

BEYE PTO MEETING MINUTES

1/19/10

I. Introductions

Michelle Brandt called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. New Business

PTO Board & Committee Chair Updates

Special Events: Laurie Myers

Fun Fair Saturday, February 20. Volunteers are needed. Please contact Laurie if you are interested.

Conferences Thursday & Friday, February 4 & 5. Prepared food dishes are still needed. Please contact Laurie if you can help.

Fundraising: Cathy Cerniglia

Fall Book Fair netted \$1,300

Bulls game netted \$340

Box tops have netted \$400 so far

Penguin Patch netted \$200, but much of the proceeds from the event went to provide a "gift buying" opportunity to those students from lower income households.

Upcoming Events:

- **Spring Book Fair** February 3-5. Volunteers are needed. Please contact **Ford Willoughby** if you are interested.
- **5th Grade T-Shirt Sale** Shirts cost \$9 and the \$12 charge will fund shirts for those students who cannot afford one.

130th Anniversary: Lisa Kitzman & Steve Wood

Capital Campaign The goal is to raise \$20,000 to purchase Smart Boards (\$3-4,000 each) for classrooms: one grade level at a time. The "headline goal" is to raise \$130 from 130 families to get above \$16,000. So far, 50 families have contributed to bring the total to \$9,000. A small group of parents and staff observed Smart Boards in a River Forest classroom. It greatly enhances the classroom experience.

Yard Sign Sales have added almost \$1,000 to the Capital Campaign. There are 25 signs left. Please contact **Lisa Kitzman** if you are interested.

Fitzgerald's Fundraiser Thursday April 15. Items are needed for the live auction.

"Beye-In" Parties will be scheduled throughout the spring. These will be parent-sponsored theme parties that include each subgroups of the Beye School community (men, women, students, families, etc).

Gospel Brunch Sunday May 16. Alumni will be invited. Tours of the school and Historic Neighborhood Walk will be offered.

130th Day of School falls the week before Spring Break. A multitude of events are planned, including an historic classroom to show current Beye students (and parents) what it would have been like to go to Beye School in 1879.

Green Team: Ana Garcia Doyle

Commercial dishwasher is installed. The lunchroom is waiting for drying racks for trays.

The committee is reapplying for the same \$10,000 grant it won last year. It is currently brainstorming for specific ways to use the funds.

Vermicomposters are on their way.

Next meeting is Jan 28 at Ana's home. Please stop by if you are interested in participating.

Treasurer's Report: Kate Ulrich

PTO currently has a sound financial position, but Membership contributions are down from last year. Please consider helping out this year.

III. Guest Speaker: Shannon Sullivan; Executive Director of Illinois Safe Schools Alliance

Michelle Brandt introduced **Dr. Constance Collins**, District 97 Superintendent and **Jonathon Ellwanger**, Beye School Principal.

Jonathon Ellwanger:

Beye School has worked hard for over a decade to be a safe and welcoming place for all students from all family dynamics. The goal for tonight's meeting is to inform and raise awareness and, most importantly, respect for the many students at Beye who come from non-traditional families. The annual turnover at Beye School ranges between 15-18% of students, faculty and staff, combined. This makes Beye an ever-changing environment. It is helpful to remind ourselves of who we are as a community and celebrate our diversity. While all PTO meetings are open to the public, only those from the Beye School community will be allowed to speak.

Mr. Ellwanger introduced three representatives of Beye School's **School Improvement Team (SIT)**:

Lynn Kamenitsa, SIT Co-Chair:

SIT is a group of Beye teachers and parents who meet every year to evaluate and plan the in three main areas:

- Enhance the achievement of all Beye students.

- Work to close the achievement gap.
- Improve the overall climate at Beye School.

When planning for the 2009-2010 school year, **SIT** took particular notice of heightened incidents of language using the term “gay”. It was especially hurtful when directed at students from families with two gay parents. The team decided to proactively address this issue with the particular sensitivity to each student’s home environment and privacy. The team contacted **Illinois Safe Schools Alliance** to facilitate three staff development sessions (two have concluded with a wrap-up planned for Spring) and one parent education night (tonight’s PTO Meeting). It must be clarified that there was no curriculum adopted or purchased for students. Instead, the focus is on giving adults the tools to deal with situations as they arise.

Karen Foleno, Student Support Specialist

There are currently two programs in place in District 97 to directly enhance the school environment:

- **Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS)** Focuses on teaching and rewarding positive behavior in all students. The program is probably better known as Paws Passes, where all adults in the Beye School building are encouraged to reward positive behavior when they see it the form of a paper slip with the student’s name on it. All Paws Passes recipients take part in a weekly drawing for prizes.
- **Students Taking Actions in New Directions (STAND)** Anti bullying program focuses on turning the bystanders to problem situations into problem solvers. Each student is encouraged to say something to any adult, whether a member of the Beye School faculty or staff, or at home.

Karen Fogg, 5th Grade Teacher

SIT aims to create and maintain a safe place for ALL kids; including those from non-traditional families. Training from **Illinois Safe Schools** has fostered discussion among the Beye School faculty and served to heighten awareness and comfort in dealing with issues.

Mr. Ellwanger introduced Shannon Sullivan,

Clips were shown from three films used at staff development. All three were produced by **GroundSpark**: <http://groundspark.org/>.

- **It’s Still Elementary:** An updated release of an original 1997 release, **It’s Elementary**. Features follow-ups to the students featured in the original film. Shown to faculty and staff at the August 24th Institute Day. In the clip, the nationwide search started in 1993 for isolating teachers who were addressing gay & lesbian family issues at the elementary school level. Four teachers in Madison, WI were identified and permission was finally granted to film the classroom, but only with the principal present.
 - Question: How will this material be presented in classrooms? **Mr. Ellwanger** noted that there is no set plan to introduce the material in a classroom setting, but rather to prepare adults for when the need arises.
 - Question: What is the expected outcome from the first staff development session? **Ms. Sullivan** identified the primary goal as identifying how abusive language affects students and how to take steps to minimize it.
- **That’s a Family:** Shown to staff at the December training. Formatted in chapters highlighting many different students’ family backgrounds: same-sex parents, single parents, divorces, foster and adoptive children, etc. The clip shown tonight featured the gay and lesbian portion of the film. It offered students’ perspective on their lifestyles and family dynamics.
 - Question: Where can parents get copies of these films? **Ms. Sullivan** noted that copies will be available in the Beye School office, as well as several available at District 97 Multicultural Education Department, and most likely the Oak Park Public Library.
- **Let’s Get Real:** Shown to Percy Julian and Gwendolyn Brooks Middle Schools’ staff during similar training sessions as Beye. The two clips shown featured middle school students offering their perspective of both how kids are bullied at the middle school level and how students have both changed their own behavior and combated bullying.

Ms. Sullivan introduced six **Oak Park-River Forest High School** students who spoke about their experiences at the elementary grade levels:

- **Zoe:** is a senior and an ally of the Gay Alliance at OPRFHS. She noted that it is crucial in the elementary years to have access to adults who are willing to take time to answer questions and discuss issues openly. She said that it is virtually impossible to escape the situations and language featured in the three film clips at school, but having the resources available can ease fears and uneasiness.
- **James:** is a freshman transgender student who is biologically female. **James** does not typically notice homophobia or teasing at the high school, but said that it is very prevalent on the web (Facebook, MySpace, etc.)
- **Jonathon:** is a gay freshman. He felt it was important to attend tonight’s meeting to do his part in stopping bullying activity at an early age. He wanted to help younger students avoid the trauma he experienced in “coming out” to his parents and friends.
- **Rosa** is a senior transfer from **Trinity High School**, and all-girls Catholic school in River Forest.
- **Annie** is a freshman who is lesbian. She was 8 years old when she realized that she might be a homosexual. She felt it was important to provide help and support early in life because it is a child’s formative years and the time in their life when they are most prone to asking questions and saying what they truly feel, positive or negative.
- **Rachel** is a junior who has two mothers. She has an adopted African American brother. She struggled at **Longfellow School** then transferred to a Catholic school for a brief, difficult time. One life-changing event for **Rachel** was the discovery that her best friend’s parents forbade them from visiting each other’s homes

because of her family lifestyle. There are plenty of organizations at the OPRFHS to help with students like her, but she felt the need for more support at the elementary level.

Question: What are some helpful hints for elementary level teachers to prepare for situations? **Jonathon** stressed the importance of adults being able to speak comfortably about the topic. **Annie** said that individual, one-on-one discussions are often helpful.

Question: How is Beye School currently addressing bullying? **Mr. Ellwanger** highlighted the “teaching opportunity” available to all faculty and staff through the training they have received throughout the year. Many strands of the STAND program are proactive and are concrete in addressing behavior:

- How can all students be each other’s allies?
- How can a student successfully intercede in disputes?
- How can a victim of bullying counter the power issues inherent in all bullying situations (e.g. strength in numbers, size, height, language, etc.)
- How can all students get to the point of feeling comfortable with telling ANY adult about an incident: faculty, staff or parent.

Question: Is bullying a major problem at OPRFHS? Do students feel comfortable going to adults to combat bullying? **Zoe** noted that most bullying at the high school comes in the form of verbal abuse. Unfortunately by this age, most students are desensitized to the fact that their language may be inappropriate for those around them. **James** said that most of these issues are not addressed, or in some cases even learned at home, and therefore become more of a “pattern of behavior” that feeds on itself.

Question: What is an appropriate response from elementary level teachers when students use the word “gay” in conversation? **James** said that if the term is used in a derogatory way, all teachers should ask the student to clarify what they are attempting to say: “Say what you mean instead of using the term”.

Question: How can adults deal with children who are victims of bullying? Use available resources (i.e. training like that at Beye School) to address concrete situations. Adults must establish a level of trust with students by listening to them

Question: To **Rachel** directly, since you are the only student on the panel who has not made a conscious lifestyle choice, how have you dealt with not having control over your family dynamic? **Rachel** tried early in life to establish that the other person accepted her without her family situation before offering more specific information about her family. She has obviously grown more comfortable with being more open as she has gotten older: “It is who she is.”

Ms. Sullivan concluded by saying that information, including those films shown to faculty and staff will be made available to all District 97 parents.

Maggie Testore asked all attendees for final questions or comments.

Margaret Brown read a statement prepared by **Wendy Daniel**. Several questions were asked:

- Why is taxpayer money and valuable teachers’ time being spent on an issue that has been proven to be statistically insignificant?
- Why is attention being diverted away from African American students and the achievement gap at Beye School? **Wendy** offered numerous statistics from Beye’s state report card to support her position.
- Why does Beye School feel the need to address moral issues that are best left to families themselves?

Wendy strongly disagreed with addressing these issues at the elementary level, rather it is best to rely on individual parents’ judgment and discretion.

Maggie Testore thanked **Margaret** for her statement. Beye School PTO always welcomes feedback and input from its members. Sometimes we agree and sometimes we don’t but she hoped we all agree that every child should feel safe, welcome and happy coming to Beye School every day.

IV. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 PM

The next Beye PTO Meeting is **Tuesday, March 16 at 7:30 PM**

The featured topic will be the transition to Percy Julian Middle School.