

**Wellesley Middle School - Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO)**  
**Minutes from the FRIDAY, October 17, 2014 Meeting**

Welcome – Catherine Mirick welcomed everyone to the PTO Meeting and introduced Mark Ito

Speaker: Mark Ito, Principal, Wellesley Middle School –  
(Mr. Ito’s presentation, please click here.)

- Mr. Ito made opening remarks and introduced Assistant Principal Cathi Gordon. He mentioned that, in addition to Ms. Gordon, Robyn Pease is the School’s other Assistant Principal. Unfortunately, because of a last minute personal matter, Robin was not able to attend the meeting.
- Mr. Ito gave a quick update on the “state of the school” – he stated that things are going very well; that the kids are adjusted well to the school year; the kids are transitioning well and things are running smoothly.
- His presentation today is on Key Initiatives at WMS for Educating the Whole Child. Three major initiatives – (1) Teaming – 8<sup>th</sup> grade students; (2) Seed Program – primarily 7<sup>th</sup> grader students; and (3) 1:1 Initiative – 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. (Mr. Ito added that he and his faculty are using the book Mindset to focus their discussions).

Presentation on 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teaming – Cathi Gordon

- CG explained that the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teaming project is an exciting endeavor. It was started last year and a lot was learned from that initial first year. They looked at the data and kept what worked well from last year and eliminated what did not. She and the 8<sup>th</sup> grade teachers got together this summer to work on how to make this initiative better.
- CG explained that, prior to this initiative, there were no houses or clusters for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and that WMS followed the high school model. However, we realized that 8<sup>th</sup> graders were not yet ready for the high school model and that we needed to do something different and that is how the teaming initiative came about. The change was made to improve learning, emotional stability, the connection between students and their peers and teachers; and to increase a teacher’s understanding of the academic, social and emotional needs of their students.
- CG further explained that the goal of teaming is always to improve teaching and learning. We can always get better. By breaking down into two teams, teachers have access and opportunities to meet and collaborate with each other and to learn from each other. Teaming allows for more conversations and sharing to take place. The meetings are not about individual students rather the teams are talking about profiles of students, i.e., what do you do with a student who does not turn in homework. CG explained that teachers learn from their colleagues about different approaches to resolve problems and challenges and this in turn improves our learning and teaching.

- CG described how Day 3 and Day 5 are used in the Teaming Initiative. Specifically, she said that Day 3 is used as the student strategy meeting. At this meeting, the teachers talk about a particular student profile, i.e., how do you deal with a student with X profile? On the next Day 3, we talk about which of the strategies that we discussed were tried and how those strategies worked in practice. Day 5 is about instructional core -- core subject teachers get together to talk about a variety of issues, i.e., homework. On the next Day 5, we talk about the different strategies that were tried and report back on how it went.

**Question: In setting up the day structure for the 6th grade students, is there any way to avoid 6th graders having a core class at the end of the day?** CG explained that this happens because of the scheduling of specials. In 7th grade, there are no core classes at the end of the day. MI explained that the master schedule is really complicated and the difficulty comes from trying to figure out the best way to transition 6<sup>th</sup> graders to WMS. The model that works best for transitioning students has core classes and specials being locked into particular parts of the days. MI further explained that, about three years ago, they looked at the schedule and with each reiteration, they came back to the schedule that is currently being used.

- CG concluded by stating that her comments were really a quick introduction to teaming and why we do it; we can always improve and get better and that it what we are working on. It is a change and the change is energizing people.
- MI added that, last year, the benefit of teaming was not known and really not discussed with the kids. This year, the kids are more aware of the initiative and hopefully there will be a better sense of it in the community and we will continue to work on informing 8<sup>th</sup> grade parents about teaming and about which team their children are in.

Presentation on Seeding Initiative – Mark Ito

MI explained the following:

- The focus of this program is on social and emotional development. For 7<sup>th</sup> graders, the focus is self-management and self-awareness. For 8th graders, the focus in on social awareness and relationship skills.
- For Grade 7, the essential question is “What are my strengths and struggles and how do I keep my emotions, thoughts and behaviors balanced?” For Grade 8, the essential question is “How do my choices influence my relationship with others and how can I more positively impact my community?”
- Grade 7 seed events – October project for grade 7 is understanding their strengths and struggles and understanding that struggles are not deficiencies. Other projects: February (back to school strategies); April (Managing independence and responsibility) – continuum in helping them move along and grow.

- Grade 8 seed events -- focus on three items – (1) team building; (2) difficult conversations around power, race, gender and sexuality; and (3) community service - making sure that they are doing things to help others.

Presentation on 1:1 Initiative – (by Cathi Gordon):

- 400 iPads distributed; kids very excited. It is a great opportunity for the kids and the teachers. iPads are great teaching tools and we are working out all of the issues as they arise.
- Another change we made this year was for Grade 6 conferences – House teachers given a big chunk of time to meet with parents (rather than having conference spread over a number of weeks). Administrators and Department Heads assumed responsibility for the kids while their teachers met with parents. Administrators and Dept. Heads took this time to get to know the kids. Great programs that support the curriculum were presented to the kids – Museum of Science program, Urban Improv. 6<sup>th</sup> graders were also given recess during this time period – they were thrilled. We used this time to talk to the kids about hallway behavior, expectations, discrimination (watched Blue Eye/Brown Eye video). It was a great three days for all – the kids, the teachers and the administrators.
- Mindset - MI talked about the book Mindset and how, last year, we began a conversation about the book and how it is used at WMS. At the November PTO meeting in Boston, we will continue that conversation and Jamie Chisum (Principal at WHS) will be part of that conversation.
- MI ended presentation with a “simple idea” – we are always looking to make kids happy at school. It is an important part of the day to make them happy. MI concluded with the hope that the school year experience has been a good one for the kids thus far.

Question and Answer Session:

**Can you talk how the 6th grade guidance counselors are or are not using the seed elements in their discussions with the 6th graders?** MI explained that grade 6 has always had a strong transition program and guidance counselors see the kids regularly on Day 1 of the schedule and talk to them about different things, i.e., language, behavior in the hallways. MI added that if there is something specific that the parent has heard and is concerned about to please let him know about it.

**Do the teachers have meetings every day?** All teachers have one prep meeting and one meeting period per day. This schedule and the regular opportunity to meet is very unusual. CG added that she has worked in other districts and they do not allow for this type of meeting and prep time per day. It is important and good.

[Parent with kids new to both WMS and the school district raised question about adjustment and isolation. Specifically, while praising the adjustment program for 6<sup>th</sup> graders, she expressed

concern about the lack of any programs to help new 7<sup>th</sup> graders to WMS. She described her 7<sup>th</sup> grader as feeling isolated and wondered if anything can be done for children in this situation. MI said that the hope is that the seed activities will help such students with transitioning and meeting other kids. MI said that they will continue to add to the program and invited the parent to reach out to him and Kate Mahoney, Head of Guidance, to see what they could do to help her child on an individual basis. Parent further expressed the need for the community to acknowledge how difficult it is to be a new student and that more of an effort needs to be made. Another parent spoke up in support and agreed that we need to figure out a way to help new kids coming in as 7<sup>th</sup> graders transition to the school. MI stated that he would raise the issue with Guidance Dept. and would put concerned parent in touch with Guidance Dept. to talk about her concerns.]

**If the 1:1 Initiative yields great results, is there any way to make that learning more available to older students not part of the program?** MI explained that there are iPads for specific classrooms that older students can use. However, the best that we can do is roll out the 1:1 Initiative and work with it and make future plans accordingly. MI reminded that this is not just a WMS issue but also concerns District planning and budgeting.

Speaker: Tere Ramos (School Committee)

(Ms. Ramos' presentation, please click here.)

- TR pleased to be at the PTO meeting to inform community of the Window Replacement Project at WMS. TR wants community to understand the project; that School Committee is bringing it to Town Meeting and if it passes this initiative will be put to a vote and School Committee wants community to be informed.
- TR explained that there are two articles involved (1) Article 4 – Request for Reimbursement – School Committee is paying for Project Manager and Schematic Design and (2) Article 5 – Appropriation for funds for Design and Construction Costs.
- WMS has 280 windows which are the original windows from 1953 when WMS was built. WMS is one of the largest middle schools in the state and it is costly to run. Problems with windows: single pane, cannot easily be repaired, and not safe so kids are not allowed to touch them (custodian was injured and sent to the hospital because of windows). TR further explained that these windows are having a negative impact on learning -- kids are either too hot or too cold. The significant differences in temperature result in energy inefficiencies. Furthermore, noise from Kingsbury Street which comes in through these old windows impacts classrooms.
- The MA School Building Authority (MSBA) has a program called the Accelerated Repair Program (ARP). A school district has to be invited to participate in this program which is specifically for the replacement of roofs, windows and boilers. There were 116 proposals made to MSBA this year and only 51 (of which Wellesley is one) were invited to participate in program.
- Under this program, a Town is eligible for reimbursement of approximately 31% of the cost of the project. However, to comply with the program, the Town is required to approve funds within 60 days of ARP invite. TR explained that the timetable is acceleration because we need to order the windows so that the project can be done in the summer (and essentially be completed by the fall.) If this project is not done in accordance with the timelines set forth, we will lose the ARP reimbursement opportunity.

- The project will result in the current windows being replaced with high efficiency windows that meet the Town's energy stretch code. TR added that, because of the age of the building, we are expecting some abatement of hazardous material in surrounding caulking materials.
- TR explained that this project will have many positive impacts on the Town including: providing a proper educational environment to 1200 students and 180 staff in the building; providing cost saving through AAP reimbursement; and many other positive impacts (safety and extended use of the building facility itself).
- If you have any further questions for TR, please contact her at [ramost@wellesleys.org](mailto:ramost@wellesleys.org)

Question and Answer Session:

**If this is approved at Town Meeting, does it go to the voters?** Town Meeting is the week of Halloween. Once it is approved at Town Meeting, it will go to the voters. We are not sure of the cost -- the current request to Town Meeting is \$3.7 million. (TR explained that it is better to ask for more than less because it will impact AAP reimbursement which is done after the fact. Debt exclusion vote will take place in December.) Debt exclusion is different than override. With a debt exclusion, your taxes increase only for the period of time it takes to pay for the project.

**How big are the windows?** There are several different sizes - some 14' in height -- varies in size. There is not one standard window set.

**Have we predicated pay back amount for doing the project?** 10% of total bill

Speakers: Rebecca Cahaly and Delissa Prideaux (from Committee 21) –  
(Schofield and Fiske Renovation Project)

- There are other projects that are part of this vote. Projects at Schofield and Fiske. RB and DP provide a brief update: These elementary school buildings are old and tired and a few years ago, when a survey was done of the public school building facilities, it rated Schofield and Fiske as level 2 requiring updates. The plan for the upgrade was done last year and there are bids out right now for electrical, ventilation, heating, and window replacement work. Total cost of the project -- \$18 to 20 million dollars. There are efficiencies if the two projects done at the same time. DP asked those parents from the Bates and Sprague communities especially for their support and reminded them that others in the community had supported Bates and Sprague in the past. RC and DP underscored the fact that these projects are not cosmetic. Rather the projects are to bring the buildings up to code.

Announcements: Andrea Doglioli made a few announcements –

- online Directory is live/ webpage
- if you have any suggestions, please write them on the clipboard

Upcoming Dates

- Fri, 10/24 Halloween Dance 7pm – 9 pm
- Wed, 11/3 Katie Greer parent presentation, 7pm, WMS auditorium
- Thu 11/13 PTO Meeting in Boston with WHS 7pm more info to follow

Minutes submitted by Connie Burton