sent out the link to others
- We make 40% off everything sold
- Trying to push out to have people share with family and friends

- Would teacher liaison's please remind teachers to send out to parents

OHES Book Fair - Unnati Patel

- All virtual
- 360 degree virtual fair - very cool new feature - like walking through real fair
- Get 25% back in Scholastic Dollars
 - Traditionally would use to purchase books for library and give \$ to each teacher to buy books
- No wishlists from teachers but are encouraging families to donate a book that they would like to see in the classroom

Membership - Jenn Lafaman

- 147 members (including 13 teachers and staff and 2 community members)
- Sent a personal email to each teacher and staff asking for membership and telling about rolling grants
 - Also included to ask for help or let us know if they need anything

Room Parents - Maria Ryan

- Streamlined the process to be the same at OHES and VES - jotform then lottery
- Will check with teachers that the selection is ok first
- Deadline Oct 23
- Going through now to make sure have at least one volunteer for each class
- Room Parents will help bridge the gap and help with communication
- VES hasn't sent out yet because of Back to School Night but will soon
- Form has been updated so parents can fill out for multiple children

- Does admin send out emails to teachers as they come or consolidate to one?
 - VES does Friday Round-up and OHES is heading towards doing that too, however important things do get stand alone emails

Welcome Week - Maria Ryan

- Thank you to Unnati and Rania!
- Balloons arrived
- Prepackaged goodie bags to go out tomorrow for all teachers and staff - Thank you Rania!
- Custodian appreciation baskets went out - Thank you Rania for that too!

New Business/Announcements/Questions

- OHES Back to School Night tomorrow - presentations to go out to parents tomorrow afternoon
- Advisor from Interact Club has reached out to administration and are enthusiastic to help out

- Yuna has been in contact and we will be discussing how to get the word out at the next board meeting
- Mrs. Camuto has indicated that many parents would like a way to contact other parents and since we no longer make the friend finder it is problematic
 - Her children's school uses Membership Toolkit which allows you to find other members
 - The PTO uses this so Yuna will reach out to them
- Lara Katz would like to thank everyone for all the hard work they have done but point out that it is all very difficult for parents
 - Communication has been lacking and too last minute for parents to adequately plan
 - Bus routes were given Oct 9 for a start date of Oct 12 and children have not all been given Bus Tags yet - how does this short notice and lack of preparation ensure that our children are safe?
 - Transportation just said to check schedules weekly because can change but didn't say specific day - leaves a lot of room for error
 - Do we need to give transportation a deadline?
 - Schedules have been changing so hard to coordinate and some teachers have better practices than other, for instance a parent Q&A each week
- Administration's response:
 - Thank you for sharing your concerns
 - Hard to identify what we can control - trying our best with internet connectivity and communication but things are changing so quickly
 - Taking feedback from teachers about what is working well and what is not
 - Since only second week of hybrid still in the technology phase of troubleshooting
 - Don't want to take away teachers autonomy -things that work well for one class may not work well for another
 - Since families can choose to go virtual anytime the number of children on the bus can change at anytime so busing is fluid at the moment
 - Since parents have to go into Genesis everyday for the COVID questionnaire they can easily check the bus schedule

Q&A with BOE Member Ranjana Rao

- True stakeholder involvement. Thank you for the invitation!
- Lots of chatter online, between parents - how can we ease these concerns?
- Not all the questions were BOE questions so PTA has created a helpful chart to help determine which questions should be asked to whom (at end of document and linked to website)

1. Why do I have to fill out a form on Genesis DAILY when my child is virtual? There's no need for the school district to collect this information if my child is virtual. Why is this contingent for my child to participate over the internet?

- Kids may be participating in after school activities and may have younger siblings. This is for contact tracing as per the guidance of the Health Department
- If parents choose to go hybrid in Jan they will be already used to filling out the questionnaire daily

2. My son attends hybrid two days a week, but there are only 4 students including him in the classroom. What are the chances that he can attend 4 days a week and when would a decision like that be considered?

- The distribution of children who are participating in hybrid program is not the same between schools
- Many factors involved - busing, different schedules at the upper schools, ensuring social distancing and cleaning protocols
- There will be another survey in December to see how many may want hybrid in January and accordingly we can see if increasing the days for each cohort is possible

3. There have been cases of COVID diagnosed in nearby districts. What notification would go out to the classroom, campus and district in the event of a diagnosis? What is the expected timing of the notification?

- Protocol is under 'Reopening' on district website
- Flowchart explains exactly what will happen
- Health department is immediately informed of a positive test, they will then tell the district

4. Communication has been challenging. Example: The decision to officially start/not start hybrid was supposed to be shared by the district at the end of September. Notification didn't happen until October 7. Where can parents go to get a status update on pending information even if said information is still being determined?

- Communication has been challenging. Verbiage is governed so sounds very leagaleez
- Were waiting on PPE until the very last minute so that is why communication was late
- Don't rely on social media, only use primary sources - teachers, BOE website
- Trying to update BOE website so more user friendly
- We can do better with information sharing and communications
- Opportunities like this is a good way

5. Whether my child is in the hybrid model or fully virtual, how is the school district ensuring that my child's social/emotional self is being taken into account?

- Lots of investment in teacher training to include SEL
 - Morning meetings repeating children's names so they feel included
- Is a constant partnership with parents
- The teacher/parent Q&A session once a month is a great idea
- We are missing cues from children which we would normally see in a daily classroom
- Work in progress and welcome suggestions
- Teachers and principals are the best ones to contact if you have any concerns
- Parent suggested Monty Moms is a good outlet for moms

6. The schools have continued to struggle with internet connection since Hybrid learning has begun. How has the district set up internet connections at the school? Are the networks set up to support the increased demands? Are in-person students and teachers all using Wi-Fi connections or is the internet hard-wired throughout the school? How can the connections be improved so that live instruction has less technical issues?
 - It is not a capacity issue but last week may have been a weather issue
 - It is a work in progress
 - If you have specific issues it should be brought to the school principal's attention

7. Why couldn't the district delegate fully virtual teachers for fully virtual students? Seeing kids in school while at home can be upsetting for some children.
 - Distribution of hybrid and virtual students is not static so it is hard to implement but it is something to think about in the future

8. Why isn't testing being required for teachers and students before entering "in-person" school?
 - Baseline testing is not mandated by the state so we cannot enforce it
 - Now that we know more about COVID spread we know that testing is not efficient unless doing it consistently

9. When will the children go back to school in person full time?
 - Don't know
 - We will follow the state and DOE guidelines and will keep everyone posted
 - Please see the reopening tab on the district's website for information

10. How can we focus on reducing screen time of students while staying remote?
 - We are all struggling since even non-school activities are also online
 - Could use more printable assignments as long as parents are ok with uploading the content so that the teachers can evaluate

11. Can new virtual kids do a quick tour of the school?
 - This would be something to bring up with the Principal and is not a board decision
 - Need to weigh the risks since we need to keep the pods tight

12. What is the teacher morale in general? What is the BOE doing to consider or improve their morale during this difficult time? How does the Montgomery faculty feel about hybrid learning in general? Are they for or against it?
 - Teachers are highly motivated and resilient
 - No way to substitute full-time in-person teaching but they are highly committed to educating our children in whatever model
 - District has invested a lot in professional development to help our teachers navigate

Flowchart to help parents navigate who to ask what questions:

**MES PTA
General Assistance regarding Parent Questions**

For future questions that might arise...

Parents can ask - is this a question about a district-wide policy or a specific circumstance of my child's education?

If specific to your child, then the protocol is likely found in the OHES/VES Student and Parent Handbook 2020-2021 Final, a link of which can be found here:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Mopu1yMUnP7esz_g5cZQ0jQph0u1QjrO3ZCsc05kdz8/edit

and within, there is a dedicated section to assist with Parent Communication (see page 30).

If pertaining to a district-wide policy, there are resources available to you on the Board of Education website, which can be found here: <https://www.mtsd.k12.nj.us/Page/16587>. Scroll through the tabs along the left-hand-side of the page, and you'll find a link for a variety of items including budget, referendums, minutes from previous meetings and policies and regulations. Of this last item, once opened you can find specific regulations related to, "Public Participation in Board Meetings" as well as "Public Correspondence," both of which provide specific language to set clear expectations for potential outcomes related to presented queries.

If specific to COVID, hybrid instruction, etc. then please reference the "REOPENING" tab of the school district's main webpage. A plethora of information is available including frequently asked questions, an archive of all communication and updates, and other valuable information.

Thank you all for coming. We are all working towards the same goal to maximize student.

Meeting concluded at 8:45.