

Downey PTO Meeting



2.13.2018

7:00PM-9:00PM

Cafeteria – Downey School

Type of meeting

Downey OPEN PTO Meeting - February

Attendees

Todd Nicholson, Sarah Young-Hong, Nayla Daly, Annemarie McMurray, Hillary Mosca, Sudha Sarma, Liz Gauthier, Beth Murphy, Sue Saliba, Cynthia Knox, Maureen Sullivan, Harshini Muttiah, Meg Kara, Jo-Anne Stanton, Jen Killilea, Tammy McGowan, Liz Mullen, Jennifer Murphy, Jennifer Lee, Darcy Petres, Lisa Maguire, Sandra Castaldini, Melissa Morabito, Evie Kleniatin, Sarah Cochran, Monique DeWan, Elizabeth Polin, John and Silvia Guerini, Tara Billini, Jennifer Shea, Principal Gallagher, Superintendent Parks, Ms. Josepha Jowdy (school committee)

1. Welcome and Introductions (Todd Nicholson)

7:03-7:05 pm

Discussion: Meet the Executive Board, Principal Gallagher, and Superintendent Emily Parks (Todd Nicholson)

- Introductions to Executive board and “distinguished guests”
- All current PTO board members identified by raising their hands

Action Items: None needed

2. Downey PTO Direction and Discussion of Recent Events (Todd Nicholson)

7:05pm-7:15PM

Discussion: Community Building, Expansion of PTO, More Effective Fundraising, Brief review of movie night and the play

- Community building: Events are focused around building community. Events such as the Gala, Movie Night (free of charge and well attended)
- Downey play: 84 students participated in the play, 10 weeks of practice, over 500 tickets sold, lowered the price to \$5 from \$7, still a small fundraiser
- Expansion of PTO: tonight (2/13/18) biggest crowd at an open meeting to date
- PTO discussed cutting back on “the ask” and the new fundraising push to move from smaller events to larger money makers like the Gala in order to cut costs for families in other areas when participating other community events
- PTO members raised their hands to show non-members who to come to about PTO related concerns or questions
- Thanks to Cynthia Knox for box tops collection
- “red white and blue rock star day” to be on Friday, February 16, 2018
- \$240 collected in box tops

Action Items: PTO will continue to fund events that build community for as little cost to families as possible. PTO will keep fundraising with bigger events such as the Gala to avoid asking for smaller amounts of money at other PTO sponsored events. Members of the PTO board will continue to make themselves available as resources to the Downey community.

3. Class Sizes and Building Space (Superintendent Parks)

7:15pm-8:20pm

Discussion: Superintendent addressed concerns of Downey parents regarding classroom size and building space

-Superintendent Parks began by showing pictures of Downey students art work currently hanging in her office and informing the group that class size is an “every year” issue
 -Ms. Parks stated that she is hearing from people at the “right time” in the process, while they are in the middle of budget talks.
 -Invitation to the group to come and engage in discussion at school committee
 -Ms. Parks restated complaints that have been made to her about class size being an issue (too big) and disparity (bigger than other places in the district)
 -Ms. Parks informed the group of her original solution to provide grade 1 with full time literacy paraprofessionals in the classrooms.
 -She then informed the group that the school committee took another look at the space issue and that it would cost \$30,000-\$35,000 to turn the solarium into an extra classroom.
 -Superintendent Parks stated her plan with including her writing a memo to the school committee recommending to “build the wall” for the solarium and eliminate money from capital budget to pay for it.
 -A reminder to the group from Ms. Parks: “Class size guidelines are just ‘guidelines’ and they need to be financially sustainable”

- Group was informed by Ms. Parks of the "Bigger picture issue" which included a full review of current guidelines and changes have been proposed to them: Grades K-3 should have 18-22 students and Grades 4-5 should have 18-24 students.
- Ms. Parks stated that she looked at high achieving districts for comps to rewrite guidelines, and informed the group that Westwood's guidelines are in line with other school districts
- Ms. Parks revealed to the group her belief that class sizes in Westwood are actually really low compared to historical numbers, 30 classrooms town-wide are below the guidelines. She also stated that class sizes can be "too low."
- Projected Enrollment Chart shared with the group
- Downey Parent concern raised: How does planning board and new housing affect the budget? University station, new canton street development, etc.
- Ms. Parks responded that the developer and school committee looked at impact of university station development, projected impact of school-aged children would be 39-63 children, actual impact of university station 39 students Pre-K -12, 20 kids at Downey, which is about 4 per grade. Next phase coming into action, projected another 9 students spread throughout district
- Superintendent informed the group of another memo she wrote to school committee to suggest that University Station becomes a "buffer zone" or a "swing district"; students can be assigned to either Downey or Deerfield depending on current class size and family enrollment. Wouldn't affect current students. There is a cost associated with busing students to the Deerfield School.
- Parent question raised: can special programming be moved to another school? Can another school house the district-wide specialized programs?
- Superintendent responded that specialized programs keep kids in their home communities vs. the district having to tuition kids out to private programs. There are currently 3 programs housed at Downey: Star, WABA, and Peer. There is a possibility of moving a program to a different school to create room at Downey in the future.
- Principal Gallagher spoke up in favor of programs: teachers in the program are great resources to help with student issues in regular education classrooms. Students learn empathy and other life skills from inclusive atmosphere at Downey.
- Parent question raised: "Where are all these new students coming from?"
- Ms. Parks informed the group that Town of Westwood elementary enrollment is down by 15%, there has been a loss of 220 students in 10 years. Also, Westwood hired demographers to figure out and predict future enrollment within the district.
- Question raised: What happens as students move up through the grades at Downey? Will there be three sections moving up?
- Answer: "Yes, grades 1 and K will move up through the Downey school as 3 sections.
- Question raised: could we have a mathematical format with a "magic number" to automatically have a new section added once we reach a certain number?
- Superintendent Parks's response: do we really need to add a new class for one kid over?
- Question raised: "Could we have a modular classroom?"
- Ms. Jowdy brings up conversation to be had about redistricting. Also mentioned having a K,1,2 and a 3,4,5 school configuration
- Question raised about spot "redistricting"
- Superintendent voiced concerns about reasonable routes for bus drivers
- Group was informed that incoming Downey second grade has 45 students in 2 classrooms and Sheehan has 45 in 3 classrooms. Again concerns raised about the disparity.
- Concern raised that class size is going to continue to grow in size from year to year
- Principal Gallagher mentioned that University station population is transient, they are rentals, family moves in and out
- Question raised: Will second grade classroom be getting a second teacher?
- Superintendent's response: There is nothing in the works right now. Class sizes of 22 and 23 are reasonable. Research shows that lower class sizes in the lower grade can impact school learning. More important to have highly skilled teachers and intervention strategies. Superintendent understands that parents are concerned with qualitative experience.
- Questions raised: What should parents of first graders be doing to ensure fairness with class size?
- Group was informed that number of teacher retirees and new teacher differential could add to budget.
- Question raised: how is time learning affected by teacher to student ratio?
- Group was informed that the proportion of time spent by specialists is different school to school depending on the needs.
- Principal Gallagher informed group she uses extra support of specialists in classrooms depending on class size and data.
- Question raised: where are the new teachers coming from? There will be one new Downey teacher in kindergarten and one in grade 1.
- Response: probably from other schools with less of a need for the staffing.
- Question: can we put data for incoming students into the hands of parents before September start of the school year?
- Thanks given to Emily Parks and Ms. Jowdy for hearing our concerns and the back-and-forth

Action Items: Parents at Downey should continue to address their concerns about class size and its effects on the learning environment with Superintendent. Concerned parents should also engage the school committee in discussions about class size concerns as stated by Superintendent Parks. Concerns should be brought to the Superintendent and the school committee before budget is set for the following year for best chance of yielding desirable results (Committee voted in favor of proposed budget for 2018-19 school year at the meeting on February 15, 2018).

4. Outdoor Classroom Initiative (Sudha Sarma)

8:20pm-8:30pm	Discussion: Gala Raised a lot of money, we want to spend a chunk of it on the outdoor classroom
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- Sudha gave a PowerPoint presentation on, "What is an outdoor classroom?"
- It was described as a space that brings learning outside, a gathering place for teachers and students, an opportunity to "learn by doing" while experiencing nature, bringing the science curriculum to life
- Jo-Anne Stanton spoke to group – an outdoor classroom ties into life science standards, community building and learning, stem scopes science program has at least one lesson per grade that can tie in to curriculum.
- Request for additional people to join the committee and also help keep up with the commitment of maintaining community garden.
- Shared examples of what an outdoor classroom could look like and design schematics.
- Question raised: where is it going to be?
- Principal Gallagher responded with current status about space, previously identified space not a great place to "grow" the space, still TBD, courtyard not ideal space because it is locked, community can't access the space.
- Committee list posted: Sudha Sarma, Jo-Anne Stanton, Paula Timofeev, Joe Mosca.
- Group was informed that PTO is to fund \$15,000 towards outdoor classroom which was raised by 2017 gala, additional funds raised from 2018 gala to be added and used.
- Committee is reaching out to landscape architects and landscapers for proposals, they are also meeting with area colleges to find students volunteers.
- Committee has met with district science coordinator.
- Another request made for more parent volunteers.

Action Items: Outdoor classroom committee to continue to reach out to Downey committee with volunteer requests. Principal Gallagher and committee to determine location of classroom with the hope of breaking ground on Earth Day. 2018 Gala to be a fundraiser to provide additional funds toward building and sustaining the outdoor classroom. Committee to accept proposals from landscape architects and professionals and narrow down design schematics and costs for project.

5. Playground Update (Principal Gallagher)

8:30pm-8:50pm	Discussion: Why the playground was updated and why the choices were made to choose certain pieces
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- Principal Gallagher gave a PowerPoint presentation on the new Downey playground.
- Playground update: why Downey? Downey school is used year-long.
- Group was informed that principal was given a \$75,000 budget from the town of Westwood and Nancy White, playground inspector and salesperson, worked with Principal to select Berliner brand equipment.
- Principal stated that former equipment was "dated", had limited play value, limited tactile experiences, no oscillating movement, older students were bored with equipment, and that accessibility was limited with older equipment.
- Reasons for new equipment choices:
 - Other equipment can provide different opportunities for our students.
 - Playgrounds should provide opportunity for movement and body awareness.
 - New Pieces and their Purpose: Venus (web) purpose is to climb and socialize, Tannenbaum (spinning thing), oscillating movement, inclusive, child can be transported on by adult and spin with friends, social, refurbished equipment: thunder wheel, regular wheel, double slide, traditional swings, cloud 9 swings: accessible to all students, can hold up to 4 students each, wee notes – griffin, for auditory need.
 - Empty space left strategically for another space in the future. Missing a monkey bar piece. Maybe putting a table and chairs there.
 - More older kids are using the new equipment, Nancy White did playground professional development with the staff, and Ms. Hone reviewed equipment with each class.
 - Teachers can manage student sharing of swings better, but it is "ok to wait."
 - This is a "modern day" playground.
- Principal Gallagher mentioned that when adding the next piece to the playground, she might reach out to students to hear their voices.
- Question raised: What role can the PTO play in the additions to the playground?
- Group was informed by the PTO board that we are working on a table in honor of Mrs. Rocha, and we want something heavily weighted, but not industrial.

Action Items: PTO to choose a table to add to the playground and dedicate in honor of Mrs. Rocha. PTO to decide if they are going to fund additional equipment to enhance the playground structure.

6. Gala Update (Nayla Daly and Anne McMurray)

8:50pm-9:00pm	Discussion: Proposals for setting up our calendar for Winter/Spring 2018
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- Committee has received great feedback from last year.
- It's going to "sparkle."
- Lots of sponsors so far, have raised about \$7500 in sponsorship.
- About 60 auction items, a lot of really personal items
- Teachers have generously donated their time and experiences as auction items.
- Theme "It's a Small World" very important to the gala, ask for volunteers to donate multicultural baskets or experiences, services, talents, wine for the wine pull.
- Hope for all to participate.
- Opening Gala up to alumnae next week.
- Goal for sponsorship \$10,000. Title sponsor is Needham Bank – donated \$2500.00.
- Thanks to grade level reps for organizing grade level auction items
- Thanks to Cramer for video, professional crew – hope for video to be repurposed and used again and again.

Action Items: Gala committee to send Constant contact to go out this week, with Gala details and updated sponsorship from the Gala, Principal Gallagher to send link to buy tickets via school messenger. Committee to continue to look for volunteers to donate auction items and sponsorship.

7. Bowling Knight (3/24) and King and His Princess Dance (4/28) (Beth Murphy and Anne McMurray)

9:00-9:05pm	Discussion: Status on these events
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- Flyers went out for bowling
- People have signed up for bowling
- Bowling is coming up March 24 and Princess Dance will be April 28

Action Items: Committees will continue planning events. Community will be filled in on events and sign ups though flyers, grade level reps, and constant contact emails.

8. Future PTO Spots Open (Todd Nicholson)

9:05pm-9:08pm	Discussion: There will be turn over next year
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-Group was informed that there will be executive board elections and open spots for grade level reps for the 2018-2019 school year

Action Items: PTO Board will arrange elections for the executive boards and work on filling open grade level rep spots, this Spring 2018, will discuss in detail at next meeting.

9. Upcoming Events of which to take notice (PTO)

9:08pm-9:10pm	Discussion: There is an important town meeting in April
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- Request for parents to attend town meeting in April.
- Request for group to meet before meeting, if possible as Maya Plotkin wants to come and talk to Downey PTO.
- Idea discussed to either have an additional open meeting or a date change for the May 8th meeting

Action Items: PTO to meet March 6, as scheduled, and discuss having a meeting with Maya Plotkin at that time.

Next Meeting: March 6 (closed) and May 8th (open)