

Highcrest Middle School PTO
General Board Meeting Minutes
May 4, 2011

Margaret Tilson and Anne Williams, PTO Co-Presidents called the meeting to order at 9:18 am and welcomed everyone.

Next year with the combined two building campus for the Wilmette Junior High and the Highcrest Middle School the respective PTO's will remain separate. We will combine a couple of the general board meetings. Elizabeth Kaiser, librarian, provided copies of the summer reading list.

Approval of Minutes – The meeting minutes from the November 3, 2010 General Board Meeting were approved. The February 2, 2011 General Board meeting was cancelled due to the blizzard.

The Executive Board for 2011-2012 was approved. Suzie Rubin volunteered to fill the one remaining vacancy as 6th grade room parent representative. Thank you Suzie!

Principal's Report – Dave Palzet, Principal, and Kelly Jackson, Assistant Principal for 8th grade, talked about the transition to the WJHS. On May 19 a larger presentation will be held for parents of incoming 7th graders. They have a team structure with 6 teachers including content area specialists, reading, math, science, social studies, foreign language and related arts and PE. Expect your student to struggle during the first two weeks. It is an earlier day and they are adjusting to moving from class to class and negotiating the building. They will be tired.

Communication is key between home and school. Dave will send a weekly email from the Principal with the Highlights – PTO enews. Parents should expect a 24-hour to 48-hour turnaround on communication with teachers/administration. Kids have his cell phone number to text concerns.

Kelly presented the related arts experience. 7th graders get a sample of everything. In 8th grade they choose the electives they want to take. In PE they pick electives, each teacher takes a different activity, e.g. football, basketball, soccer. There are 7 weeks of health both in 7th and 8th grade, addressing emotional and physical development as well as nutrition in lieu of PE. There still is a run day once a week during health.

In 8th grade they stress abstinence, talk about substance abuse, and making good choices as they move into high school.

Technology is infused into the classroom. At the Junior High the differentiation specialists work with everyone across the building, both those that need extra help and those that need advanced curriculum.

Currently at Highcrest there are 4 houses each in 5th and 6th grades requiring 8 different schedules. He would like to streamline this process in the future and look at how the differentiation resources are used.

When he initially came to WJHS all sports were cut with only 200 plus spots. He brought in non-cut sports: cross country, wrestling and track and field for girls. They are looking into adding golf and tennis. Highcrest kids can participate in the non-cut sports offered at the WJHS as well. They have after school clubs and a spring musical, student council, battle of the bands. The Den, like RAD is there. They offer drop-in homework assistance.

There are lots of way for kids to get extra help. They can come in early if needed. They have math assistance in the resource room during lunch.

They have intervention periods for kids who are struggling. They have homework assistance before or after school when they have missed an assignment. Zeros for missed assignments can really hurt grades. It is not a punishment; it is a support for them. If after a period of time, homework has not been turned in the teacher will refer the student to homework assistance either before or after school for one hour. It is done electronically, with an email notification to the parents. It is staffed with certified teachers. The computer software and textbooks are there and the assignment has been sent electronically. The homework never leaves the building. The supervisor puts the missing assignment in the teacher's mailbox. There is an activity bus that can take students home at 4:15 pm. Any child can ride it, used for sports or other activities. It is a mass transit system with the school district divided in half.

Dave as asked about whether he would introduce homework assistance at Highcrest. He mentioned that Highcrest has a long day as it is so having homework assistance during lunch may be the only way. Highcrest has something similar to this now at lunch. Communication is key with the parents. They will be moving to the same electronic system used at the WJHS to notify parents when students are referred to homework assistance.

A parent also expressed that we need a uniform method of communication for homework assignments. Teachers use different methods, blogging, homework hotline or others. He will look into this.

At WJHS each team has a website that at a bare minimum must include a homework calendar, teacher contact information, uploadable notes, and a link to parent portal.

On April 15 the staff from both schools had their first combined in-service day. A math teacher commented that in her 15 years she had never sat down with her cohorts across grades from 5-8. She found these break-out sessions by curriculum extremely helpful.

Homework – some parents have felt there is too much homework at Highcrest. The district guidelines call for 10 minutes per grade level, so a 5th grader should get about 50 minutes per night. We need coordination across the teams to make sure that special projects do not coincide.

If you are seeing excess homework it should be reported to the teacher or grade level principal. Dave would like to better align the start and end times of the two schools.

There has been talk of trying to incorporate band and orchestra into the regular school day. Band and Orchestra now run before school making it a significant time commitment for kids outside of the regular school day. Dave mentioned that one of the Board of Ed's goals has been for kids to have exposure to a wider variety of the arts. If they took band or orchestra during the day, those students would miss exposure to other related arts.

Band is 5 days per week, at 7 am is so early so many kids drop out. Perhaps the parents should be surveyed. Orchestra is 3 days per week, band is 5 days at week, Marie Murphy has orchestra, WJHS has band. We bus back and forth.

Lunch is different at the WJHS. All kids of the same grade eat together, 20 minutes of lunch then 20 minutes of recess. He encouraged parents to do lunch duty at the WJHS, 2 40-minute periods.

If the transition to WJHS lasts more than 3 weeks for your student, let the school know. In April the kids came to the junior high to watch some of the musical, they will have a short tour of the building.

On August 17 there will be a student orientation. The students go to home room and an 8th grader who was in that homeroom last year leads them through some getting to know you activities, and tours of the building. They do use parent input forms in placing students. The August 17 orientation is just for the students and is student led. The meet and greet is when the kids will meet their teachers.

He is in process of hiring two new assistant principals. Final interviews will be held next week. Announcement should be quickly after the 11th. Cassie Black will be the assistant principal for 6th grade, and Kelly Jackson will be the assistant principal for 8th grade.

A parent suggested that student council should be offered in the morning one week and the afternoon another week so that more kids can participate and would not be required to attend every meeting.

Sarah Jacobs, incoming WJHS PTO co-President, elect, introduced herself and encouraged parents to go to the website, wjhspto.org. There are opportunities to be involved as room parents and to serve in the cafeteria.

FAN – Suzie Rubin announced the last FAN event for the year.

Hear Richard Louv, acclaimed author of Last Child in the Woods discuss his new book, The Nature Principle, and offer guidance on how to integrate nature back into your life. 7pm, May 19, 2011 at The Skokie School, 520 Glendale Avenue, Winnetka. Presented by [FAN](#), in partnership with The Book Stall, Winnetka Public School D36, Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood, and the Chicago Botanic Garden. Read more about Richard Louv at: www.childrenandnature.org.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 am.