



Rutherford Elementary PTA Meeting

Sept. 19, 2023 3:30 pm

Recorded by: Julie Harman

A. Call to Order The meeting was called to order at 3:33 pm. There were 20 attendees in person and two via the virtual Zoom link.

(Micki Sievwright*, Kate Berg*, Dawn Oppelt*, Emily Siegel*, Julie Harman*, Nicole Heggernes*, Bethany Cox*, Ashley Hennig*, Sue Barrera, Kelsey Skaar, Heather Nelson (principal), Claudia Stannard (teacher)*, Melanie McNulty (teacher and representative), Lisa Tschida, Sarah Netzer*, Bethany Falch*, Abby Pierre, Noemi Nielsen, Katrina Borgen, Xiong/Ruby Moua, Ann Kindler (teacher), Mike Funk (superintendent).) * = PTA member

B. Micki's welcome/intro.

- Introduction of PTA Board: Micki Sievwright (president), Kate Berg (vice president), Dawn Oppelt (communications), Emily Siegel (treasurer), Julie Harman (secretary).
- Introduction of committee leads and PTA members and attendees.
 - Grants Committee: Jocelyn Ghodes (lead), Principal Nelson and PTA Board members
 - Grounds Committee: Nicole Heggernes (lead), Paul Heggernes, Abbie Smith, Katrina Borgen, Elda Larson, Kary Thelander, Andrew Thelander
 - Wishes for Rutherford Committee: Nicole Heggernes and Ashley Hennig (co-leads)
 - Staff Appreciation Committee: seeking a leader; members include Abby Pierre, Alexis Forsberg and Margot Kraemer
- Introduction of staff members present at the meeting. Melanie McNulty and Jamie Jansen will be teacher liaisons this year.
- Noted that this is our first hybrid PTA meeting. The district gave us the necessary technology to offer the option of virtual attendance, even though all our meetings this school year will be in person. Thank you, Jeanette, for the support!

C. Vote for New Board Member:

- Emily Siegel was unanimously voted in as treasurer.

D. Financial Update (Kate):

- Changes for the 2023-23 Year: Dawn Oppelt is no longer a PTA treasurer and will be removed from the bank account. Abbie Smith is no longer the PTA accountant and has left Rutherford and will be removed from the bank account. Emily Siegel is the new PTA treasurer and will be added to the bank account. There are no changes to Kathryn Berg and Heather Nelson Murray on account.
- Taxes: Taxes have been submitted. Thank you to Katie Papke's husband for his help with the taxes. PTA will be moving our savings (a large amount this year since we have the fundraising earnings for the playground) to a CD. Thanks to Kyle Berg for his financial planning help. This money will earn about \$15K in interest until funds are needed.
- PTA calendar is on our website: www.myrutherford.org/calendar . Check it out throughout the year to see the most current dates and times for our events.
- Move & Groove Color Run is our next big event (Sept. 28). Parents are welcome! Donate online: www.myrutherford.org/2023-move-groove
- Teacher Wish Lists: Wish lists are compiled for families to check out specific ways to support their children's classrooms: <https://linktr.ee/rutherfordpta>. Thanks to teachers for sharing these with us. We've had 139 unique visits to this site!

- Featured Grades at PTA Meetings: Each PTA meeting this year will feature a different grade, with teachers from that grade sharing specific news and needs for their classes during part of the meeting. This schedule will be shared ahead of time. (The rest of the meeting will be about schoolwide topics, so please come to all meetings if you can!)

E. State of the School (Heather Nelson)

- Thank you to the grounds committee and volunteers for all their work making the gardens around Rutherford beautiful!
- We've had a great start to the school year, with good energy levels. Heather visited each class to talk about this fall at school, as well as lunch and recess (everyone's favorite subjects). There is a lot of excitement for the new play area – thank you to Dr. Funk's leadership and support, as well as the PTA, parents and families and all our community partners.
- Kindness Retreat is coming up soon for the 5th graders. This is an annual retreat through Youth Frontiers and supported by the PTA. It's a great way for 5th graders to start their final year at Rutherford!
- Back to School Bash and Kindergarten Playdate were amazing, well organized and “seamless”! Heather noted that three school board members came: Andrew Thelander (Rutherford parent), Chris Lauer, and Alison Sherman.
- Fast Bridge: The data from last spring's testing will be reviewed by teachers this Thursday at SWIM meetings. This data helps our school determine which students could benefit from different levels of intervention.

F. Presentation by Dr. Funk

- Video explainer: [Bond 2023 - Room to Grow](#)
- Bond Referendum: Our district will be voting on November 7 for the referendum. This will prioritize:
 - Providing the best educational environment that meets the needs of all our students and staff.
 - Preparing the district for future growth (projecting growth of 1000 students within the next 10 years).
 - Operating in a fiscally responsible manner, balancing student needs with taxpayer support.
- This bond will:
 - Provide more space for growth.
 - Replace 100-year-old facilities.
 - Improve safety and security.
- Dr. Funk detailed the plans for replacing the two school buildings that are more than 100 years old: Lake Elmo Elementary and Andersen Elementary. His slideshow includes visuals for the building plans (see link below). The bond would also support adding on to Oak-Land Middle School to accommodate growth and improving air circulation to the building. Stillwater High School's entryway would receive a much-needed renovation to facilitate safe and efficient entry of students/staff to the building each day. Finally, the bond would support increased security to district schools.
- The tax impact of this bond would be about a \$17/month increase for a median-priced home of \$500,000. Even after this increase, Stillwater taxpayers would still be paying less in school taxes than comparable neighboring districts (Hastings, Mounds View, N St. Paul-Maplewood-Oakdale, Mahtomedi, Roseville, White Bear Lake, and South Washington County).
- For more info on what Dr. Funk presented, please see the district's website: <https://www.stillwaterschools.org/our-district/bond-2023>
- Early voting begins on Friday, September 22!
- Questions for Dr. Funk:
 - What if it does not pass? If the bond does not pass, security updates will still happen but will be delayed. Andersen, Afton-Lakeland, Lake Elmo, and Oak-Land will see significant overcrowding. District will need to continue border adjustments as population grows, to alleviate large class sizes. The district will continue to face operational challenges of maintaining two 100-year-old buildings.
 - Where will the new Andersen school be located? The town of Bayport is strongly in favor of keeping Andersen in town. The district hopes to come to an agreement to buy 10 acres of unused land from People's

Church, adjacent to Barkers Alps Park. If that does not happen, the school will likely be located further down Stagecoach Trail, past St. Croix Prep.

- How will the high school deal with the projected population increase? Ten years from now, based on the projection, the high school will still be fine. After that, the district will need to strategize how to accommodate more students. While it's far down the road, Dr. Funk has visited other schools to explore creative solutions to this issue. For example, in 2019 Dr. Funk visited a high school in Colorado that had a secondary education center, where students could take "off-site," specialized classes, such as running a professional restaurant kitchen or building a frame that would become the structure of an actual house.
- What is the timeline for the new elementary school buildings? The new Lake Elmo and Andersen elementary schools would open in fall 2026.
- What is your ask of the PTAs? Dr. Funk's big concern is that there is nothing controversial in the bond to drive people to vote. The board carefully eliminated any controversial asks to target the very highest priority projects. It's also an off year for elections. So he asks PTAs and parents/families to get the word out for people to vote. "The people who will help us the most are the parents."
- What is your response to people who ask why you want to build two new schools after recently closing three schools? Dr. Funk said although he was not superintendent at the time, he has closely followed the Stillwater school district for many years and recognizes that the closure of the schools in the north tore the district apart. But whether or not those three schools had closed, we would still be facing this issue now, because the district growth issues are in the south. Heather added that there is an advantage to larger schools, because students and staff benefit from more resources that larger schools can have. For example, our district's smaller schools tended to have more part-time teachers, and therefore teacher turnover was high.
- Will you be making Vote Yes yard signs? Dr. Funk has been involved with 5 bond campaigns, and 4/5 were successful. He has never used yard signs. He said Vote Yes signs are Vote No magnets and can become divisive in the community. A community group supporting the bond did purchase Vote Yes signs, but they will not use them at all unless Vote No signs are posted.

G. PTA Volunteers Needed

- Check our website for opportunities to [volunteer](#) and get involved: myrutherford.org
- Greatest volunteer need is this Thursday for Picture Day. We need a few more people to help during the afternoon shift.

H. Additional Updates (sent via email due to meeting time constraints)

- **Culver's Givebacks start in October!**
 - Go to myrutherford.org/calendar for all the dates of our giveback meals.
- **Grant Committee**
 - Jocelyn Gohdes (head of the Grant Committee) is looking for new Grant Committee members! Her youngest is currently a 5th grader, so she'd love to work with other PTA members who would like to be more involved with the Grant Committee going forward. She's happy to fully train in and support the next lead and other committee members! All activities and communications are fully documented, so a smooth handoff of notes and examples are already in place.
 - Grant Committee recap: We had 8 total requests totaling a little over \$6,000. For the 2023-24 school year, the PTA budgets \$10K total for grants (\$5K for fall, \$5K for spring). The PTA and Principal Nelson were able to dip into the spring budget slightly in order to approve all 8 grants. Most of the grant items are on order and in progress. Stay tuned for details!
- **Grounds Committee**
 - Always looking for volunteers to help. No experience necessary and flexible timing.
 - Dates coming up will be this Friday, 22 and next Friday 29 at 9:00am.
 - Text Nicole at 715-220-1886 for more info.
 - HUGE Thank you to Kary & Andrew Thelander!! They weeded the entire back playground mulch area before school started and it was a very large task.

- **Appreciation Committee**
 - Considering providing a meal for staff during upcoming fall conferences.

- **Wishes Committee**
 - We have a tentative hold on Saturday, April 13 at the Lake Elmo Event Center.
 - Our first meeting will be Sunday, October 10 at 6:30 to prep for sponsors and donations. If anyone is interested, please sign up on the sign up genius or email Nicole at heggernesn@gmail.com or Ashley at Ashley.e.hennig@gmail.com for more info.
 - For the “Big Wish” this year, we would like to know what our fundraising will be going towards this year so if the PTA and Heather could discuss and give us a few options or ideas by the Oct PTA meeting, that would be helpful.

Meeting adjourned at 4:33. See you at the next PTA meeting: October 17 at 6:30 in the Multi-Purpose Room—with a focus on First grade! There will be a Zoom option for those who cannot attend in person.