

St Peter's School Parents Association Meeting

October 24, 2014

The Library was filled with parents and members of our school community. Below are the highlights. Please note that the next PA meeting will take place at 8:30am on **Friday, November 21st** in the Library. Our aim in these PA meetings is to pack as much helpful information as possible in one hour without running over the 9:30am mark. All parents are welcome!

1. Introductions and Welcome!

- a. **Gigi Lamm – new PA Secretary!** Thank you, Gigi!
- Gigi thanks Kate and Amy for the wine!

- b. **Matt Evans, Academic Dean and Division Head for Grades 3-8** (mevans@st-peters-school.org)--that

- Matt spoke at the meeting to address the new advisory program & take questions

- US families know that this year, St. Peter's began an advisory program for grades 5-8, modeled after LS homeroom teacher format. The US previously had a similar model where each student was assigned to a homeroom teacher based on his/her grade. Under the previous model, many faculty members who were not assigned students couldn't make the same connections with students as those who had been assigned students. And for many faculty and staff members, St. Peter's was the first school that didn't employ the advisory program.

- The new program decreases the ratios of students assigned to faculty and staff members and the advisory groups are a way for students to come together in a different way than merely being with their classmates. Classes are together for long periods of time and the resulting continuity is good, but because the school and the classes are small, this can lead to inter-student tensions and there is a need for more variety. The advisory program also fosters connections between older and younger students.

- Format: 5th and 6th grades are divided into 4 groups and 7th and 8th grades are divided similarly. The groups are all co-ed. After a year, all 8th grade students graduate and new 5th graders are assigned a group, new 6th graders stay with the same advisor, and the same pattern follows for new 7th and 8th graders so there are always rookies and veterans within each group.

- Schedule: 4 mornings a week, the groups meet from 8-8:25. Arrival time can vary and that is fine. Some students arrive at 8 and some not until 8:20. Some now like to get in early to have time with their advisor. Wednesday mornings are class meeting times, so

there is no meeting then. But every other Wednesday there is a period for school service so on alternate weeks, that Wednesday period will be advisory time. Advisors have lunch with their groups on Fridays.

- Content: The content varies from meeting to meeting. The meetings have become a welcomed component of the beginning of the day, functioning as a transition time to talk, participate in activities, or occasionally finish homework. It's a buffer before going off to class. What happens during each meeting can be determined by the needs and wants of the students. Sometimes there is discussion about community service, goal setting, respect and compassion, etc. Other times, the students go outside and run around.

- Parent question: Is there any guidance for applying to secondary school during meetings?: There is no specific guidance regarding school placement during the meetings. They may talk about related issues, such as what would students like to do in a new school, and what would they want to have accomplished before going to a new school? The meetings will try to build a sense of accomplishment. Largely the meetings focus on topics for the students—any struggles they may be facing either academically or socially.

Parent question: Is there any curriculum so all groups are doing same thing? No, because the groups should not function or feel just like a class. There is a shared Google doc to which all advisors have access that lists 30 activities created as options for the group meetings if ideas are needed. These activities can be done at any time. And as an example of a time when there was a uniform topic, this week the groups talked about ERB's so the students could check in about the tests, preparation, stress levels, etc.

- A resource for parents: Advisors can serve as an onsite point of contact for parents. They should not replace contacting a teacher directly with any specific class-related issues, but parents should always feel comfortable reaching out to an advisor to discuss any issues or concerns. Advisors can help problem-solve with parents and students. Parents can also contact advisors for smaller issues, i.e. if a student is out sick and work needs to be picked up. Advisors are also the eyes on the ground and can keep an eye on their assigned students. They serve as a nice balance between the parents and the teachers and can act as an intermediary.

- How advisors work together: Advisors meet as a team once a week. They brainstorm ideas, problem solves (i.e.—what to do with a particularly chatty class? Who can address this issue? What is the best approach and solution?). The advisors are boots on the ground so all can help each other.

Parent Feedback: Should there be more uniformity between groups? Does Mr. Evans

check in with advisors? Mr. Evans is not comfortable giving a specified curriculum. He will offer ideas for what he'd like the program to be and offer ideas. It's a goal for each group to accomplish the same things but the goal is really to meet the needs of the students. There is an existing outline re: communication but there is no manual and no script—that's anti advisory. And undoubtedly, there are growing pains. But all advisors have been advisors elsewhere and know how to manage their groups and the needs of the students.

Parent question: Do parents get anything from advisors on report cards? Advisors will submit a mid-term comment. There will also be the opportunity to meet with advisors on conference day.

Parent question: For US could advisory time be time to finish homework or study? Advisory time will always be flexible and based on student needs. This may also be an opportunity to balance finishing work done with a conversation about work load and how to best get work done. The program needs to remain flexible and without a curriculum, and because arrival time for all students vary, there isn't a set program for each day. But this allows for ongoing discussions—i.e. if some students forgot homework, how do you keep track of that? Everything can spark conversation and groups can discuss how to help stay organized and take care of each other.

Parent question: Why is advisory time so early? There is really no other time to do it and the program needs to be protective of its time as there are a lot of other activities that take its place (pie eating contest, Morris dancing, assembly, etc.). The school cannot sacrifice academic time for these things.

Additional remarks: There will be a meeting of advisors on December 1 to see how the program is going and what adjustments need to be made or questions have arisen.

c. **Doonie Brewer, Upper School English Teacher, grades 5-8** (dbrewer@st-peters-school.org)

- Ms. Brewer previously taught high school, middle school, and summer programs. She has a background in public speaking and will help develop declaimers.

Ms. Brewer's holds a graduate degree in American Studies, so would like to make parts of the curriculum more interdisciplinary, which is the new wave in helping students learn and understand comprehensively.

- She will be keeping curriculum the same, but may change the order of things. Ms. Brewer dispelled the rumor that she will be getting rid of portfolios.

d. **Dirk Parker, Upper School Science Teacher** (dparker@st-peters-school.org)

- New upper school science teacher and head of new innovation lab—title is US Science and Director of Innovation

- Everyone is very excited about what's going on in the Innovation Lab and Mr. Parker recommended everyone see the change in the formerly "scary basement." Much has been happening to change it. It's still transitioning, but things are in progress and during a recent advisory, one of the student's bodies was scanned to make a bust with the 3D printer. There will be a lot happening in the lab and items and time will be volunteered and donated to further spark innovation. Students may come home with questions and suggestions.

- The new Innovation Lab needs a new name. Possibly something that combines the concepts of the lab and the scary basement. Name TBA!

- Right now, the lab has a scanner and a 3D printer and Mr. Parker is hoping for a laser cutter to fabricate woods. He is also staging for Lego robotics and there are shelves that are hanging wood for woodworking and other projects. Mr. Parker would also like power tools and another 3D printer because they will be in high demand. One 3D print can take anywhere from 4-8 hours. If students bring a schematic, they can print whatever they want, but the line for this is expected to be very long.

- There is a wish list of needs for the Innovation Lab: spools of filament run \$40 a piece, come in 4-5 lbs, and usually net 15 builds, depending on the size. Filament is environmentally sound and can also be made by recycling plastic bottles and mistake builds, dropping in pellets. If the school could make its own filaments by recycling anything that's plastic, there might not be a need to buy them.

- Mr. Parker would like to work through the issue of the science lab's location on the 3rd floor and the Innovation Lab's being in the basement. This requires a lot of stairway travel.

Parent question: Can we show something completed up in the lobby? The busts of Gabe and Matt Evans may be up for Open House on Saturday.

Parent suggestion: Giving tree at auction? Attendees can contribute an ornament on the giving tree which represents donated items for the lab.

- Mr. Parker is working on a plan for a Maker's Fair. This encourages all grades to invent or create—could be anything. Speakers are invited to talk about creating a business or inventing. Mr. Parker is also considering a mini "shark tank." Students would pitch ideas to parents who would choose one or two ideas for the school to adopt and/or

microfund. Students would create and market the product outside of school. Mr. Parker asked for outreach to entrepreneurial parents who might fund or invent themselves to speak on a panel or help choose student projects to fund.

- There is interest in using the lab for more than a couple of periods a day—how else can the space be used? The space should be used to encourage students to think outside of the classroom box, to think creatively and actively create. For example: students may be able to come down for a 20 minute spaghetti tower challenge or other activities in which they can participate at various times.

2. Harvest Festival Wrap Up

a. THANK YOU Suzanne O'Brien, 2015 Harvest Fest Chair

- Thank you to Suzanne. Friday was a great success

b. Pumpkins were PHENOMENAL!!!

-Pumpkins are currently on the West lawn, but may move. Claim your pumpkin if you want one.

c. Comments? Feedback?—Change in day? What worked/didn't?

- Overall feedback was that the entire day was great. The change to Friday worked well because all kids could be there as some couldn't come due to conflicts on Saturdays. There was a suggestion to make the festivities start a little later. Some working parents missed the color calling and if later, parents could volunteer more. What about right after school? There was influx of people at 5 when more parents could get there.

- Some parents would like alcohol to be like available. The festival could be like an Oktoberfest. There could be a selection of different beers (We can't sell alcoholic beverages but maybe it could be part of ticket price?).

- Color week and the build up to Friday were excellent. There was a lot of excitement around all the different days and that really helped the ECD students feel involved.

- Lines were long because so many more people were there at the same time as opposed to when the festival was on Saturday. There was the suggestion that popular activities like face painting could number kids who would come back in time for their number.

- Food seemed to run out too early and there was not enough variety for the kids or for adults who don't eat things like pulled pork. Several years ago parents volunteered for the grill and served hamburgers and grilled chicken, etc. There was a suggestion to incorporate parts of that model.

- This year there was an attempt to have less volunteers needed so more parents could be with their children and enjoy the festival, but some parents missed volunteering on a larger scale.

- It was nice that the festival was contained so kids could play independently.

3. **SPS Open House – Rafhia Foster** (rfoster@st-peters-school.org)

a. **Saturday, October 25th 1- 3 pm**

- 59 families registered. Over 100 people may be attendance. Most are for preschool, then preK, then Kindergarten. There are some families registered for lower and upper school. They are coming from a lot of schools in the city and over 18 different zip codes. Gender is 50-50. Several families are return visitors.

-Because of high attendance, format needed to be changed at last minute to maximize volunteers and make more efficient for attendees. To prevent bottlenecking and accommodate all ECD attendees, all interested in ECD will stay in theater for a longer presentation and then tour the classrooms. Other grades will tour after initial presentation.

- There is more to see this year: the Innovation Lab, gardens, art spaces at Old Pine.

b. **Rafhia made a request for additional volunteers.**

- This is a great opportunity for parents to talk to prospective parents.

4. **Halloween Celebration and Conferences**

a. **Halloween Play is Thursday, October 30th at 2:15**

- LS and US change into costumes, ECD wear costumes to school in the morning, over clothes then change after a.m. parade

- Costumes can be anything and don't have to relate to the 8th grade play

-There is a morning parade for ECD on Wiggins lawn. Parents can stay and watch.

b. **Teacher Conferences**

i. Sign up on line.

ii. Upper School – sign up with advisor and any subject of concern.

- The newsletter has links online to sign up for conferences.

5. **Teacher Appreciation Events – Diana Urbanchuk, Chair** (diana@urbanchuk.com)

a. **Appreciation Luncheon Discussion – either Dec 1st or April 3rd**

- Teachers truly appreciate the lunch and parents like doing it. It was very successful last

year. Works best when students are not present so the faculty can truly enjoy it. Parents volunteer to donate food and decorate.

- The two possible dates for this calendar year are December 1st or April 3rd. April is the safer date rather than the Monday after the Thanksgiving break. Gestures of appreciation will still be done throughout the year, like flowers and balloons in the teachers lounge.

- Class parents need to communicate re: teacher appreciation week. There needs to be an ask for written thank you notes from families to give out to teachers. They should be heartfelt messages about the whole year, not just teacher appreciation week.

b. Holiday Gifts for Teachers

- St. Peter's School families traditionally join together to provide holiday and end-of-the-year gifts to the teachers, administrators and directors of the school. The Parent's Association hopes these recommendations will help guide Class Parents and families in their generous gift giving.

- Upper School VPS and any US Class Parents to meet on Wednesday, November 5th after drop off to discuss gifts for advisors / homeroom teachers. Information will be shared to US Class Parents following the meeting.

- ECD & Lower School Holiday and End of Year Teacher Gifts Recommendations:
Class Gifts:

- We recommend that the Class Parents coordinate gifts as a class, although it is not compulsory for any family to contribute.

- Please be sure to gift the Teacher, Assistants/Assistant Teachers and the Divisional Directors from any money collected from families.

- There is no need to provide gifts to other teachers within the same grade.

- Divisional Directors - Preschool - Grade 2: Kate Seltzer and Grade 2 - Grade 5: Matt Evans.

- All students names should be included on the card, regardless of the family's choice to contribute.

- All Class parents within a division are welcome to work together to provide a single or coordinated gift to the Divisional Director.

- Personalized gifts created by the children and coordinated by Class Parents outside of classroom hours are always appreciated.

- Special Subject teachers, facilities, administration: a School-wide collection box will be provided in reception desk for these special-subject faculty and staff. Families should be encouraged to contribute via the box in reception. Collected class money does not need to be utilized for Special Subject teachers in lieu of the school wide collection box.

6. **Holiday Sale – Megan Thorell, Development and Admissions Associate** (mthorell@st-peters-school.org)
 - a. **Holiday Sale will take place Friday, December 5th – Saturday, December 6th**
 - The sale is now a two-day event: Friday afternoon and Saturday all day. Wreath decorating takes place on Thursday night, December 4th.
 - b. **Proceeds benefit our SPS Scholarship Fund** – this is the only annual event earmarked specifically for Scholarships and Financial Aid
 - c. **Thanks to Butch Sullivan and Jason Clouser for helping with Trees!!**
 - There is a need for more dads and volunteers to help with tree sales.
 - d. **Thanks to Jennie Pritzker for designing Wreath Designs**
 - e. **Thanks to Molly Hughes Lavino for staging and designing this year's sale**
 - f. **Santa Breakfast – Belinda McLeod, Heather Levine, and Melissa McCloud**
 - The Santa Breakfast is on Saturday, December 6th. Volunteers are needed for this event. Attendance is largely ECD, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. Steven Starr has donated Breakfast food. Tickets purchased in advance or at door. There is a full breakfast, games (cookie decorating, crafts, etc.) and pictures provided with Santa.
 - g. **The Holiday Sale is THE major volunteer event of the Fall.**
 - There is a great need of volunteers for the sale. There is a sign up board for all volunteer slots which will be posted in the lobby.
 - The spirit shop and bake sale are being eliminated this year. Sprit shop will be a pop-up store during the week. This may include some prepackaged food items.
 - The sale is an event that engages the entire community—many people not from St. Peter's buy their trees and wreaths there.
 - The sale will be advertised around the St. Peter's neighborhood and all the way across Broad Street. There was a suggestion to contact the Center City Residents Association.
7. **Spring Auction – Catherine Signorello, Auction Chair** (csignorello23@msn.com)
 - a. **Friday, March 27, 2015 at 7 pm**
 - b. **Location Announcement: Moore College of Art**—beautiful space good price, great view.

- c. **First auction meeting on Wednesday, October 29th** after drop off, in the library. This is a brainstorming meeting to get everything started. It is not required to sign up to volunteer at this meeting.

8. Running Club: - Sasha Best (sasha150@gmail.com) / Liz Blum (elizabeth_hutson@yahoo.com)

- Running Club is off to a fine start with returning friends and newbies. Thanks to everyone who has come out. The club hopes more folks will feel the pull of beautiful fall weather along waterside and urban walkway adventures! They run at a very moderate pace and distances between 2 and 4 miles. They also encourage and fully support walking at any time.

- Feel free to contact Sasha Best or Liz Blum with questions. Otherwise meet in the lobby at 8:30 on Tuesday mornings! Return is usually by 9:15 AM.

9. New Business:

a. Book Sale Revival Idea

- The book fair was done in years past with smaller bookstores that tended to have higher priced items. The Scholastic sale is a nice way for classroom teachers to build libraries. The proceeds go to teachers for books and in-classroom libraries.

- Parent suggestion: Can we link it with summer reading list? Could you purchase summer reading books at the fair?

- Need to form a committee for the sale. Page Dicker will lead the organization of the book sale and work with Scholastic who provides materials for school book fairs. If it's onsite or online is still TBD, but either way, Scholastic provides whole packages of necessary material.

10. Miscellaneous:

- a. Parent directory is going out today, digitally.
- b. What happened to clothes that were left at the swap? Maybe a last chance opportunity? Maybe donate?
- c. What is the plan for this year's MLK day? This will be an agenda item at the November meeting.
- d. What is the school doing for the holidays for the less fortunate? There will be an update at the next meeting.
- e. After the meeting we spoke to Shawn and he mentioned that while this is nothing official, the school is monitoring the ongoing situation regarding Ebola in the United States. The school is working with the National Association Independent Schools (NAIS) and the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools (PAIS) and their teams to be prepared in the event anything changes.
- f. Reminder: We switch to Winter Uniforms Monday, November 3rd!!

NEXT PARENTS ASSOCIATION MEETING Friday, November 21st 8:30 am in Library – Speakers will include James Lavino, Strategic Plan Implementation co-Chair for the Academic and Culture Committees, who will be discussing and collecting feedback regarding Traditions at SPS. Our aim in these PA meetings is to pack as much helpful information as possible in one hour without running over the 9:30am mark. Please email us (parentsassociation@st-peters-school.org) with any future agenda items. Thanks for reading!