

March 23, 2015 PCO Meeting Minutes

Christy Fitzpatrick Burns read the PCO mission statement.

Christy announced that plant sale information will be sent home this week.

She also announced that the Shoe Box fund raiser is under way. There will be a “shoe wars” amongst the grade level classes. The class with the most donations will be announced at Earth Nite.

The Blooming Bash was a success, with around 160 guests, being the best turn out so far. The rough numbers came in at 15K. We’d like to keep donations coming.

Q: How much do we need to get the playground started?

A: Ms. Cook - \$35,000.

Guest Speaker – Gail Brown from PAAR – Education Specialist

PAAR serves Allegheny County and talks to kids in schools and offers counseling. They also have traditional rape counseling services which is free.

They will start with interviewing ECS principals, teachers, parents and students to get their perspective on needs for the school and where we’re at now. They’ll give ECS a score. It will be age appropriate and start with middle schoolers. They’ll talk about what sexual harassment is, prevention, healthy boundaries and how you tell someone you like them. They’ll also discuss bi-stander intervention, how you help a friend in need.

Mr. Aglio chimed in and announced that this discussion and relationship with PAAR started because of social media, particularly with 7th and 8th graders. There were a lot of situations where kids were posting inappropriate things. He said that PAAR will tailor their support to ECS’s needs. They’ll gather feedback on the current issues. Also, if you have student in crisis Gail is available for support.

Q: Why not provide a watered down approach for 4th/5th graders since they’re in the same building?

A: We can pull in resources for those grades.

Q: What age is sex-ed provided?

A: 5th and 6th. We also encourage kids to talk to their parents and not to talk about it at school.

Gail – we start as early as 1st grade and talk about healthy boundaries. Gail said that they like to be proactive and not just talk about it once, but continue to discuss it.

Q: Should we start earlier?

A: Yes, middle school is a good age to start.

Comment from parent: The downside is that we bring in a lot of language to kids that don't really know what it means and how to use it. i.e. sexual harassment.

Gail- we want to make sure that we "train" teachers too and parents so everyone is on the same page.

PSSAs

They're coming up April 13-24. Lower School- 3rd grade is three mornings.

5th-8th grades- 4 days

Keystone exams are May 13-27 (Algebra) in 8th grade. Students must pass this exam to graduate from high school. Last year 26 out of 29 8th graders that took it passed.

PSSAs - they will encourage kids not to rush. Kids that need more time can go to the overflow room.

Q- What does the rest of the day look like?

A- Lower School- modified schedule, play time

Upper School- structured academics

Ms. Cook asked if anyone was opting out. No one is opting out from the group attending the meeting.

Q from parent – what does that mean?

Ms. Cook – some schools that teach to the test have parents that object and opt out of the PSSAs. Last year in PA 260 students opted out because they feel that the test is not a true measure of everything.

Comment from parent – opt-out is not bad for schools that teach to tests but ECS is not at all about test prep and teaching to the test.

Mr. A – as most schools were test prepping last week out 5th graders were speaking in front of a crowd of 100+ people.

Q- Does it hurt the school if someone opts out?

A- The student gets a score of 0 and it has a negative effect on the school's overall score.

Comment from parent- my son took Keystones in 8th grade and he was so glad. He can now skip Algebra and take any math. At Woodland Hills if you don't pass in 9th you have to test prep instead of attend PE.

Ms. Cook – we do really well on the PSSAs considering we don't teach to the test. The kids are learning, not memorizing.

Comment – can we spread the words about ECS's philosophy to help other parents understand the approach we take?

Comment – this is difficult for teachers too because it is against how they teach here.

Mr. A – At ECS test scores aren't a consideration in how a teacher is evaluated.

Q: How are the PSSAs framed to the kids?

A: Ms. Cook- we tell them that we use it for diagnosis purposes, and it helps us know what the students need to learn. We get an academic profile with MAPS tests and it helps us put other things in place in case they are needed.

Mr. A updates:

June 5th he will attend the Lower School coffee

May 7th is 3rd grade orientation for parents and kids

Tomorrow is a Mine Craft workshop

8th grade dance – unsure of the date. Last year students organized it.

They're interviewing for PE position in the Upper School, Mr. Mathis filling in for Ms. Bergman while she's on maternity leave.

Ms. Bannon is taking a 6 month sabbatical and walking through the Appalachian trails.

They may pilot a language program – Duo Lingo

4th-8th grade kids will meet "coaches" during off-hours in small groups. Justin will update everyone once he has more information. He is in the early stages of meeting with Duo Lingo to discuss details.

Molly Bennett- Board of Trustees update

They had a strategic plan meeting and did pre-research to gather information and build a strategic plan for the Board.

Amendment – the amendment for the second K-8 school will be submitted to PPS Board in mid-April. The High School amendment will be submitted after that.

If they're rejected they will go to the State level next.

The timeline once it's at the State level is unknown because there is a new administration.

New Home office role – they're looking for Director of Development.

Purchase of Upper School – they're working to secure financials to purchase the Upper School building.

Molly is working on Board members bio's and picture for the website.

April 13 – meet the candidates; meet the two candidates running for PPS School Board. ECS is hosting, come out and show support for PPS Board.

Other Business

Christy read through the events.

Q: for rising high schoolers do we have a plan to track how ECS alum are doing in High School?

Maybe we can have 9th graders come to a PCO meeting.

A: There's an alum survey on the website.

Q: Would it be tough to have alum parents on Facebook page after their kids graduate?

A: It may not matter, as they may not pay attention to posts. And the PCO include community members, anyone can join. We've talked about moving it to an organization or page, as opposed to a group so ECS can comment.