



**Rutherford Elementary PTA Meeting**  
**Oct. 17, 2023 6:30 pm**  
**Recorded by: Julie Harman**

**A. Call to Order** The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. There were 25 attendees in person and 3 via the virtual Zoom link.

(Heather Nelson°, Jocelyn Gohdes\*, Christina Torke\*, Nicole Heggernes\*, Celeste Nelson, Emily Siegel\*, Sarah Netzer\*, Carolyn Felty, Taylor Pass\*, Micki Sievwright\*, Lindsay Cremona\*, Holly Kranz, Bethany Falch\*, Morgan Spooner\*, Meredith Rice, Kate Berg\*, Melanie McNulty°, Jamie Jansen°, Claudia Stannard°, Lacy Oster°, Kate Papke°, Julie Harman\*, Ashley Hennig\*. Attendees via Zoom: Borgen family, Kaylyn Schaefer (sp?), Dawn Oppelt\*.

\* = PTA member ° = faculty/staff)

**B. State of the School (Heather Nelson)**

- We're settling in well to the school year, and right on track: usually by MEA break everyone has settled in to the routines of the new school year. Committees are up and running and have begun meeting: the new Operational Safety Team, the Building Instructional Team, and the Community Connections Team.
- Heather has spent time at recess with students the past few days and shared how amazing it will be to have new playground equipment next year! The additional square footage (from moving the site of the large playground) and additional equipment will mean more for kids to do at recess. This will lead to better behavior as well.
- Heather thanks the amazing Rutherford parents for their support this year!
- Note that fall conferences are happening next week.

**C. Treasurer Update (Emily Siegel)**

- The Move & Groove fundraising event brought in \$12,805 – thank you to Rutherford families and friends!
- Emily noted that we did not hit our Move & Groove goal this year, but we are cautiously optimistic for continuing as planned for the year.
- House funds are being spent. Emily called attention to Dawn Oppelt's newsletters that are detailing what the PTA is spending money on.
- Kate Berg added that spending is always heavier at the beginning of the year. So far we've spent \$25,000 and brought in \$20,000. Of the \$1,000 in funds per grade, over 50% has been spent. (This \$1,000 per grade is new this year and in addition to per-teacher allotment. It is to be spent on things that will benefit the entire grade.)
- Kate passed around printouts detailing all the PTA's spending from this year so far.

**D. Playground Committee Update (Kate Berg)**

- Kate noted that a survey was sent after last meeting to all the attendees, and there were three takeaways that we'll address going forward: that those who are new to meetings don't know what they don't know (we'll give more explanations and background info at meetings), that there's uncertainty over whether kids are allowed to come (yes! we sometimes will have a middle school student volunteer to help supervise kids, but we also welcome kids to sit in the room during meetings), and that we should keep the content of the meeting relevant.

- Last year, we raised enough money by May to replace both playgrounds at Rutherford, with the help from some extra money from the district. A handout was recently sent home with students detailing the timeline and why we need to wait to put in the new playgrounds (in short, we can't allow playground construction during the school year for safety issues). But we will be able to purchase the equipment in December, as we had hoped, to secure this year's lower prices.
- To coincide with the election on November 7, the students at Rutherford will have their own election, voting for one of four candidates for color schemes for the new playgrounds. The students will vote in booths in the Multi-Purpose Room and receive I Voted stickers. Kate passed around photos of samples of the four color schemes that are in the running. The voting will be a learning experience for the kids and help carry excitement for the upcoming playground – waiting is the hardest part!
- The engraved brick campaign will launch in November. Rutherford families and friends can purchase personalized bricks to be used to make a brick patio on the site of the current (old) playground structure. A “soft launch” was offered to outgoing 5th grade families last spring.
- Check <https://www.myutherford.org/> for updated playground info.

#### **E. Grants Committee Update (Jocelyn Gohdes)**

- To recap what the Grants Committee does: a portion of the PTA funds for the year are set aside as grant money. This is above the house funds offered to all faculty. In the fall and in the spring, teachers can submit grant applications, usually for large purchases to enhance their classroom/learning experience. The grants committee reviews and approves the applications.
- This year, we have \$10,000 total in grant money. This fall, we received eight requests and were able to approve them all. This spending totalled \$6,400.
- After the grant applications were submitted, the committee received an additional request for a Brain Pop Jr. subscription for first grade and has approved this.
- We have approximately \$3,000 remaining in grant money for the school year. The committee will start taking applications in January.
- Jocelyn noted that her Rutherford student is in 5th grade this year, so she's looking for someone interested in leading the Grants Committee next year. She'd like to work with someone through the spring grant process to help transition the leadership. If you are interested, please let Jocelyn or Micki know! ([president@myutherford.org](mailto:president@myutherford.org))

#### **F. Grounds Committee Update (Nicole Heggernes)**

- Thank you to Buber! Black Dirt for the donation of mulch this year, and thank you to Country Sun Farms for the pumpkins to help make the front of the school look fall-festive!

#### **G. Scholastic Book Fair Committee Update (Micki Sievwright)**

- We have new volunteers taking on the Book Fair leadership this year, as Kirsten Hellyer is transitioning out of her leadership role. Micki introduced Taylor Pass and Sue Barrera as co-leads, with the possible addition of a third co-lead who might be interested. Thank you for helping the Book Fair to continue!
- The Scholastic Book Fair is November 27 to December 1, with an evening Grand Event on Thursday, November 30.

#### **H. Staff Appreciation Committee Update (Morgan Spooner)**

- Morgan is heading the Staff Appreciation Committee this year.
- Bethany Falch, on the committee as well, said that they had their first meeting and decided to do a few new things this year. They will partner with Heritage Embroidery for an apparel fundraiser, the proceeds of which will go toward purchasing gifts for the teachers and faculty. The hope is that the gifts will be meaningful and useful.

- Instead of giving gifts on each designated appreciation day, the committee will show appreciation monthly by treating the faculty to Monthly Snacks in the staff lounge. They hope this feels like more frequent and consistent thanks for all the faculty does. The designated appreciation days will be recognized via notes on the TV in the school entryway.

### **I. Wishes Committee Update (Ashley Hennig and Nicole Heggernes)**

- As background info, Wishes is a recurring spring fundraiser event; this spring will be the 11th Wishes! It's an adults-only gala featuring a schoolwide raffle leading up to the event with winners drawn at the gala, a silent auction (online as well as in person), and a live auction and giving moment facilitated by a professional auctioneer.
- Wishes will be on Saturday, April 13, at the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center.
- The Wishes Committee held their first meeting. Many volunteers from last year have returned to help this year. The committee is beginning to find sponsors and live auction items.
- The next meeting is November 12. Meetings will always be held the second Sunday of each month. All are welcome! Contact Nicole at [heggernesn@gmail.com](mailto:heggernesn@gmail.com) if you are interested.
- Their next goal is to find out the "Big Wish" so they can proceed with their planning. Last year's Big Wish was the playground.

### **J. Featuring: First Grade!**

- All four first grade teachers (Melanie McNulty, Claudia Stannard, Lacy Oster, and Kate Papke) gave a presentation about exciting things happening this year in first grade. Some highlights:
  - This year, the school is using a new science curriculum (Smithsonian Science). The first unit, called "How to Find Your Way in the Dark," taught about caves and aligned perfectly with the field trip the teachers had planned to Crystal Caves.
  - The teachers are excited about this new curriculum. Each year builds directly upon the previous year. The first grade teachers even turned their sunroom into a "science lab," and students have been using the space to study light and run experiments.
  - Thanks to the PTA for the grade-level funds that first grade used to purchase a Scholastic News subscription and a Raz Kids subscription. Scholastic features interesting current events and helps cover social studies standards. Raz Kids offers useful extensions of classroom learning and allows teachers to give quizzes and observe student/class results. Parents will even have access to Raz Kids in the summer!
  - First graders had a great time at the Move & Groove event! They were excited to participate – especially the students new to Rutherford this year – and eager to take home their T-shirts. Having the event at the beginning of the school year is great timing, as it builds the spirit and sense of community that's so important to the students.
  - Other first grade highlights: they will start meeting with their fourth grade buddy classes tomorrow. The fourth graders and first graders will take turns reading to each other. The first graders also have buddies from The Lakes (a senior living community next door to Rutherford) – four residents who visit with the students twice a month. On Halloween, the first graders will parade through The Lakes with their costumes.
  - The first grader teachers' slideshow ended with a video of a weekly Fun Friday Big Sing – all the first graders sang (with ASL signs). ♥
- Question from Kate Berg: with the state requiring all third graders to hit certain reading benchmarks, how are first graders being prepared to reach these by third grade? The teachers answered that a lot of time in first grade is spent on phonemic awareness – the ability to hear individual sounds within a word. This is a crucial foundation for strong readers. The CAT (Collaborative Action Team) meets weekly to share updates on student progress and address where interventions might be needed. They are always tracking and discussing where each student is. Heather Nelson added that a group of Rutherford staff (Heather included) is going through letters training on the science of reading. This is an intensive training of four full days outside of classroom days. She said the Rutherford staff is very dedicated to ensuring each student's needs

are met and is working very hard—but that she considers students' feelings at school and whether they feel loved at Rutherford to be of the highest importance. Melanie McNulty said she believes that MCA scores will naturally go up, and that the teachers are careful to create a joyful learning environment for the students and to balance that with pressures of test scores.

- Question from Emily Siegel: She has noticed larger class sizes this year, specifically in first grade. Is this something parents could help with/take action on? Kate Papke said it comes down to dollar amounts. The school is given an acceptable class size range from the district. When class sizes fall just under the threshold for needing an additional class, the class sizes are large—as they are in first grade this year. Other years, the class sizes are small—as they are in kindergarten and second grade. The teachers and Heather recommend attending school board meetings, as this is a school board decision, and/or contacting Superintendent Dr. Funk.
- Thank you to the first grade teachers!!

#### **K. Winter Gear Drive (Lindsay Cremona)**

- Rutherford PTA is partnering with a local Cub Scout troop to collect winter gear. Beginning in November and continuing all month, there will be a donation box near the front door to collect new or gently used winter gear. As the box fills, the scouts will collect the donations and bring them to Valley Outreach. More information will be sent to families soon.

#### **L. Two Volunteer Requests**

- Kelly Taverna is looking for a parent volunteer willing to learn to use the popcorn machine. This has been out of commission for a bit, but teachers are looking to use it again for special in-class events.
- Kelly is also looking for a parent volunteer who could come in periodically to organize the Lost and Found and post or send out pictures occasionally to help families reunite their kids with their belongings.
- Any volunteers interested, please contact Micki ([president@myrutherford.org](mailto:president@myrutherford.org)).

#### **M. Minutes from the September meeting were approved.**

**Meeting adjourned at approx. 7:35. See you at the next PTA meeting: November 21 at 3:30 in the Multi-Purpose Room—with a focus on Second Grade! There will be a Zoom option for those who cannot attend in person.**