

## **October 16, 2008 Minutes**

PTO Meeting Chelsea Heights Elementary

### **Mary Vanderwert - School Board Member**

Mary described school funding formula changes and cuts dating back to 2003. We have had 1-2% increases over the years since. We have had three years of cuts in a row. She described a study that was done in the city regarding a potential referendum. We are asking \$475 more per student than the old referendum. Our last referendum was focused on materials like iPads. This time it is for operating.

Questions - What are you hearing from the state? Why can't they see the need? Are districts getting what they need to cover costs in special education? What about institutions and corporations that don't pay taxes - Are they able to donate to districts? 1/3 of our land in St. Paul doesn't pay property taxes. Does this also apply to state offices that don't pay property taxes? What about the Highland Park Plan for low density? Those taxes would go to the whole city. What should we be telling our neighbors who don't have kids in the school system? They are all our kids - our future - our future economy. We can invest in them now and have fewer costs down the road.

What about the families that choose to send their kids out of SPPS? How do we keep families here at Chelsea? Community feedback - School start times will influence whether those families choose to stay in SPPS. After school care is lacking at Chelsea and we are struggling to get a conversation going about it with the district and the city.

Question: How can we help? If you're looking for ways to help - We need your PR and need you to be ambassadors. Talk about how great our schools are - talk about our diversity and all the programs we have to offer. [Mary.Vanderwert@SPPS.org](mailto:Mary.Vanderwert@SPPS.org) Mary also suggested that the PTO connect with Cedric Baker regarding our concerns about after school care and the change in school start times.

### **Principal's Report**

Our projection for student enrollment was high and this year we are down 27 kids which meant Jill had to return \$85,000. She anticipated the discrepancy in enrollment vs the projection and didn't have to make cuts. We didn't fill the TA position, didn't do an equipment upgrade and used staff money that wasn't designated elsewhere. We are operating on a minimum standard without cuts. Will we have cuts if the levy doesn't pass? Probably. Jill reviewed her current staffing (classroom teachers, TAs, specialists).

Walk/Bike to School - Good participation with not so good weather. We had a great day!

First Awards Assembly today! We had three this afternoon with 1st graders singing at all three assemblies.

Conference sign up sheets went home this week and the schedule will be put together next week.

NW Como Bonfire is on October 26th. Flu shots will be available again this year.

Election Day is coming up on November 6th. We will be doing a Kid's Vote.

We took the all school picture yesterday - a Cheetah paw.

### **Club's Choice Update and Budget Highlights**

Club's Choice - We made about \$8000. This is slightly better than last year. This money covers classroom grants that go to teachers. This is a very big part of our budget. Our Bare Honey fundraiser is underway. We have a lot of No Work Fundraisers - no selling door to door. Have we asked families to make a straight up donation? What about doing a Fun Run? Do we have a Read a Thon? Could we tie that into I Love to Read Month in February? We are always interested in hearing more ideas for fundraising and looking for people to help organize events.

We are doing Give to the Max Day again this year. Is anyone interested in helping with the technical support for getting Give to the Max going?

### **Fall Conferences**

Julie recognized Sarah Meggitt as our teacher appreciation coordinator this year. We feed our teachers at fall conferences (and spring too). Teachers do not have time to go home or out for dinner and we ask families to bring in food or money donations for a teacher meal. Look for an email soon!

### **NW Como Bonfire**

October 26th

### **Food Drive**

We will be collecting food to go to Neighborhood House beginning Nov. 5th and ending Nov. 27th. Flyers will go home soon, check your email and Cheetah Chatter. What about an award that would help the winning classroom get more involved?

### **Chelsea Curriculum - Mrs. Knezovich**

Reading - Kids are in a 90 minute reading block using a workshop model (a mini lesson with independent time and small groups). This model allows for differentiation. We use FAST testing for benchmarking and interventions and monitoring progress. Part of this test is on the iPad. We use Mondo, a standards based curriculum and grouping of readers. Teachers supplement this curriculum. Phonics is taught in K-1 and older grades as needed. Words Their Way is used in grades 2-5. A whole language approach and phonics are both used at Chelsea. Are book clubs happening? That is teacher specific. Are there reading themes (like space, countries)? That's an older model for reading. K and 1st graders have 4th and 5th grade buddies.

Math - The Workshop model is also used in math. Everyday Math is our basic curriculum - a spiral based curriculum with the skills cycling back in. Strategies are presented in different ways. How can we help support our kids with math? There are online demos and teachers can share strategies in Schoology and Seesaw. Teachers supplement with different resources too. Kids are assessed formally and informally based on MN state standards. Parents can also find math supports on Khan

Academy website or by googling the topic, ie. Lattice multiplication. Teachers oftentimes send home a 'how to sheet' from Everyday math.

Writing - We use the Workshop Model. Older kids do more unit-based writing (memoirs, realistic fiction, etc). Do you use Handwriting without Tears? Yes, this is a program that helps with learning how to form your letters and we use it in K and 1st grade. Do we teach cursive? Some teachers do include it but it's not a standard.

Spelling - no district wide curriculum We purchase or create our own spelling curriculum. Word families, Words Their Way (example: word sorts).

We do have math and literacy leads in our building. These teachers go to district wide meetings and learn new strategies and information and share this in the form of professional development with the staff. This year we are learning a lot about small group reading.

How do teachers communicate with families? Elementary schools do not use the gradebook portion of Schoology yet. Grades 4 and 5 use Schoology, it as an electronic portfolio. Lower grades use Seesaw.

Homework - How much that is assigned is decided by the specific teacher. It is used to practice skills and teach accountability. Please communicate with your teacher if homework is a real struggle for your family. Reading at home is always encouraged.

What is Moby Max? This is an online math program that includes an assessment. It helps with specific skills and moves students through their individual needs. Kids work on it on an individual basis.

Social Studies - 20 minutes , three times a week minimum. Sometimes social studies is also included in writing and reading work. Scholastic Readers (funded by PTO) are also used.

Do teachers feel a lot of pressure about teaching the standards and test scores? That has changed over the years. Teachers do not feel as much pressure as in some past years. This was echoed by Ms. Gebeke as well.

How does Chelsea do on the MCAs? 53% proficient in math, 49% in reading (meets or exceeds) We do really well when we retain our students. Students who opt out of the test are a "not proficient" result. It also counts against our proficiency percent. What do we do with students who are not proficient? The teachers will use the scores as a guide but will rely more on assessments in the classroom to gauge where a student is at in their skills. Students struggling also work with our hourly teachers on math and reading.

We have MN state standards for science, art, music and PE also.

Do students have books? You might see the math workbook come home. They are consumable (written in) and expensive. Social studies has a textbook in 5th grade. Teachers can place articles on Schoology as well. We have math reference books in classrooms too.

If you have questions about curriculum, you can talk with your child's teacher or contact Ms. Gebeke.