

PTO Meeting

January 19

Present: Tara Davis (chair), Katie Wilson, Martha Hunt, Chelsea Wiehl, Traci Bartlett, Karla Lumbra, Abbie Morse, Jess Bashford

Notes

Staff introductions: Traci Bartlett, Chelsea Wiehl (K teacher)

Tara shared Mary K (principal) updates: staff focused on upcoming transition to second semester; preparations for semester 2; Its sent home about second semester with teacher/class assignments and safety flyer; more in depth info to be sent four days prior to 28th.

There may be an informational video and/or family forum of some sort via Zoom after start of second semester.

Second semester student numbers in building: The number of students transitioning to in-person are similar to the number of students transitioning to all-remote (meaning numbers in the building won't fluctuate tremendously). While the other Bratt schools have more coming in than going out, Chelsea said it's not a significant increase at OG.

Kathryn Mason will be hosting a school counselor intern; she started last week.

Mary working to put together another photo newsletter.

Leadership Council meeting updates: Tara attended last week. Parent survey has been put on hold until the spring. The thinking is it might be more informative in preparation for next school year. Leadership Council is a new entity this year as a result of the merger. Intended to be another vehicle of communication; link from parents & school to school board.

Tara referenced Reformer article and other conversations about potential un-merger. Katie mentioned that it hasn't been very long to necessarily pass judgment on success (or not) of merger; Tara agreed with idea that it feels premature to change course. She also mentioned that Mary spoke of the benefits of meeting and collaborating with all the school principals on a regular basis over the course of this past year. Plus the fact that the school grouping for remote learning would not have existed without the merged district.

Chelsea sharing what she feels would be helpful reminders for home communication: Making sure families are really clear about what warrants quarantine; protocols around drop off and pick up. Procedures aren't changing but there will now be twice as many kids. Help with communication about dismissal now being 2:40.

Tara mentioned that engagement is being discussed at board level. Data around engagement linked to school success rates. Having parents engaged in school (with school); strong indicator of success. Chelsea mentioned Andy's survey that went out to teachers before holiday break. It

was unclear what data it yielded. Tara mentioned the brainstorm from last PTO meeting around virtual family fun/engagement.

PTO Updates

Tara's primary role has been to champion the transition of our school playground to a Living Schoolyard. She joined the Farm to School Committee (including garden coordinator - Tara Gordon, teachers and reps from Food Connects, Edible Brattleboro). The committee is looking to bring back "Harvest of the Month". Tara Gordon is coordinating with the Co-op to potentially do a combination of in-class/virtual cooking demonstrations for classes. Beets are January's Harvest of the Month.

School is getting sprout kits from Food Connects; there will be some kind of growing activity happening for all classes that request it.

Second grade has been studying birds with BEEC; pre-K made bird feeders with Tara Gordon. PTO is requesting donations and efforts to support this work and establish something permanent.

Tara Davis and Tara Gordon have been trying to coordinate closely to support continued efforts around growing our Living Schoolyard. Perimeter path will be a sensory path. Some of that work has been done thanks to COVID funds (evidence of meandering path through apple orchard already present). One proposed idea is for a "living tunnel"--exact details TBD.

Focus has been on working collaboratively across various disciplines and with different committees, staff, etc.,

On MLK Day, Tara posted idea of a social justice entity of some sort--to get a discussion going; not sure what shape the entity would take. There are people interested and funds (potentially) available to support these efforts. Idea of "poet-tree", living art form. Social-justice lending library inspired by little library focused on racial/social justice library on Pleasant St. Wondering if current librarian (Cate filling in for Lexi Oliver) is someone who may be interested in supporting these efforts. Chelsea mentioned importance of connecting with Mikaela Sims and Diversity/Equity Committee to connect vision, funding, etc., Traci and Kylie Weld are OG staff on that committee.

More on lending library idea: idea of a lending library with family/parenting focused books.

Katie wondered if this year might be a tough time to launch a new lending library due to COVID realities. Suggested looking into digital resources for short-term.

Kathryn Mason has a BLM Reading Room:

<https://sites.google.com/wsesu.org/oakgrovecounseling/blm-reading-room>

Tara referenced resources through local author and activist Angela Berkfield's new book "Parenting 4 Social Justice"

Winter Sports

OG hasn't been trying to launch winter sports; parents have expressed interest and curious that other schools seem to be moving forward with winter sports efforts. Tara wondered if two major barriers were transportation and gear. Chelsea added that staff capacity is another major barrier. Staff, especially at OG given its small size, is at capacity.

Idea of classes getting one day for a special outdoors activity; Maybe use PTO funds to hire an org like BEEC, VT Wilderness School, that can run a program.

Chelsea reminded everyone of stress on teachers to keep everyone safe this year. Loves idea of one afternoon of sledding. Says it feels like a gift as opposed to an ask. It's been really hard to have fun with students this year. Transportation is often a big barrier. This year it would have to be a bus with windows open due to COVID. Teachers can't drive kids this year.

Conversations have ensued about possibility of fires; other schools are having fires (Academy, Putney Central, Guilford). Traci said she talked to Mary about possibilities of fires and they're not possible. Chelsea spoke to her daughter's experiences at Academy with outdoor time, and cooking over fires; wishes OG was situated in another location with more access to woods. Tara brought up potential of Wilsons' Woods; PreK and BEEC have recently teamed up to explore the possibility. Living Schoolyard has had these conversations and wants to support them.

Jess noted that lack of gear keeps resurfacing--she wondered how other schools are equipped with outdoor wear for their classes.

Chelsea mentioned how few kids regularly come with weather-appropriate clothes. Level of organization that happens at the school level. Katie mentions it's really opaque on parent side about how gear needs could be met.

Chelsea mentioned the need to articulate, at a district level, priorities (e.g., outdoor ed) and then ensure that all kids, in all schools, are able to experience those things in meaningful ways. How can district staff/fund/organize events/experiences in equitable ways?

Abby asked about Valentine's Day: Chelsea said that Valentine's Day is on the weekend this year. At Academy no licked envelopes or anything to eat. Chelsea is guessing Oak Grove may follow suit (i.e., no party). Chelsea will ask about Valentine's Day at this week's staff meeting.

Bringing concerns about equity, resources and programming to Leadership council in February.

Scheduling: PTO now overlaps with the WSESD merged school board meeting. Suggested switch to 4th Tuesday of the month

