

Huntington School Parent-Teacher Organization

Meeting Summary

January 14, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

Meeting held on Zoom due to COVID-19

Board members in attendance: Ann Yarka, President; Maureen McCarthy, Vice-President; Ramie Miller, Treasurer; Meghan Vitale, Secretary

Administrators: Joanne Harlow, Principal

Office of Family Engagement: Melissa Hidek

Others: 3 parents/community members, 1 staff member

I. Welcome

Ann welcomed everyone.

II. Approval of previous minutes

Minutes from November meeting were posted on the website. Ann made a motion to approve, and Ramie seconded. No objections.

III. Board member reports

Ramie reviewed the financial reports from November and December. There was one debit in November (reimbursement to Ms. Archie for balloons for the first day of in-person classes). There was also one debit in December, which was the purchase of a holiday tree from the Admin account. Total account balance as of 12/31/20 was \$23,744.87 (no pending transactions). Mrs. Harlow said that students loved the tree, and they made a lot of nice decorations for it. It is in storage now and will be used again next year.

IV. Old business

None.

V. New business

Michelle Ratchford recapped the discussion from the Superintendent's Parent Council (SPC) meeting, which she attended on behalf of Huntington earlier this week.

- The district is starting an evening academic support program for elementary students, and tutoring and support for middle school.
- 1,600 families participated in the survey about second semester educational model.
- No information is available about state testing yet, but will be soon.
- A lot of schools have done virtual art shows, book fairs, spirit weeks, and food and clothing drives.

- Much of the discussion at SPC was about the school budget. The city lowered the school tax rate, which resulted in a loss of about \$1 million in revenue. The district has spent \$6.2 million on technology for this school year, WCNY production, and PPE for staff.

Michelle also asked about holding a virtual awards ceremony for Huntington students. Mrs. Harlow said that usually around this time there are PRIDE award assemblies and the middle school breakfast. She has proposed to staff to do the assemblies for all grades, because students need encouragement to continue working through the second half of the year. There will be attendance and participation awards, and families of students receiving awards will be invited. This will hopefully bring some normalcy into this year, even if these have to be held virtually (by grade level, most likely).

Ann raised a concern about teachers participating in classroom contests and winning Dojo points instead of the students; this does not seem fair to the kids, and it is discouraging. Mrs. Harlow stated that only the 5th grade team is still using Dojo, and she'll follow-up with them to get a better understanding of how they are using Dojo and what they are trying to achieve.

Ann also expressed concern about students being progressed to the next grade level following all of the missed in-school time. She questioned whether all students are really ready to move to the next grade level, emotionally and academically. Mrs. Harlow said that teachers usually start looking at student data in February or March, and start planning for the next year. We know students are being impacted differently by the pandemic; some students are really struggling, although some are doing quite well with the new structure and many are somewhere in the middle. The school will continue to offer academic supports to students. Mrs. Harlow stated that the teachers rarely recommend retention, as research shows it doesn't help improve student outcomes. Concerns pertaining to individual students should be addressed by scheduling a conference with the teacher and/or administrators.

There was a question about yearbook and school photos. Meghan explained, and Mrs. Harlow reiterated, that photos were originally scheduled for October, very close to the start of in-person (hybrid) instruction. It was just not feasible to hold photo day at that time, due to all the unknown new logistics of in-person instruction. We have not rescheduled, and it is unlikely to be rescheduled unless we re-open full time. With nearly 1,000 Huntington students, and restrictions on people in the building, it is very challenging. At this time, there is not a plan to produce a yearbook because there are so few students in the building, and the yearbook has been a NJHS project the past few years. Parents have expressed disappointment.

VI. **Administrative report**

Over Holiday Break, about 30 staff members had tested positive or been exposed to COVID-19. But school had already been remote, so exposure in schools was minimized. Original plan was just to close Huntington only for a week, then changed to two weeks. Then, Superintendent pivoted to closing the whole district for the two weeks. Most staff are beyond their quarantine period, but now family members have tested positive so staff are back in quarantine. At the moment, the district is still planning for return to hybrid instruction on January 19. The building has been disinfected repeatedly while nearly everyone is remote, although only admin, custodial, sentries, and a few support staff are in the building. They are still doing food service. If teachers were symptomatic on December 19 (last in-person day), then students were contact-traced. A parent expressed concern that a teacher was in

school sick for at least two days. Administrators and teachers are starting to get scheduled for vaccination.

Teachers were encouraged to have discussions about what happened at the Capitol last week.

Kindergarten info sessions are being scheduled – virtually – by the Office of Shared Accountability. Huntington has been scheduled for February 10 at 4:00 p.m. and March 3 at 5:00 p.m. OSA will be sending out the information to families.

The after-school program has started, and is being run virtually. They are also offering some options during the day, so students can participate on the days they are home. About 80 students enrolled so far. Instruction is being given by certified teachers (from the district sub list) in small groups. Registrations are still being accepted; the link is on the school webpage. Meghan will post link on the PTO Facebook page. One challenge is that many of the community-organizations that staffed the program last year cannot get access to the district's digital learning platforms (SeeSaw, etc.).

Mrs. Harlow submitted the Title I plan, but the purchase of headphones was denied. She proposed other options: supplies and materials for virtual science fair, extension of service for evening family reading night, and/or virtual family math night kit (\$700 for all materials for K-5). Peggy Chase noted that the Education Foundation can provide grants; she'll look into whether the deadline has been extended.

Meghan asked if the librarian will be scheduling a virtual book fair this year. Mrs. Harlow will talk with the librarian.

The school has an entire classroom full of donated clothes. There are also still a lot of donated blankets to hand out.

Meghan showed a concept that she has developed for some crosswalk enhancements and an intersection mural in front of the school (Sunnycrest/Forest Hill intersection). She will refine the concept, and work with the City through the permitting process. This would likely be a temporary installation, completed by volunteers. If feedback is positive, we could pursue more permanent options.

VII. Closing

Ann made a motion to adjourn, and Meghan seconded. No objections. Meeting adjourned at 8:03 p.m.

Next meeting: February 11 (via Zoom)