

Avery PTO General Meeting Minutes

9/19/2022

1. Intro to PTO and Exec Board

- Ingrid Deetz- – President
- Katie Rich – Secretary
- Kris Sontheimer – Treasurer
- Erica Morrison – V.P.
- Hannah Peterson – Principal
- Stacey Kuschel – 5th grade teacher and staff liaison
- Nancy Pollihan – front office

PTO is made up of parents, teachers, admin that work together to develop programs and funding for those programs to improve the school. We are also a conduit that parents can use to address concerns and needs.

We have a lot of events that have been on hiatus for the last couple of years, but we are bringing those back and looking forward to that.

We also make sure our teachers and staff feel appreciated throughout the year for all they're doing.

2. Ice Breaker

- Heather Adams – has twins in Kindergarten w/ Mrs. Masterson and daughter in 2nd grade. Just moved here 2 weeks ago.
- Shannon Moore – 5th grader in Mrs. Thompson's class. Will have been at Avery for 16 years. She does Run for Webster.
- Amanda – has 5th grader, plus 1st and 8th graders
- Allison Webster – Kindergartner in Mrs. Arbini's class
- Lindsey Moody – 7th grader, 2nd grader, and one to start K next year
- Christine Novalis – 3rd grader Clark and 1st grader
- Maureen Jones – has a 6th grader, 3rd grader in Timmerman's, and a K in Mrs. Arbini's class
- Danica – has Frankie in 3rd grade in Mrs. French's class and a preschooler who just started at Ambrose
- Jennifer – 3rd grader in Timmerman's class

3. Board Elections

Need to vote in this year's Board. Voting is a formality but needs to be done. We would fully welcome any co-positions.

Motion made to vote in the board. Seconded. Board approved.

4. Review Budget and Vote

Kris: The top half is expenses we have, and the bottom half is fundraisers. Are there questions about the expenditures?

Q: What are the PTO Buy-Out expenses?

Ingrid: We are asking for people to donate. That goes directly back to the teachers. The money goes directly back to the teachers to make improvements to their classrooms.

Kris: We are hoping to bring in \$10K. Whatever we bring in goes right back out.

Q: Is the number at the top what is in the bank right now?

Kris: Yes, it is very close. I need to add a few minor changes.

Q: Trivia night?

A: Fundraising for this year typically funds next year's event, but that has changed. Trivia funds a lot of the everyday stuff at the top. If there's a special need, that might go under a "Fund a Need." Big buckets where money is going...teacher grants, field trip grants (\$1K per grade to offset costs), \$5K for staff appreciation. We made a guess, because we have no idea what the attendance will be.

Playground/recess = \$3500. We were looking for those kids who don't want to do the sports/athletics...plan is to buy some tables and shade umbrellas and art kits for those who aren't interested in being active on the playground. The teachers have made this request.

Stage = \$1500. 2-3 years ago an anonymous donor donated \$10K to Avery. Kevin Starks was the principal at the time. Some signage of diverse people was purchased. "Podcaster" was also purchased so the kids could do pod-casting. The donor reached out to find out how the money got utilized. Aaron Winkler reached out to the donor to get more context around the funding. The donor wanted plaques put in the school for 2 of the favorite teachers when he was there. He also wanted the funds to go to benefit music and social studies. The idea of a stage had been circulated for several years. Heather Mosley reached out to get quotes on a stage. There is approximately \$6500 left of the funds. The stage would be used for musicals, concerts, the end of 5th year celebration. Someone is going to be working with the 3rd and 4th-grade teams to use the Podcaster equipment to support social studies.

Q: Someone was talking about the need for a sound system and stage so that we could actually hear the kids better.

A: We don't think the quote includes a sound system. Mrs. Mosley is looking at the same company that Bristol used and was recommended for Avery. It's a pretty big stage but is modular so can be set up to fit smaller groups of kids as well.

Q: Instead of giving each grade level \$1K for field trips, perhaps it should be based on number of students...there are more 5th graders than Kindergartners.

A: We are open to field trips – it was just an easy way to break down the money. Allocating based on number of kids is totally reasonable. We just wanted to make sure that one grade alone didn't receive all of the funding.

Q: How many field trips does each grade level go on? Do younger kids take more?

A: This is an ongoing conversation about field trips. What is the expectation? Some teams go on more field trips than others. We want to equalize the number of field trips between the grade levels and ensure there is some kind of curriculum connection.

A: To be honest, it is really expensive to take a field trip, especially with transportation and fuel costs rising. We try to use the district bus because it's more affordable. 5th graders like to go to Challenger Space Center for their curriculum. We wrote a grant and won it, but it's still very expensive. We would use almost \$700-\$800 for that one field trip and would not be able to do another field trip unless we asked parents for funding. That presents a tricky situation. Some years parents have been generous, and other years they have not been on board with that. We are looking for opportunities and experiences but need to consider cost. \$1K would get us one field trip and maybe half of another. Perhaps we could allocate a certain dollar value per kid. Some grade levels are also just less interested in field trips. You would think \$1K would go a long way, and it doesn't. Teachers and teams can also apply for additional grants, which has been done in the past. The money has been used to put toward another field trip. 5th grade has gone to Springfield, IL; to Pilot Knob for the Civil War. The Challenger Learning Center is another big one, of course. Providing some budget for field trips would be much appreciated by several teams.

There are 2 grade levels that have an extra class – 3rd and 5th grade have 4 classrooms, while the others have only 3 classrooms. We didn't take that into account when budgeting \$1K per classroom.

Q: \$1500 was budgeted for 5th grade special activities. At what point do we say, "Hey, 5th grade got enough!"

A: That money was for 5th grade parties, t-shirts, etc. – things that have become the norm.

Q: What about the 5th grade ski trip?

A: We were finding that the 6 different elementary schools in WGSD were funding things differently, so different kids were coming into Hixson with very different experiences. There's an ongoing conversation in the district about field trips. The larger conversation for Dr. Peterson is that grade levels have equal access to field trips.

Q: How do the different schools deal with field trips?

A: Bristol funded all of their field trips. It's different for each school.

Perhaps we can allocate funds per grade level class, knowing those funds can shift a little. We can accommodate for the larger classes but don't have to make it a numbers game.

Lindsey: At some point in the past, Avery kids at Hixson were being funded by the PTO for Camp Wyman and trying to track funds only for specific former Avery students was a nightmare.

Nancy: We have roughly 400 per kid. That equates to about \$15/kid. We try to get the District Bus which is half the price of the First Student buses. The school is very, very cost-conscious to try to save on field trips.

Ingrid: The field trip money was a lump sum, and we haven't figured out how we need to split it up.

Q: Can the budget come out a couple of weeks earlier so that people have a chance to look over it?

Kris: I was voluntold for the position of Treasurer, so action was a bit delayed but now it's under wraps and I'm ready to be more proactive.

Amanda: Maybe I'm optimistic, but I think if we send it out a couple of weeks ahead of time, people will be more engaged.

Ingrid: Once the budget is approved, we will be sending it out through the Pulse where the money is going, what we're using it for, etc. There will be more proactive communications. This is just kind of our working budget. Things will change as the year goes on. This is just a best guess for now. As things come up, we will change things.

Q: If we approve this budget, what is the plan for how the field trip funds will be spent?

A: We need to talk to the teachers first to understand what we're even looking at in terms of field trips. We can come back to this in the next meeting.

Hannah: One suggestion is that we're approving the lump sum for field trips, knowing that we need to have more conversations within the building to discuss field trips. We can come back next year with more input. To Stacey Kuschel's point, there are certainly some grade levels that are taking a lot more field trips.

Ingrid: The way the budget is written, we do not have to do \$1K per grade level. That was just an internal conversation.

Q: When are the Buy-Out funds going out this year?

A: Half will go out to teachers in October and half will go out in Spring. Not everyone gives before the deadline, so it's somewhat of a balancing act. We request everything in by Oct. 14th, but that doesn't always happen. This also coincides with Fall Festival.

Q: If we get less for PTO Buy-Out than we anticipate, how is that distributed? Do you do \$5K for fall and only \$3K for Spring if you only get \$8K total?

A: We currently only have \$3K raised. This is all new info for the new Board.

Q: Does Nancy know any info on PTO Buy-Out funds and how they were spent in the past?

A: Yes, cash came in, and she kept that in the safe. When teachers turned in their receipts, she would keep track as people received their allotment. Funds went out to teachers, reading teachers, SSD teachers, etc. When teachers made a purchase, they would turn in receipts, maxing out at \$128 in the fall and in the spring. When they reached that amount, that was the end of their reimbursements. Whatever they spent getting ready for the school year, they would turn in their receipts.

Lindsey: \$3K is low for right now.

Hannah: Whatever is raised for PTO Buy-Out should be divided by the amount of staff that's going to be given funds.

Teachers have not been told a set amount yet. We either give them less or make it up somewhere else in the budget.

Q: If people give more, does it go into the Buy-Out for next year?

A: I wouldn't do that because some parents would be upset it didn't go to their school year. Sometimes corporations do a match.

It's hard because you're asking for Buy-Out, funds for Progressive Dinner, and for Fall Festival. Progressive used to be done in the Spring.

Now that Progressive Dinner is closing (as of tomorrow), I have no problem pushing harder for Buy-Out.

If everyone gave \$20, then we'd meet our Buy-Out budget. People give in different ways.

We need a United Way thermometer.

Idea: Ask people to buy magazine subscriptions and then go back to the regular Buy-Out as an incentive.

Conversation: We need better communication on Buy-Out. People don't know what it's about. They don't realize how important it is to teachers. Ask people if they'd rather donate or buy wallpaper, etc. – emphasizing the lack of having to shell popcorn, etc. We need a visual. The guilt + positive reinforcement can work wonders. Include pictures of teachers holding up things they've gotten in the past. This would be incentive for people to donate when they see the actual impact. Another idea: Doing a "Hat for a Day" fundraiser. Everyone can wear a hat, but not everyone has to donate. Or a "PJ Day" fundraiser.

In marketing, you need 7 touches before someone takes action.

Backpack mail. A thermometer sign out front. Social media. An email from the head room parents.

Hannah: We have tried to reduce backpack paper to reduce waste and clutter.

Head room parents are in process. Parents are far more likely to read something that comes directly from their child's teacher than from the newsletter. Teachers can also reach out to families.

Do a coloring page for kids to bring home of "how this will help our classroom." The front page has the "write about your dreams." The back page has the "This is what you DON'T have to do;

The reimbursement angle is very compelling also. Knowing that teachers already spent this money.

Motion to approve budget, with the understanding that there needs to be ongoing discussions. Motion seconded. Budget approved.

5. Past Event Feedback

- a. Yoohoo/Boohoo --
- b. Picnic --
- c. Movie Night – there were some variety of behaviors at Movie Night. Reminding them of the AVERY way brought them back in-line. Just ask a kid, "Are you following the Avery Way?" and they'll probably know what you're talking about.

6. Progressive Dinner (9/24)

Maureen is heading Progressive. Sales will end tomorrow at 5 pm. That will take place on Saturday. This is the last chance if you want to go. There are currently about 40 people signed up (20 couples), not including hosts.

7. Fall Festival (10/7)

Fall Festival is going well. It's moving along. In the Pulse, there are Sign-Up Geniuses. Collecting prizes. We have a couple more weeks to send in little plastic treasures. Tomorrow night there is a stapling party at Amanda's house. Will be tearing and stapling game tickets and raffle tickets. Info is going home in backpack mail this week. Some things will be different. Most will be the same. A lot of the games are being rebuilt by individuals who are putting in tons of time and money and effort.

Behavior expectations – are reminding kids of expected behaviors. Some behaviors are happening at schools other than Avery. We need to amplify the message that supervision is great; adults should be there with their kids, and we need to make sure that nothing is done regarding destruction of property.

Policy: If any parents ask you once to quit and you don't comply, then the second time you will be asked to leave. There will be paid police officers on the campus. Note this is NOT a danger. It's just typical middle school behavior for kids to come and hang out. Most of the troubled behaviors tend to be with older kids that aren't even current Avery students. "Troubled" doesn't mean dangerous – it's just typical middle-school shenanigans. All volunteers will be empowered to tell kids when it's time to stop if there's an issue. But the event is so fun! Come! (The worst

in the past was some vandalism and some rowdy behavior towards volunteers in the Haunted Hallway. These Middle School kids don't know who Dr. Peterson is; one grown-up is just like another in their eyes. There has been a district-wide effort to have consistency about behavioral expectations.)

There is going to be one point of entry – the front door. We're not going to turn anyone away just because there's isn't a grown-up with you. Sometimes older siblings come with their younger siblings. We are doubling volunteers for the Cake Walk. We hope to have more people in the trouble spots, and also better communicate to the volunteers about what has happened in the past and what they do if similar behavior occurs. We're just trying to be more on top of it.

8. Front Lawn Discussion

Last year, Amanda realized that no one was doing anything to the front lawn flower beds. The school district will mow grass and rake leaves once per year. If the PTO puts in plants, it is responsible to maintain them. Amanda has organized 3 front lawn clean-up events. A lot of people come, it's great, and the front lawn looks a lot better. We've been able to maintain what's out front without a ton of work.

On the Atalanta size, there are 6-8 raised wooden garden beds. In the past, people have done a little bit of gardening there. That area is now really overgrown. Daniel Oppy has started cutting back some of the bigger stuff on his own. Others have tried weeding, but it just grows right back. Teachers haven't expressed any interest in doing anything with it. The school district will not maintain it because they cannot mow it.

What should be done with that? Rip it out and put down grass seed? Do kids want to get involved in a teacher-led garden activity with support of parents/PTO? i.e. In Spring we plant pumpkin or sunflower seeds.

We can put it out to parents...it was Kelly Dunsford, who has since left, who ran those boxes. Some teachers had a beautification club, and then COVID happened. Mrs. Holder did some beautification. It was a passion project.

Hannah: There was a grant available from the Webster Groves Garden Club specifically set aside for WG schools. Hixson received it last year and put it toward their garden. If we could get a task force of families / teachers and get the beds into a ready condition, they would probably be utilized. The biggest concern is the maintenance of them. Brian Keller (and wife Christine) is on the Board and lives on Atalanta and have asked about those beds. He forwarded info on the grant.

We will put something in the Pulse to see if anyone takes ownership of it. Hannah will also ask the staff is anyone is interested. We can offer support to get it started, but someone will have to own ongoing maintenance. The question is if we can reignite the energy for it.

It could be integrated into curriculum about lifecycle.

What about Adventure Club? Or Cub Scouts? Or Girl Scouts?

Does the WG Garden Club have a Junior Division?

Hannah: Her neighbor across the street works at the Missouri Botanical Gardens, and her yard is always gorgeous and low maintenance.

Amanda: The tree came down. I recommend we plant another tree in that spot.

Hannah: The front wall is not in great shape, and water often passes into the classrooms that are up against that front wall. She reached out to Jason Miller and he said to not do anything yet because he doesn't want tree roots to press into the foundation and cause further disruption. Now that the Bond passed, she has reached out to find out when that money comes to Avery. He has mentioned that they might be able to fix that wall. They were going to dig a trench across the front and put in some drainage, but now might be able to do it internally. Hannah will reach out to him again to find out if it's okay to plant a tree now.

Amanda has been talking to Andy Vance who is a landscape designer with kids at Avery. She'll get suggestions from him.

Some people might give specifically to Fund a Need fundraisers. That might reach a different subset of donors. People might also want to give specifically for that garden area. We should look at what it would cost to do a quarterly maintenance for that area.

9. Ways to get involved

Become a PTO board member!

Volunteer!

Chair a committee!

Q: Trivia Night – are we going big or small this year? We could go back to Ursuline, which would give us the ability to have 350 people, or we could do the Shrewsbury Community Center, which would cap us at 250 max. There's a cost with going big. Shrewsbury is roughly \$1100. Ursuline is around \$3000.

We haven't had this event in a long time. Since we've last had this event, we have a smaller population.

We have zero socials on the calendar right now and that needs to change. No wine socials. No class level events. In the past, everyone would sign up for Fall Progressive Dinner at Spring Trivia Night. Now the timing is off. In other schools, Trivia Night is selling out because people are desperate for social interaction.

Suggestion – go big, but don't raise the ticket prices.

A lot of activities are not spread out well.

Q: How much would we normally charge per table? Who knows...perhaps \$200 or \$250 per table for 8 people.

Looking at the budget, we are missing a ton of opportunity. Someone has to step around the socials and get the word out. Ex. Field Trip Wine Trip.

In the past, didn't like how socials were all centered around Trivia Night. Trying to offer a variety of activities, not just alcohol-related activities. We did a family hike one Sunday afternoon. People paid a nominal amount of money to fund raise but the bigger goal was to build community.

10. Open discussion

You should be able to subscribe to the Avery calendar on the WGSD site so that it syncs to your iCal or Google Calendar.