

Shepherd Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization

Minutes: November 20, 2019, general business meeting

Board members in attendance: Liz Bradley (President), Ayana McIntosh (2nd Vice President), Caroline Smith (Recording Secretary), Karen Sload (Treasurer), and Andrea Smith (Assistant Treasurer)

Absent: Taryn Losch-Beridon (1st Vice President), Lauren Benning (Corresponding Secretary).

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 pm. Around 50 people were in attendance. Chancellor Lewis D. Ferebee and Mayor Muriel Bowser were also in attendance.

Welcome from the PTO President, Liz Bradley

Updates from Dr. Hedlund

- Dr. Hedlund had parents participate in a morning meeting activity by greeting one another.
- She informed parents that the faculty is working on additional age-appropriate instruction at morning meeting.

Construction Progress

- Dr. Hedlund indicated that the permits were paid for last week. They had been held up at environmental because there is a need to dig up the street and put up a fence for some pipe work.
- The construction should begin after Thanksgiving.
- She has been meeting with the project superintendent in order to get updates about the project and to keep the parents informed.
- There was concern that with excavation that there might be dirt in the air, and they do not want that dirt to be contaminated. They will be testing the soil and running air quality checks.
- A parent asked what the final deadline for completion of the project is. Dr. Hedlund promised to find that information out.
- A parent wondered if bad weather would affect the progress. Dr. Hedlund indicated that the project manager said it would not.
- Another parent was curious as to whether the cafeteria will be done for the beginning of next school year since the project is three months behind. Dr. Hedlund also promised to find that out.

Updates from Liz

- Enrollment for next year is projected to be around 380 students. This is right around the target for next year.
- When the bubble years are eliminated, that will be the time to check in about the budget and potentially advocate for keeping some of the resources that we now have.

- Parents expressed concern about eliminating the new positions, particularly the assistant principal addition.
- As far as fundraising goes, the STEM materials will be purchased with the money raised from last year's Gala.
- Ms. Scott thanked the PTA for those STEM materials.

Social Emotional Learning

- The PTO funds will also help to send five teachers from Shepherd for social and emotional learning training on December 5th.
- Dr. Hedlund informed parents that the teachers will be doing some work with the non-profit Playworks. There have been some issues with the students, particularly 3rd and 4th graders, with their play at recess.
- A parent indicated that some schools have an intentions room where students can go to calm down if they are feeling overwhelmed.
- Dr. Hedlund indicated that most classrooms have a designated safe space or cozy corner.
- She also informed parents that Mr. Garner will be doing some social and emotional workshops.

Playground Issue

- A parent expressed concern about the playground equipment having lead-based paint. If the equipment is yellow, she heard at a community meeting, then it is lead. She asked the Chancellor what could be done. He indicated that he would be happy to look into it and follow up.

Ed-Tech Discussion

- Members of the Ed-Tech team, including Dewayne McClary, DCPS's Direct of Digital Learning and Innovation, spoke.
- Dewayne indicated that their team had been meeting with the third grade teachers about upcoming tech implementation in their classrooms.
- They explained DCPS's Empowered Learners Initiative. Their goal is to have a 1 to 1 ratio of technology to student in grades 3, 6, and 9. There will be a three to one ratio (technology to students) in other grades.
- They explained the various features that the laptops which will be distributed will have. These devices are set up to enable teachers to lock down certain websites, block thumb drives, and blackout screens.
- They then went over some of the logistical issues. Dewayne indicated that they have been devoting time to digital citizenship lessons. The third graders have been doing this with their teachers, and their last three lessons will be with the school librarian.
- It was explained that this department trains, models, and partners with teachers to create technology infused lesson plans.
- This website was given for those interested in reinforcing some of those lessons at home: <http://bit.ly/DCPStech>.

Parent Questions

- A parent asked how about whether or not these devices would go home and whether or not they will be upgraded when need be.
- Dewayne noted that they are in the process of securing a three-year lease so that after three years the machines will be upgraded.
- Right now, in the first year of the program, these devices will not go home.
- It was asked how children who did not have access at home would be supported.
- ETS indicated that this was an issue they were looking into and that they were also looking at the surrounding schools and schools across the country for models of this kind of programming.
- Another parent asked why 4th and 5th grade were being skipped.
- Dewayne noted that they are hoping to accelerate the program but that for now it is limited because of finances. The decision to start in third grade was because that is the year that PARCC testing begins.
- Another parent expressed concern about the children losing the devices and/or breaking them. Will the parents then be responsible for replacing them, the parent asked.
- Dewayne noted that insurance will be factored in. There will also be a lojack on the device which would enable DCPS to black out the device and track it.
- Other parents wondered if the students will be talking about online safety and screen time limits.
- Dewayne noted that digital citizenship and safety in implemented into the lessons. He also noted that the students will not be using the devices all day but rather in moderation, which should model at home behaviors.
- It was asked what type of device the students would be receiving, but that question couldn't be answered because DCPS is still in negotiation with the company.
- The Chancellor echoed some of the things that Dewayne said. He noted that these devices are not a substitute for instruction. He also indicated that teachers will be trained in terms of how and when students can use the devices that are age appropriate. He wants to instruct both parents and students about healthy relationships with their devices.
- A parent asked how Shepherd compared in technology education to other schools. The Chancellor indicated that DCPS is faring well nationally; it is the fastest improving urban school district in the nation. He also said that there isn't a national test for technology in the classroom, but he feels good about DCPS.
- A few parents wondered if they could buy their own laptops for their students. Dewayne said that these laptops would not have the safety and security features that are installed on a DCPS computer.

Student Government Update from Ms. Pereira

- SSG will be meeting once a week with during morning meeting with homeroom representatives. There will be discussing issues that are of importance to the officers and their classmates. Right now, there is talk about bullying, and the group is planning on making posters discouraging bullying to post around the school.

- They have also talked about hosting a talent show and ways to integrate IB into school events as well.

Winter Concert – Thursday, December 19th and Friday, December 20th

- Ms. Pereira also spoke about the winter concert which will have a winter wonderland theme. Each grade will be learning a different song to perform. There will also be songs sung in Spanish and French.
- Mr. Garner will be having each student make a snowflake to display for the concert.
- The concert will take place on the night of Thursday, December 19th with a repeat performance the next morning.

Spring Musical

- Ms. Pereira announced that the students had selected Aladdin to perform for the spring musical.
- She encouraged parents to be on the lookout for volunteer opportunities.

Budget/Minutes

- Liz then asked for approval of the budget and the minutes from last meeting. A motion was made, and the budget and minutes were approved.

Upcoming Events

- In January, Shepherd will host its annual summer camp fair.
- In spring, we will be celebrating our 40th Jazz Night Festival
- The Student Government has plans to hold a talent show in spring.
- The Gala and Auction will be held at the end of April.
- Basketball tryouts will happen the first week of December.
- There is a wreath sale happening.
- EdFest is scheduled for Saturday, December 14th from 11-3 pm at the DC Armory
- The faculty and staff holiday party will be held on December 18th.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 pm.

The next PTO meeting will be held on Wednesday, December 18th at 6:30 pm.