

District 181 PTO President Meeting Minutes
Provided by Bridget McGuiggan, Director of Communications
November 7, 2017 • Location: The Lane School

Call to Order

9:08am

Introductions

PTO Presidents, The Lane PTO Executive Board, The Lane Principal Brandon Todd, Board of Education PTO Liaison Jennifer Burns, Superintendent Dr. Don White, Director of Communications Bridget McGuiggan, Interim Assistant Superintendent of Learning (C&I) Joan Woolwine

Minutes (October 3, 2017)

Approved as presented.

Common Assessments / Secure Assessments

Interim Assistant Superintendent of Learning (Curriculum & Instruction) Joan Woolwine and Superintendent Dr. Don White provided an overview of common assessments and addressed PTO President questions on that topic. Dr. White explained that the District has been continuing to work toward creating consistency in the learning opportunities students have across the District and providing a guaranteed curriculum. They explained that while learning standards are set at the State level and curriculum is set at the District level, the teacher determines how the content is taught, and in some cases, the teacher also determines how students are assessed (aside from MAP, PARCC, etc.). Therefore, there is a lack of consistency in such assessments, and so teams of D181 teachers have been working this year, and worked over the summer, to develop what is known as "common assessments," which are the same across the grade level for all schools. They are typically administered within a common window of time, as well. Ms. Woolwine said the concept is not new - other districts utilize common assessments.

Ms. Woolwine emphasized that common assessments are intended to be just one component of a student's grade and said no determination was made at the District level about what percentage of the grade the assessment would be - that was at the teacher's discretion. Common assessments are not meant to be high stakes and are not used for placement.

It was clarified that common assessments were not being sent home (aside from math) to ensure test security, as a common assessment is intended to be re-used for multiple years, with minor tweaking as needed. Ms. Woolwine said it can take many hours to write a quality common assessment, therefore the administration did not want teachers to spend time re-writing assessments every year. She noted that teachers provided feedback to their colleagues about the common assessments during the November Institute Day, with feedback related to test items, clarity of directions, pacing, etc.

Some parents expressed concern about how they could support their child's learning if the tests do not come home. Ms. Woolwine noted that the assessment should cover the content the child has been learning, and so parents should have had opportunities to see practice work and/or other small assessments. Additionally, the parent should receive a cover sheet referencing how the student scored related to standards / content. Lastly, parents can meet with the teacher to see the test. Ms. Woolwine noted that math assessments (i.e. unit tests) have been coming home and will continue to come home on a regular basis.

Ms. Woolwine went on to explain that the student information system is a key component of effective common assessments and related parent and teacher communication, and the District is not where it needs to be with Skyward at this time. Therefore, the administration of common assessments is being put on hold right now and conversation is ongoing about how and when they will be used. The implementation of common assessments is a learning process, she said, noting that creating alignment is a good thing, but there is a normal transition period. She and Dr. White then discussed that teachers assess students on a daily basis in different ways so they are regularly gathering data on their learners. The Lane School Principal Brandon Todd discussed that analyzing student data is an opportunity for teachers to determine whether their class is on track to meet goals and benchmarks. He also commented that teachers collaborate together throughout the year around student data.

A parent asked - when the common assessments resume - what data would be available to parents about how their child's score compared to District results since the test is administered across a grade level, giving the example of including a percentile. Ms. Woolwine and Dr. White did not have an answer to that question at the time of the meeting.

A parent noted that at the high school level, "nothing comes home" and students have to schedule time with the teacher to review their test.

A parent noted that communication is needed to help clarify these issues for all families.

Other Topics Related to Academic Success

- Some parents commented that it seems there is an increase in the number of substitute teachers in the classroom this year. Ms. Woolwine commented on meetings of Subject Area Committees as one reason that subs have been needed, commenting on the importance of the work teachers are doing. She also shared some of the ways the Department of Learning has attempted to minimize sub use (i.e. adjustments to the scheduling, ensuring teachers are only on one committee). Board President and PTO Liaison Jennifer Burns commented that from a Board perspective, teacher contract negotiations is a good time to discuss considerations such as teachers' time in and out of the classroom.
- Mrs. McGuiggan commented that the 2017 Report Cards for Illinois, the District, and D181 schools are on posted the District website. Additionally, she encouraged families to explore the Illinois Interactive Report Card website (www.illinoisreportcard.com) if interested in reviewing the performance and progress of any school or district in the state.
- Mrs. McGuiggan noted that a Special Education Procedural Manual is currently on public display, and community members can share comments or questions about it before it is presented for Board approval. A related FAQ has been created for parents.
- The group briefly discussed the status of the Middle School Scheduling Committee.

Google Docs - Assemblies and Appreciation Ideas

Mrs. McGuiggan reminded the group that they are invited to contribute to two Google Docs: (1) Assembly Ideas and (2) Teacher and Staff Appreciation Ideas.

Mobile App Preview

Mrs. McGuiggan provided an overview of the District's new mobile app. She noted that the app is complete and available for download. It is free and available on both Android and Apple devices. She explained that the District is doing a "soft launch" to welcome feedback from PTO Presidents, the Board, and a small number of others before it is announced to the community.

PTO Collaboration - Insurance / Social Media and Texting

PTO Presidents shared information on the types of insurance they carry. Those who had information available all said they use AIM. It was noted that some PTOs have purchased additional coverage for special events (i.e. family run event, event where alcohol is served). The Presidents also shared the rates they pay, which they noted likely vary because of different enrollment numbers.

An attendee discussed whether separate social media liability insurance was needed (i.e. copyright infringement, sharing photos inappropriately). There was debate about whether that was covered under existing general liability insurance. That led to a brief discussion on social media and texting. Several PTOs said they have Facebook pages and either do not post pictures of students and don't let others post pictures, or they refer to the District's Do Not Photo list before posting. One PTO said the Facebook page they use is not an official PTO page, therefore they do not monitor pictures that are posted. The PTOs also discussed the use of services such as "Remind" for texting. Per a question, Ms. McGuiggan suggested the PTOs follow an opt-in protocol for such services rather than automatically enrolling families.

PTO Collaboration - Outdoor Education

Per a question, it was confirmed that Walker, The Lane, and Monroe participate in Outdoor Education at Camp Edwards in Easy Troy, Wisconsin. At The Lane, the PTO pays for transportation and families pay the fee. Walker PTO supplements the difference between the actual cost and a set fee. Monroe students participate in fundraisers to offset the cost, or parents can simply pay the fee. It was noted that the time of year of the trip can impact the cost.

Mr. Todd and other attendees discussed that Outdoor Ed includes both team building exercises (i.e. performing skits) and academic lessons (dissecting owl pellets). Students sleep in cabins (separate cabins for boys and girls). Teachers serve as the chaperones; parents do not attend. Attendees commented that students who go typically say it is a favorite memory of 5th grade. Mr. Todd shared that there is a high level of planning required of teachers, but the staff greatly enjoy the experience, as well.

PTO Collaboration - The Parent List

Per a question, it was clarified that some PTOs have chosen to include in their newsletter or in a stand-alone communication information about The Parent List, which is run by a parent from Hinsdale Central High School. (It is essentially a site for parents to share reviews of local services such as therapists and counselors.) It was clarified that only positive reviews are permitted, and the parent who runs the site manages the posting, but it is otherwise not vetted. It was noted that the content may be more targeted toward issues facing older students (i.e. eating disorders, depression). It was also noted that the future of The Parent List is in question as the parent who runs it may not continue it next year.

Next Meeting

Mrs. McGuiggan said she anticipates two topics for discussion at the December meeting (being hosted at Madison) will be registration for 2018-19 and procedures to go along with the District's upcoming Visitor Management System implementation.

Adjourn

10:45am