

## Van Hise Elementary PTO Board Meeting Minutes July 8, 2015

Present: Shelby Connell, Carousel Bayrd, Jolynne Roorda, Eileen Snyder, Kristin Ruedi-Krause, Dana McCloskey, and Rachel Betzen.

NEXT MEETING: August 26, 6:30 pm, Vintage Brewing Company on Whitney Way.

**VHE PTO Mission.** The board discussed the PTO mission statement:

The objectives and purposes of the organization are:

- A. To be a volunteer support group for Van Hise Elementary School.
- B. To promote fellowship along with communication between children, parents, school and community.
- C. To be kept informed of and supportive to the programs, purposes and philosophies of the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) to provide the best education possible for all students.
- D. To represent the school and students before the school administration, district administration and committees, and the school board.
- E. To develop united efforts among faculty, parents, students and the general public to provide for every child the highest advantages in physical, mental and social education.

Shelby shared a simplified version of the mission statement from 2012, and asked the current board for their opinion on whether it still holds true:

Enhance the school experience for all students and families, via fundraising, community building, promoting school spirit, and communications.

Shelby also shared the core principles of the PTO, as she sees it:

- Support learning/school experience.
- Inclusion (all families)
  - Financial, language, transportation, etc.
- Build Community
- Students, families, teachers/staff, and larger – MMSD, neighborhoods, Madison.

The discussion focused on:

- What do these mean to you?
- Do you agree? Should we continue them? Modify them?
- How to incorporate: volunteers, fundraising, events, vehicles.
- What are our priorities and goals?

**Discussion:** It can be easy to focus solely on fund raising and lose sight of other objectives. In a nutshell, the PTO mission is to make the school a success; our primary purpose is to morally and

financially support teachers and VHE staff, in this environment where public schools and teachers' morale is threatened. Because VHE is in an affluent area, with an active PTO, in some cases, the school districts prioritize funding for other schools, so VHE sometimes doesn't get extra resources, or sometimes even enough. We end up buying basic materials for our teachers for things like reading intervention. So, sometimes it IS the materials for the regular classroom that we're covering, not just "nice to have" extras. Some things the PTO has provided in the past include floor mats and a vacuum cleaner for the custodial staff.

One other thing the VHE PTO funds is a taxi to help bring people to school events; the use of the taxi has expanded, and some people use it to get to conferences. Van Hise shares our social worker, psychologist, nurse, and BRS staff with Hamilton, since we share a campus. We have 4 BRS's for 20 some languages.

The financial part of what the PTO does has to be balanced between pure fund raising and pure community engagement. There really is not a huge diversity of people who come to the events (except multicultural night). How should we go about expanding the groups that come to other things? How about offering a scholarship for a kid to do some kind of summer activity, such as karate, dance, etc.? But we can't really target individual families for that kind of thing. There are probably around 90 families who might qualify for something like that.

In a nutshell: Provide moral and financial support to Van Hise teachers and staff to help achieve school success.

**Ideas for reaching out.** Find out from non-English speaking families what they might want to do – maybe the BRS's could help with that? Classroom reps can help build authentic relationships between parents in classrooms. It would be nice to do some kind of grade/age activities for older kids, not just K/1. Jolynne talked about a winter party the parents in her child's classroom held, but it ended up costing a fair amount of money for the parents that volunteered to pay for it.

We need to make sure the ideas we come up with fit into the four main ideas of the mission. It was agreed the PTO could spend some money to do grade level events. Whatever happened to movie nights? They were replaced with the dance, for a number of different reasons, including the cost to license the movie, difficulty of choosing a movie that would be widely acceptable, and the fact that it didn't end up being very social.

Someone suggested a fall potluck, organized via Doodle Poll or something similar.

**School play/concert.** Someone else suggested a school choir concert or after hours play. It's too hard to organize, and potentially leaves out too many children. Sometimes there's a school choir concert, but it is generally during school hours. Who would choose, organize, rehearse, and direct a school play? The teachers are already stretched thin. Kristin will look at what other comparable elementary schools in the area are doing.

Shelby noted that the school teams (community building, etc.) that the children all used to sign up for have been discontinued in order to focus more time on meeting the new standards.

An after school class might be one way to go, but those are organized in a standard way, and trying to change that might cause more problems than it would solve.

**Grade level events.** It was decided that we should focus on the idea of having grade-level events for this fall and shelve the idea of a school play for the time being. A few ideas were offered for ways to offer grade-level events. It was generally agreed a mid-week, outdoor potluck would be a good plan. Suggested locations were the VHE garden and Rennebohm Park. It was decided Rennebohm would be better because it is more spacious, and sometimes it's nice to get away from school for an event.

The PTO can provide pizzas, paper goods, and tablecloths. The fliers for the events will need to include the food allergy clause. Carousel will investigate the availability of the park between Sept. 22 the end of October, skipping the week of Oct. 6, since that's when back to school night is. She will choose the night of the week based on the highest number of consecutive weeks with that day available, and will gather other pertinent information. Dana will create a flier, Shelby will copy it.

**Classroom Representatives.** Carousel presented a draft of a proposed information sheet describing what classroom representatives will be asked to do. She will add a mention of outside of school classroom events, something like, "organize 2 or more classroom events per year." There was some discussion about the number of hours the classroom representative should expect to spend on PTO activities every month. It was suggested that the number of hours be increased from 4 hours/month to 5½ hours/month. Carousel will put in the info sheet that that amount of time is the ideal, and may vary depending on the teacher. She will have the teachers review it.

Rachel will make a shorter, more visually appealing flier to hand out at registration to solicit volunteers for the position. The information sheet will be provided to volunteers so that they know what they should be doing. Rachel will get the flier to Shelby by Aug. 8. Shelby needs anything that is going to be handed out at registration by Aug. 15. Carousel will send a revised draft of the information sheet to the board for further comment on July 9.

**Commitments for next year.** The board discussed what commitments we have coming up next year, as a sort of gut check, to be sure nobody is over-committing. Playground committee: people are still visiting playgrounds; there was some kind of technical issue with the spreadsheet that was on Google Docs. People should email Excel spreadsheets to Kristin, and she will compile them into one document. The deadline is July 14, Kristin will email the compiled form on July 15; the meeting will be July 18.

The things we know are on the calendar are set. Carousel is handling the Kindergarten breakfast and the open house and is coordinating the classroom reps. Jolynne is handling communications. Eileen will do notes and agendas and help Heidi and Kristin write thank-you notes as they come up. The events are very organized, with a binder and colored tabs. Jolynne and Kristin are still doing the carnival. The raffle will be a separate discussion. Jolynne is waiting for a quote from a company for the cost of a 5k; she expects to hear something by July 10. She hasn't heard back

from one company at all. She would like to press ahead with it, even if it doesn't happen this year.

**Activity Fair:** If nobody agrees to organize it at the beginning of the year, we won't do it. Jolynne offered to do it, but the carnival is at the same time – two events at the same time is a lot to take on, especially if one is the carnival. Shelby suggested that it would be better to have someone new take it on and make it their own. It's also a good way to get others involved.

Things we need help with right now: the book fair and the activity fair. How can we ask for help, get the information out there, so we can actually get a response?

**PTO topics.** September is Peg's beginning of the year presentation. It is the meeting that gets the most people, but it also takes the most time. Beth Cantwell wants to do PBS/bullying in October. Could we do the PTO showcase at one of those presentations? Someone from each event/committee could be there, and each person could stand up and say maybe 3 sentences each. But it's important for the actual people to be there. Heidi and Kristin will have to contact event people before the school year and make sure they can be at that first PTO meeting. We'll have a master sign-up sheet where people can list their emails. Shelby will go through her list and figure out where the gaps are. The first half hour or so will be the PTO intro, then Peg will talk. Maybe we can skip the business meeting in September.

**Registration.** Shelby will hand out a half-sheet flier about the August PTO meeting (Aug. 26). She contacted the Vintage, but there's a new policy that you have to purchase \$100 worth of stuff per hour the room is in use. Maybe we can keep the meeting to an hour; Shelby will reserve the room for an hour, then if other restaurant customers come into the room after an hour, that's fine.

Other things to be handed out at registration:

- Sheet for new families to get on email list.
- Flier for new families for the first day of school breakfast – for all new families, not just Kindergarten.
- Registration welcome
- Things to know about the PTO (Shelby will circulate this via email to see if we still want to do it)
- We should highlight the grade events in some way.

Registration will run from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm on Thursday, August 22. Carousel, Heidi, Jolynne, and Kristin all offered to do a shift. Shelby may be able to come in for the last hour.

**Communications.** Facebook: Shelby will add something to the flier she's going to send us for review about liking VHE PTO on Facebook. We need to add more administrators to the account so others can post. Beth Cantwell administers the VHE Facebook page; a lot of that content comes from the district. Danielle Thai and Jennifer Roth were administrators of the VHE PTO page. Shelby will email them and Jolynne to connect the three of them so they can work out the details about Facebook; Shelby will not need to stay involved in it.

**Website.** Jolynne is looking for help; Dana volunteered to help. Events planners should be talking to Jolynne early – at least 3 months ahead of time – in order to be sure the information gets onto the website in a timely fashion.

**Brochure design.** Someone suggested making the brochure that goes along with the form for the direct appeal stand out more by adding color, or turning it into a tri-fold brochure, or something similar. The biggest concerns about that idea are 1) cost – we do not want to spend money unnecessarily, our operating costs should be as low as possible and 2) even if the actual cost of the brochure isn't much, having anything too fancy might create the perception that we're spending money on frivolous things, thereby making people less likely to donate. There was quite a bit of discussion about the merits of producing an eye-catching brochure. Some thought that it would not bring in any additional donations; others thought it might actually discourage donations; still others suggested that people might appreciate a brochure indicating how the PTO allocates its funds, particularly the funds raised by the direct appeal. It was pointed out that if we could get the cost of the printing donated, we could make a note of that on the brochure, so that parents will know that the PTO didn't spend a lot on it. The brochure would include back up documentation describing what the PTO does – its mission and core goals. There was a pie chart indicating how the money from the direct appeal was used in 2013/2014.

There was discussion about the costs for printing the brochure. How much would a job like that cost, and how much could be donated. Someone suggested it makes more sense to reverse that question – how much is too much, what is an appropriate amount? Is there a formula for figuring out what percent of the budget should be spent on overhead?

Dana reported that we spent \$15,000 on grants. After School classes cost about \$6,700, and raised about \$8,000 in profit. For the art fair and carnival, we spent about \$8,000 and got \$9,000 in profit. We would want to spend less on printing than on community building; we spend around \$1,000 for all community building events. Sales, etc., bring in about \$1,700. The general PTO expenses are about \$7,000, but \$5,000 is teacher grants. Everything else is about \$2,000. The community fund raising events that we do nothing for (Great Dane Night, etc.) raise about \$2,000. The Fall Fund Drive raises around \$13,300. We also get money from the Hill Farms Neighborhood Association. Our deposits in 2013/2014 were \$55,000; our total expenses were \$40,000. Note that some of those were funds that were deposited for a specific purpose and used right away for that purpose. \$40,000 is probably a good base for what we spend, though it might be higher this year given the playground fundraising and the possible classroom events.

Adding the classroom events will help us balance out the playground-related fund raising, keeping a balance between pure fundraising events and pure community building events.

**Technology.** Amy Kurka sent out a survey to teachers asking what their technology needs are. Because of the timing of the survey, she did not get much of a response, but a lot of teachers would like more iPads (each classroom has 2-4). Shelby is hoping to meet with Mrs. Keeler before the start of the year for logistics and will try to get her perspective on how we can approach technology at the beginning of the year, given that it takes a while to roll out. Generally, the iPads that are purchased for the school are a generation or two behind the very newest models. There is also some interest in digital cameras throughout the year.

Shelby wanted to know if she should do a tech inventory, just to see what the need is. We should plan on about \$10-13k going for technology next year. We need to ask the school board if they have a timeline for when VHE will get the technology called for in the district's technology plan, and what exactly is their goal for how much technology (1 iPad per classroom? 1 per kid?). Also, will they use the technology funds to replace obsolete equipment? The first round of the technology funding from the district went to 2 middle schools and 5 elementary schools (VHE was not one of the 5 elementary schools).

**MMSD parent advisory group.** Shelby would like more involvement from the PTO in this group, since they are making decisions about parent representation.

**PTO Board Minutes.** Minutes from general meetings of the PTO are posted on the website, but so far, the board minutes have not been. It was agreed that the board minutes should be posted to the website, but not otherwise distributed beyond the board.