



Rutherford Elementary PTA Meeting

Jan. 16, 2024 3:30 pm

Recorded by: Julie Harman

A. Call to Order The meeting was called to order at 6:31 pm. There were 13 attendees in person and 3 via the virtual Zoom link.

(Heather Nelson°, Micki Sievwright*, Kate Berg*, Emily Siegel*, Julie Harman*, Ashley Hennig*, Nicole Heggernes*, Jocelyn Gohdes*, Cassie Banna, Melanie McNulty°, Kyle Davis°, Susan Judge°, John Tasch°. Attendees via Zoom: Emily Waller, Bridget Tiesling, Kristy Bonestroo. * = PTA member ° = faculty/staff)

B. State of the School (Heather Nelson)

- We're midway through the year, beginning a new quarter next week. Tours started for 2024-25 kindergartners and families. So far, all Heather's tours have been with families new to Rutherford, preparing to send their oldest to kindergarten! Orientation will be April 25-26.
- Some of the faculty (including Heather, Susan Judge, Melanie McNulty, and Mikki Barber—Rutherford's Interventionist) continue to go through literacy training and assessments of literacy curriculum. Rutherford intends to start a new literacy curriculum for the fall (all grades, but older grades will use it more). Any new curriculum needs to be on the state's approved list in order to be funded.
- Micki asked if there are lessons from the experience of introducing a new science curriculum for the 2023-24 year, such as prep time, that they are factoring into the decision. Heather said the specialist is very familiar with the curriculum, and Heather is confident in their guidance to find the best fit. Melanie added that there will be extra time and prep involved with the introduction of any new curriculum. Heather said they will be looking at not just year one goals of having the new curriculum but also year 2 and going forward, making a longer plan for incorporating it.
- It is the 2027 goal that all K-12 teachers involved with student literacy will complete LETRS (Science of Reading) training.

C. Treasurer Update (Emily Siegel)

- The PTA is continuing to disperse some of the house funds. Emily will send updates soon to the teachers to notify them of the funds remaining for the school year.
- Wishes sponsorship money is starting to come in.
- Rutherford was pulled off the Kowalski's give-back program (PTA was not informed of this until we asked). Each half year, Kowalski's removes the bottom earners to make room for organizations on the waitlist. Rutherford has now moved to the waitlist and will be reconsidered in the summer. Based on past earnings from Kowalski's, the PTA planned to bring in about \$2,000 this year, so we will be short of that.

D. Book Swap Committee Update (Kate Berg)

- Book swap collections have begun. Students and families brought in hundreds of books on day one!
- As discussed at last meeting, we will not have the Readathon fundraiser this year, but the Book Swap will incorporate the Bookworm challenge (free books to students who find hidden bookworms throughout the school).

- Students can bring in book swap donations of good-condition books until Feb. 2. We especially are in need of chapter books for the older readers (but no adult books or religious books please).
- Melanie will remind the teachers about signing up for a time slot to shop the book swap. Shopping will take place Feb. 7-9.

E. Grants Committee Update (Jocelyn Gohdes)

- There is \$3,200 remaining for spring grants, and the committee is taking grant requests until Friday, Jan. 19.
- The committee will meet on Saturday, Jan. 20. In considering the requests and amounts, Jocelyn will make sure taxes and shipping are included on the amounts, as they have not always been in the past. Jocelyn also mentioned that in deciding where to allocate grant money, the committee prioritizes grants that would benefit more students in the school, and they consider whether requests are for something the district might cover. Watch the PTA Facebook page to see where the grant money is going.
- We discussed the importance of continuing to make “Purchased by PTA” labels for grant items. This helps awareness of how PTA money is being directed and serves as a reminder of what belongs to Rutherford.

F. Yearbook Committee Update (Micki Sievwright)

- Micki shared the cover design options with the 5th grade teachers, who will have their 5th grade classes vote on their favorite design.
- The yearbook committee could use more volunteers. Contact Micki if you are interested. (president@myrutherford.org) The committee will assemble the yearbook in February and March. They will be communicating with teachers about specifics.
- The PTA wants to ensure that all Rutherford 5th graders interested in having a yearbook can get one, so teachers will communicate any needs for scholarships to the PTA.

G. Outdoor Classroom Committee Update

- Lindsay Cremona and Heather Nelson will be connecting on this.
- Heather will reach out to the staff to see if some could meet. She and Lindsay plan to put a survey together to get feedback from staff on how they'd like to use the outdoor classroom area.
- We've sold 37 bricks; sales end on March 1.

H. Staff Appreciation Committee Update

- From Morgan Spooner's update via email, the appreciation committee is hosting a wellness bar tomorrow in the faculty lounge.
- Micki asked for feedback on how this different approach (providing monthly treats to all staff instead of honoring certain staff members on their calendar appreciation day) is going. Those present had all positive feedback. They said it was “welcoming,” “warm,” they're “feeling the love,” and it gives faculty an opportunity to socialize outside of their houses.

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

- Wishes will be on Saturday, April 13, at the Lake Elmo Inn Event Center. Save-the-dates went out (thank you to teachers). Invitations will be sent in February.
- The sponsorships are picking up with the new year; so far they've received \$7,000 in sponsorships. They will be collecting sponsorships through the end of January.

- They will bring back the popular wine/beer/spirits pull at the Wishes event. Past Wishes had this, but they did not have one last year.
- The “Big Wish”: Last year, the focus was on the playground. This year, the Big Wish will focus on the PTA in general, bringing awareness to what the PTA supports in each grade. Proceeds raised at Wishes will go to the general PTA fund.
- Melanie McNulty expressed that without the PTA, they wouldn’t be able to supplement their classroom lessons and activities. Heather said it can be a challenge to run a school on the budget determined by the district each year, which varies depending on budget cuts and changes in allocating money. She’s seen a significant decrease in some areas due to budget cuts. But in the past, PTA has supported the school through the purchase of maker carts, Smartboards, and work done on the science room, yellow house, green room, and art room, and more. Melanie added that they appreciate that the teachers are able to help decide how the PTA money gets directed, since they see where the needs are.
- Emily Siegel suggested at the Wishes event, the committee could give tangible examples of where the money could go. For example, a donation of \$XX will fund teacher appreciation gifts for one month.

J. Fundraising Committee Updates

- No Readathon this year; Wishes will be the only spring fundraising event.
- This summer, the PTA board will be discussing what fundraising should look like in the upcoming “normal” year (now that we are finished with the bulk of the playground fundraising).

K. Upcoming Events

- Math Night will be held at Rutherford on Feb. 23. This is sponsored and run by Mathnasium. More details to follow.

L. Featuring: Fifth Grade!

- The fifth grade teachers (John Tasch, Kyle Davis, Susan Judge; Aaron Danielson wasn’t able to attend) talked about exciting things happening this year in fifth grade. Some highlights:
 - The fifth grade year begins with an annual Kindness Retreat, PTA funded. Mr. Tasch noted that he loves starting the year with this retreat. It gives the 5th graders the opportunity to be vulnerable and sets the mood and precedent for the whole year. It’s a very powerful experience and is often one of the students’ favorite parts of 5th grade. The Kindness Retreat leaders are assisted by high school students.
 - In math, Mr. Tasch uses a popular fantasy football lesson, which supports many of the state standards for 5th grade (including algebra, fractions, decimals). He uses a workshop format for learning.
 - In reading, Ms. Davis began the year with book clubs. The 5th graders had a nonfiction unit to develop their research skills, studying all the events that led up to the Revolutionary War. The students completed a biography project, studying and synthesizing their research on an African American historical figure. Today they shared the posters they created.
 - In writing/word work, Ms. Judge said the students have been working very hard. They started by studying sentence structures and paragraph building, and then they moved into personal narratives. She noted that they seemed to enjoy writing more as the year went on. The biggest challenge has been their Word Work (decoding sounds and syllables) and Morphemes (using prefixes, suffixes, root words to understand word meanings). She’s very impressed with how all the 5th graders have risen to the challenges this year!
 - In science/social studies/second steps (social curriculum once a week), Mr. Danielson said 5th graders spend a lot of time on science, as this is the first year they are tested on science. They are using the new science curriculum, and the students are loving it. A big event of 5th grade is BizTown in May, which incorporates a lot of social studies and life skills (by having the students operate a small town for the day) and is always another highlight of the 5th graders’ years.

- Question from Ashley: Do 5th grade teachers pull out some groups of students based on extra needs or to offer extra challenges? Mr. Tasch said that Rutherford has a broad support network for students who need extra support. The teachers build differentiation into their lessons, and WINN (What I Need Next) time is used to provide additional instruction or support. Ms. Judge added that the teachers do this within their own classrooms. For example, she uses writing circles and flex Fridays.
- Question from Micki: Regarding a graduation ceremony or celebration for the 5th graders at the end of the year, is there any discussion about bringing that back post-Covid? Are there any ways the PTA can support the teachers in celebrating the graduating class? Mr. Tasch said that with Covid, the schools were instructed to keep any celebrations in the classroom and without families coming into the building. He found that the small, single-class celebration was very positive and personal. He does understand that parents might want a different send-off. The kids mostly care about the cake! Per Heather, it was a district-level decision to celebrate internally with just the students, and it was important to the district to have consistency across the elementary schools too. The 5th grade teachers described that what they've done recently is have a park day at Northland Park and invite parents to join if they wish, and they have parties in their classrooms with cake and a slide show. Kate said the PTA can help with cake if the teachers want; maybe the 5th graders could get T-shirts? Heather said it might be possible to add a half hour onto the PTA's spring party (details still being planned), when the 5th graders could gather with families.
- Thank you, fifth grade teachers!!

M. Additional Updates

- Thank you notes from Audrey and from "RU Hungry" (the food cart operated by yellow house students) were passed around.

N. Minutes from the December meeting were approved by Jocelyn Gohdes.

Meeting adjourned at 4:44. **See you at the next PTA meeting: February 20 at 6:30 in the Multi-Purpose Room—with a focus on Pre-K!** There will be a Zoom option for those who cannot attend in person.