

**Cherry Run Elementary PTA
General Membership Meeting Minutes - March 16, 2021**

Attendees:

| | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Amy Beck | Katherine Seto | Lisa Hammond | Tracy McConachy |
| Angela Lock | Jill Hunt | Lisa Reddel | Unknown |
| Catherine Brown | Joanna Sampson | Maria Blanco | Vicky Trump |
| Cindy Ko | Jocelyn Balnague | Mark Bibbee | W. McGraw |
| Claire Foley | Katy Harvey | Julie Allen | |
| Dan Newmann | Kendall Bonsall | Mary Gatton | |
| David Allen | Kim Painter | Meagan Van Hoy Dwyer | |
| Elizabeth Busby | Molly Quinones | Megan Davis | |
| Elizabeth Carroll | Krissy Schmidt | Pam Wilson | |
| Emily Miller | Kristen Melchiori | Rachel Ehlers | |
| Eric and Lauren Hooks | Lakicia Moye | Rita Robinson | |
| Erin Hurley | Laura Connelly | Sara Scott | |
| Jason McConachy | Laura Jane Cohen | Sarah Yurasko | |
| Jay Pearson | Laurie Wilson | Stacie Rubino | |
| Jean Waters | Leslie Lauth-Torres | Terri Thomas | |
| Jennifer Dixon | Lisa Baxter | Tia Lott | |

Jason announced guests on the line including Laura Jane Cohen - the school board representative for Springfield district, Jay Pearson - the assistant superintendent for Region 4. Tia Lott the educational specialist for equity and cultural responsiveness for Region 4 schools is also on the line as well as guest Lisa Reddel.

- Katherine Seto gave an update on the Nominating Committee: We are still taking nominations for Treasurer and 2nd VP. Ms. Seto spoke about how important these roles are and how volunteering for the PTA is a great opportunity to benefit our great school.
- Raffle Giveaway announcement by Elizabeth Carroll – One of our generous sponsors donated a one-year family membership to the Children’s Museum of Richmond. Those interested can type their names into the chat and their names will be entered into the wheel of names.
- Quorum Established, Meeting Opens
 - Posted the following links in the chat.

Link to meeting minutes is in the chat.

Motion: To accept the meeting minutes from our February meeting.

Unknown

Second: Eric Hooks

Minutes were approved.

Principal's Update:

On February 25th there was an incident in one of the grades. A teacher was reading a book about Jackie Robinson and read words that contained a racial epithet. This created an uncomfortable environment for students and for parents. Mr. Bibbee reached out to parents of the 5th grade class with a plan to reach out to the rest of the community in due time. In retrospect he wishes he had reached out to the whole school. As principal of the school, he takes responsibility for what happened. Mr. Bibbee recognized the harm that this had to students in our school and also to our community. We need to make amends for that and chart a path forward to ensure that there are supports in place and make sure that this never happens again. We want the apology to be of action and not just words. We want to earn trust back in our community. Want to be clear that this action is indefensible. Within four minutes of finding out about this incident, Mr. Bibbee was on the phone with the regional office. We have video so we didn't have to spend time figuring out what happened. Video is available to be viewed by any of the 5th grade parents of students affected. Want to create an environment where we can solicit feedback and concerns. We can talk about it tonight and we'll answer questions, but there will also be another opportunity where this will be the sole focus.

Question: How will this be addressed with students?

Mr. Bibbee spoke with Tia Lott today about how to address this with students. Some community members are looking for closure. Some just want to move on. Others want more discussion. We had cultural awareness training on March 8th. We want to get feedback to help ensure we are providing resources for families. Our equity team is working with Ms. Lott as we move forward with supporting students and creating awareness around creating cultural inclusivity. Spoke with Mr. Pearson about how to address this with students. He has offered a grant opportunity for up to \$2,000 for training for implementing programs to help both the staff and the students. Also think it's important as we move forward with what we think should be done is that we get feedback from families about what they think we should do and how this has impacted their children.

Question: What action is going to be taken about the teacher that used the term? The word was used probably 4 times in about 12 minutes. Doesn't believe that this was a mistake. How long has this teacher taught this way? Do you know if this has happened in other classes? Concerned that there is a lack of urgency.

Mr. Bibbee: We don't discuss discipline. It's a confidentiality concern. We have addressed the teacher and charted a plan but we are not able to talk about discipline. We have a firm grasp about how long this book has been used and how long this has been going on. We do not have video evidence of previous years, but from talking to the

teacher we know that this book has been used in the past. I am at a loss for why he chose to use the word at that time and it shows a complete lack of judgement.

Mr. Pearson: One thing we are asking is if students and staff prepared to speak up when they hear stuff like this. There was an instructional assistant in the room. If this happened in the past, why did no one say anything.

Ms. Lott: We definitely want to have a climate where people feel safe speaking up and that staff feel comfortable advocating for themselves and for others. We don't want to put the onus on students only or staff only.

Ms. Hurley: With kids speaking up and standing up, we talk about with bullying how you can be a silent bystander or a vocal bystander. We have a new star in star system this year "stand up star." The student who brought this to our attention was able to do the right thing by speaking to his father about it.

Question: I have an 11 year old and have a hard time thinking of son being responsible for having to step up and say this is a bad word. There were several kids who didn't know what the N word was in the morning and by 11:30 they did. That is the tragedy. What was the point that this passage was meant to convey? Are there not any mechanisms in place to prevent this from happening?

Mr. Bibbee – Yes there is a policy and procedure for how we access resources. If teachers want to use a resource that's not listed there is a process for getting that approved. In this instance that process was not followed. In general, there is not a big need to go outside of the materials we provide as a county. In this instance, that process was not followed. The teacher was a huge fan of Jackie Robinson. The book was given to him by a student. The teacher should have run it by Mark Bibbee or Jeannie Waters. (We would not have approved it.) That word should have never been uttered.

Question: I had a fifth grader in that class and am upset by this. Son was the one who asked what the word meant and now knows. Wish it could be taken back. Needed tools to talk to son about this. Would like that from the support staff – tools about how to talk to him. It was difficult to explain that this was not appropriate language even though it came from a teacher he respects. All I can do is teach that this is not a word that should be used.

Ms. Lott: Equity stretches across all offices. Work is being done with cultural response in teaching practices. There are explanations and examples provided. It is not perfect and we continue to revisit it. We can work together to review the response.

Mr. Bibbee: There was a link in the email I sent out earlier and I will be working with Ms. Lott to provide further resources.

Question: Has it been established that what happened was bad? Has the loop been closed with the children? If not what is the plan and have parents been informed?

Mr. Bibbee: Erin, Tia and I are meeting on Thursday to focus on child support and also will discuss parent support. We don't want to close it and just put it past us. We want to continue moving forward, ensuring there is a consistency in conversation. Will require planning and implementation. We started with the staff aspect but are now working on how to address students. It will be really important to bring families in to ensure consistency in conversation.

Question: Not telling the students this was wrong seems like a missed opportunity. When will this be addressed with the students?

Mr. Bibbee: Sooner rather than later. Will have more of a timeline after meeting with Tia. Not to make excuses but I was late getting info out because I am a planner and I wanted to know the plan before reaching out.

Question: Want to be sure that whatever form of address this takes place with the students, that the parents are being notified so that we can listen.

Mr. Bibbee: Will definitely let you know what the plan is and will give the option to opt out of that. I've let many of you down with my lack of communication around this issue.

Return to school plan is for full 5 days of return to school beginning this fall. Nothing is written in stone, but since Dr. Brabrand sent the message out, that made me confident to announce it.

Playgrounds are open. Precautions are in place – hand sanitizer, masks, no congregating.

We would like to allow students to bring their own equipment even though that is normally not allowed. They cannot play catch but they can kick a ball around if they're not touching it with their hands.

Lunches are available every day, free, for every student. They are grab and go. Teachers are not in the room during lunch. (Will be an assistant.)

Today the third-sixth graders came back.

Laptops have been exchanged.

Picture day

A-K on 24th 8:30-10

L-Z on 25th 8:30-10

Virtual students come before school.
No make-up picture day.

Parent: Back to the 5th grade incident, I'm feeling anger, frustration, sadness and disappointment because of a lack of transparency. I know we'll get there because we have great teams, but before you can move forward, we have to find out how this happened. With a case of assault, you don't leave the victim and the accused together. How will make sure this is not systemic. I have a 4th grader who will be going into 5th grade next year and want to have a level of trust and confidence that there will be an investigation into how this happened.

Laura Jane Cohen: My first instinct is what do we do? We have prescribed discipline that happens. We offer restorative justice. With that we recognize the power imbalance between the victim and the accuser. Mr. Bibbee and I spoke soon after it happened. We make sure that we do not make the victim feel further victimized. There are systems in place. This is thankfully my first go-round with this. I live down the street and this is my community too. It's a tight community. I don't want any parents feel like this is only happening to them. This is happening to all of us and we will work together. I understand that we can't discuss personnel decisions but as far as wanting a transparent plan, I hear you.

Jeannie Waters: Doesn't feel appropriate talking about testing here, so I will contact parents in grade levels affected.

PTA Budget Update

Jason: Because we have to discuss the budget, I am putting a link to it in the chat. There is not a lot to discuss due to Covid unless anyone has questions.

Picture Reminder and Yearbook Update

- We will have yearbook this year after all. Goal is to have 100% of students included if they wish to be included. Have online tools for virtual students. There is a short turn-around and that option will close on March 31st. It will be using cell phone to take picture that will look like official photo. You will have the option to upload photos of events throughout the year. We will give you a link to send in pictures through a secure Shutterfly site. We really need parents support in sending in those pictures. We don't have any due to school being closed for most of the year.
- Thank you to everyone for responding to the survey about yearbooks.

Other Updates and Business

Regarding a comment about disappointment that PTA did not take a more active role in bringing students back to school. We have these meetings every month and have

looked at how to support the school. We had the silent auction and tried to use funds to support the school. As a PTA, there are folks that are on both sides of this issue. We have had people consider not joining the PTA because in-person was closed, but have not had a lot of comments about us getting involved in advocating for back to school. The issue of schools is a county-wide issue and actually a national issue.

In response to a question about SACC and contacting them about reopening plans: This was touched on somewhat in our last meeting. That is a Fairfax County program and is separate from FCPS. So would encourage you to express your thoughts through those channels.

Mark Bibbee: It's hard to take a position when half have wanted all virtual and the other half wanted in person. I've tried to advocate for both. Our school board represents about 52 schools and has to consider all of them. Even though membership is down, PTA has done an amazing job of supporting the school and students with things like picture day. Not one person has done more to help than Laura Jane Cohen – helping with staffing, critical needs, space concerns. She even helped obtain a more reasonable start time.

Mr. Pearson – Learned over last couple of weeks that we can do (back to school). Current challenge is 6 ft social distancing and even at 3 ft we will have capacity issues executing a full return – especially at some of our more crowded schools. Cherry Run is fortunate to have a small population compared to others. We know in the building is the best place for kids to be. I get emails from parents saying “Get our kids back to school” followed by another saying “Why are you bringing kids back to school. It isn't safe.”

Elizabeth Carroll: We've been struggling with how we can get kids on school grounds with the rules constantly changing: What we can do in person, the numbers we can have, etc. We've struggled with how to keep this community connected when we can't be within 6 feet of each other. We love this community and will advocate for kids and students. We love our kids and our community and that is why we give our time as volunteers.

Mrs. Cohen – Thanked Mr. Bibbee. I served on PTA board for several years and am not new to how advocacy runs in this community. Sometimes it runs on your side and sometimes it doesn't. Everyone is advocating for their kid. You're doing your job. It's not awesome when it's done in an unkind way. A big piece of my job is looking out for everyone's kid. My goal is to be in constant communication with PTA presidents and principals. Would I like us to have more in person? Yes, everyone would, but I think we have everyone back in person who wants to be. This has been a year of constant change. I'm excited about what we've been able to accomplish, by the 3 feet distance and data on transmissibility in classrooms. 5 days a week is always the goal. The next hurdle is how to accommodate students who need to remain virtual. We're moving forward. Our kids react to how we behave. I'm here whether you yell at me or not and will get back to you either way. So hopefully we can work together.

Parent: Regarding the anticipated 5 day return, given that there's no approved vaccine for kids and given the distancing requirement, what has changed? How will we make this work given these challenges?

Ms. Cohen: Biggest challenge is our specs are based on having 18 inches of space. So getting to 3 feet is a challenge. There are folks who will hold their kids back until they are vaccinated, but we are hoping kids will be able to vaccinate in the fall and wouldn't want to keep kids out for the whole year if they'll be vaccinated after a few weeks into the school year. So how do we allow flexibility for that. How do we accommodate younger kids who may not qualify for the vaccine.

Orange Hunt is over-crowded. Will CR have to absorb a few kids? We are working to map every room Some schools have ripped out computer stations, coat hangers, etc. to make more space. There is work to be done. We will know more as we move toward the summer.

Mr. Pearson: There are a lot of extra cabinets, tables, etc in especially elementary classrooms. Other question is how would we accommodate students who will choose virtual option for the 21-22 school year. We might group schools together for virtual students. For all the complaints, I receive a lot of compliments for all the hard work the teachers are doing.

Sarah Yurasko is the winner of the children's museum give-away.

Jason McConachy moved to adjourn meeting.

Since there was no opposition, we will consider the meeting adjourned.