PTO meeting

11/4/2021, at 7pm

Via Zoom

In attendance – Anne Dixon, Sue Johnston, Lori Zinner, Beth Herlihy, Liz Flaig, Fernanda Campbell, Jennifer Behr, Nick Jathar, Jess Lourie, Melissa Monokroussos, Joris Gjata, Barbara Mauger, Carolyn Virgilio, Kerry Prasad, Jennifer Behr, Shion (Shy) Walsh, Adam Bernstein, Julie Winsett

Agenda:

Principal Update – Beth Herlihy

Updated that all is going well at school. No covid cases this week! Parent teacher conferences are in process and going well.

Event recaps

Picture Day – Lori Zinner

Overall went well. Had to change location given wasp’s nest. Weather was good. Makeup day is likely in spring – depends on if visitors can come inside in winter to do retakes. Coffee Pond can send vaccinated photographer, distant from kids; kids may be partially vaccinated, so would be low risk. Decision on date pending.

Pumpkin contest – Sue Johnston and Lori Zinner

Ran this the week before Halloween. Lower turnout this year with 17 entries. Lower turnout for voting too, only 37 votes. Winners were announced at school, and winners run in Update. Winners will receive giftcards and CS masks.

5th grade bakesale.

Held on Election Day outside of school. Went very well. Made $1600.

ELL Coffee – Lori Zinner gave update

Great turnout, about 20 people, more involvement than in past. New families joined. Recruited some new translators, and also enrolled some new families in the ELL program.

Upcoming events

Halloween party – Sue Johnston and Lori Zinner

Rescheduled party due to rain, now scheduled for Sat 11/6. Some challenges given delay; supplies are less available after Halloween; Carolyn Virgilio actively looking for pumpkins, hay bales. Many volunteers, including new volunteers. Will have DJ, who was able to reschedule to this weekend. New food offerings this year – pizza and subs, have publicized vendor. Carolyn suggested hotdogs for next year, which can be purchased in bulk cheaply and cooked by volunteer. Still need volunteers for games. Will send another blast, as need to have volunteers to run games. Fliers going home in backpacks tmr am. Made some covid modifications; tickets will be turned in for goody bag, instead of kids grabbing prizes from prize table; will also have hand sanitizer available.

Action items: party planning in progress as above

ELL TG

Planned for 11/18 from 7-745pm. Will be virtual.

Action items: blast, planning in progress as above

Equity spending – Kerry Prasad

Kerry is PTO Council Co-P. The council is comprised of PTO Co-P’s from across Newton, meet regularly every 4-6 weeks. PTOC next week will discuss gift policy. Class gifts are $150 per staff member per year. Hope to spread details: to each PTO, to Room Parent coordinators, who can then pass along to parents. Guidelines are based on MA state ethics laws and rules. Kerry will send document to Julie, to forward to Board. Total is $150 per year, with winter and spring gift. Classroom gifts are not included in this amount. Classroom gift is poorly defined and not well regulated. Individual gifts not allowed, other than non-monetary gifts. Gifts should not list individual names, but should be from entire class. Same rules apply to aides, specialists. Policy is on PTO website too.

It was discussed to also have a collection for specialists, aides etc. Room parents could tell parents that excess donations might go to specialists.

Discussed how to make sure non classroom teachers are included in gifts. There are various aides, literacy specialist, psychologist, lunch monitors, maybe 20-30 staff not affiliated with classrooms? The Co-Ps will review and then present ideas at next meeting.

Action items: Co’Ps reviewing, Jen Behr offered to help; need to make sure Room parents aware of guidelines, and need plan for specialists/aides.

Food allergies. Anne Dixon

At last mtg, food allergies were discussed. The Co-Ps are working on new guidelines. Will send out for feedback. Trying to focus on inclusion, balancing the difficulties of being an organizer vs being an allergy family. Will make a distinction between events held during school and after; if event during school day, would try to make allergen-free. Trying to finalize, then will send to group for feedback.

Action items: in process

Communications – Anne Dixon

Reviewed plan to optimize communications from PTO with families. There are limited number of blasts that can go thru mailchimp each year, based on membership we paid for. Need to make sure blasts have appropriate timeframe for distribution, so the clerk or whomever is sending has time to work on this. Also want to be sure there aren’t too many messages sent, so our messages don’t overwhelm community and get ignored. Also want to spread out, so not all messages sent at once/clustered. For Update submissions, these need to be submitted on time, which is Friday evening, so that Update editor is not working on this for the entire weekend. Want to be inclusive of all the pertinent information and events, but be cognizant that the Update editors, clerk and other mailchimp admins are volunteers.

Co-Ps are working on guidelines, that include optimal deadlines for blast submissions, Update submissions, as well as including info about who blasts go to, how to submit etc. Will put both of these on PTO website, and aim for consistency.

Action items – Anne will circulate to group, and upload to website

Outdoor learning grant – Joris Gjata

Joris applied for $2000 grant, which was awarded, however now sorting out whether grant can be used, given equity limits and rules. The grant needed to be reviewed by the SC; the SC approved grant; funds will be deposited with district, not PTO. However, have to make sure the grant does not violate equity rules. Equity guidelines were reviewed; if we use the grant monies, then must remove $2000 from PTO budget elsewhere. It was discussed if grant could be modified, and apply for things outside of equity guidelines, such as green team which is open to everyone, or beautification. Joris shared that grant money application was an initial proposal, and there might be some flexibility. She will clarify with the grant team to see if we can submit modified proposal, then go from there.

Staff and teacher involvement was discussed, to ensure the grant is useful to the community. Surveying the teachers was discussed. Will address once grant is sorted out.

Grant application process was discussed. With grant applications, should we have formal review process; need to ensure compliant with policies; Co-Ps and treasurer create budget, review projects/groups.

Action items – Joris will talk to grant team & update. Survey. Consider formal grant review process for future.

Annual Fund update – Joris Gjata

Going well, around $17k so far. No annual fund blasts. May extend deadline as started late. Have some corporate contributions.

Action items – consider annual fund blasts. Consider extending deadline.

CAS –

5th grade had World of Owls presentation. Adjusted to rain. Authorfest will be April 12; authors will visits classrooms; will then have afterschool bookfair, all held outdoors. Steve Telio is now the 4th grade rep, and working on an option for 4th grade, Japanese drumming team, trying to get done before gets cold. Rakshaa and Karen were able to preview some options; saw member of Wampanoag tribe, will try to have them visit 3rd graders in spring. Kerry offered strong praise to CAS chairs, they have adapted in changing times, they have sent wonderful blurbs and update info etc, and their hard work is truly appreciated.

Directory – Julie Winsett

Almost ready to go. Awaiting final decision on class lists, then can proceed with printing.   
Discussed class lists. Ongoing NPS weekly discussion, and was reviewed at last PTOC meeting.   
Hard to maintain community without knowing who our community is. NPS has privacy concerns.   
Discussed having central signup, in same way that sports teams do, where you get info from your class etc.

For many families, grade but not class listed. In Update, can ask people to go in and update who their child’s teacher is, and give deadline. Julie updated the opt in and opt out items again – 98 responses although some are duplicates; will continue to run in Directory and families are responding.

Action items – ask families to update class teachers. Continue to run opt-in signup. Will print once class lists decision made.

GT update – Julie Winsett

Had harvest/tea party which was success. Upcoming student GT meeting, after-school, will talk about trash and recycling.

Welcomed Nanda Campbell, new FORJ chair.

Mail Chimp – Nick raised the cost of mailchimp. Need to readdress in future

Next meeting: 12/1 at 7

Meeting adjourned at 8:50pm.