

Dover PTO General Meeting January 28th, 2011

A general meeting of the Dover PTO was held in the Chickering Elementary School cafeteria, starting at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, January 28th, 2011. This meeting was originally scheduled for January 21st but was moved due to a snow day. There were approximately 30 people in attendance.

Ms. Anne Nolen and Ms. Megan Field, PTO Co-Presidents, presided. Ms. Pam LoDato, Secretary, recorded the minutes. Ms. Field called the meeting to order and welcomed all the attendees. She introduced Dr. Terry Nugent, the principal.

Chickering Senior Team Presentation

Dr. Nugent began her comments with describing the PTO as the spirit of the Chickering community. She has loved her time at the school, which began last July. Dr. Nugent introduced the senior staff, starting with Dr. Denise O'Connell, SPED Director. Dr. O'Connell's career has included teaching children from preschool thru graduate students at the Fitchburg State program for special education teachers. She directs the Chickering SPED program with an inclusive philosophy. Dr. Deb Reinemann was recently appointed Vice-Principal, upon the December retirement of Ms. Ginny Keniry. Prior to that she was the school's curriculum coordinator. It is very unusual to have a team of 3 leaders at an elementary school that all have their doctorate degrees.

Dr. Nugent presented an organizational chart for Chickering. Areas of importance include curriculum, student services, professional development and campus safety. Dr. Nugent has overall responsibility for the school and budget. She manages the teachers, IT and building staff. Dr. Reinemann manages the teaching assistants and helps with the teaching staff and oversees student services. Dr. O'Connell has responsibility for the special education teaching staff and budget. She reports to Ms. Valerie Spriggs but works closely with Dr. Nugent and the Chickering staff. One of the advantages of Dover as a single school district is that the staff focuses on just one institution.

Dr. Reinemann discussed the status of the curriculum initiatives. Chickering has almost completed the integration of the new literacy program, which includes reading, writing and spelling. The school has successfully moved to a model where the teacher begins with group direct instruction and then follows with small group, differentiated instruction and independent work. The major updates to the math program are done. Looking forward, Dr. Reinemann is expecting some changes in math instruction when Massachusetts adopts the common core education standards for the US. This is not expected to be a big adjustment given the state's high standards. Over 30 states have adopted the common core standards for K-12 education. Massachusetts is still in the assessment stage. The Social Studies MCAS is on hold for state budgetary reasons.

Dr. Denise O'Connell spoke about the collaborative relationship the SPED teachers have with the regular education staff. The goal is to have all kids learning in the most inclusive environment possible. Many new teaching methods have started in the SPED environment and then moved to the regular classrooms. For example, differentiated instruction first started in SPED and now is a key feature in all classrooms. Another current example of a SPED initiative is the cart of Ipods which is a shared resource across the building.

Dr. O'Connell said this year a new initiative is the addition of executive function skill training for students. Ms. Sarah Ward, an outside expert, has consulted with the school. She is doing professional development training with the teachers and will give a talk to interested parents on March 30th. SPED and the parent SEPAC will also be bringing Rick Lavoie, a national educational speaker (based in Boston), to work with teachers and give a parent talk on April 13th. Dr. Lavoie is well known for his Fat City videos developed for public TV.

Dr. Nugent commented that Mr. Hart works closely with teachers to integrate technology, such as the white boards, into the classrooms. Currently all 3-5 classrooms have the white boards. Dr. Nugent and the senior staff have made over 300 classroom visits to observe the teaching methods and classroom environment already this year. Data from each visit is collected via an Ipad.

Due to budget constraints, the curriculum coordinator position will be eliminated. This important function will be replaced by a curriculum committee model, as is done at Pine Hill. Vertical teams with representation from all grade levels for math, science, ELA etc. will be assembled. Professional development on the 1/2 day wednesdays is a key to the continual improvement at the school. There is a clear link to the school's improving learning outcomes.

Dr. Reinemann said there continues to be emphasis on improving the writing program with professional development time being spent on writing instruction and evaluation. The new literacy specialist, Ms. Sheila Harper, has been part of this initiative. The writing program and other curriculum areas are very positively impacted by the PTO's curriculum enrichment programs. These parent supported programs bring in award winning authors, artists in residents, and other top rated specialists into every classroom.

There was a question about professional development for the specialists in art, music, PE and technology. Dr. Nugent said there is a strong caliber of specialist staff at Chickering. For example, Ms. Sue Pelletier recently published a chapter in a book about teaching mixed media art. The specialists participate in K-12 training in the Region and are invited to both the general education and SPED professional development sessions.

Dr. Reinemann oversees the student services functions at the school which includes student safety. One area under review is the parking system and student drop off and

pick up procedures. The school will seek input from parents on this issue and will need the help of the PTO to communicate the changes made to improve campus safety. Open communication with the parents is very important to the senior team. Dr. Reinemann hosts a series of curriculum coffees that discuss the different programs in more detail and allow for questions in a smaller setting. Check the school website for upcoming dates.

Dr. Nugent described the state approved bully prevention plan for Chickering. Bullying in elementary school is very different than in middle and high school. Children at Chickering are still learning social skills. There are classroom lessons using the Open Circle curriculum. Mr. Harte includes lessons on student safety on the internet and cyber bullying in the older grades. Dr. Nugent emphasized the importance of maintaining a safe school environment where kids know it is OK to be different.

At the conclusion of the senior team presentation, a parent asked about the early morning automated calls on snow days. These calls are initiated at the Regional School level but the community concern over the early hour will be conveyed to Mr. Steve Bliss. One parent suggested that the calls go to a cell phone, which could be turned off at night.

Co-Presidents' Report

Ms. Nolen thanked the senior staff for their informative reports. Ms. Nolen gave an overview of how the PTO spends about \$80,000 a year to support Chickering. Just over 40% of the money goes to classroom curriculum enrichment programs, which is managed by Ms. Mary Yanke and her team of parent volunteers. Approximately 44% of the budget goes to pay for additions of books, technology, and capital needs requested by the staff. About 13% of the budget goes to community activities such as family fun nights and other PTO sponsored events. PTO administrative costs are just 3% of the budget.

Ms. Missy Gramer, PTO Vice President, explained the annual PTO grant process. Staff can solicit funding via a written grant request. The PTO makes grants for a total of \$5,000 a year. This year, nine requests were made for items such as black jack chairs, musical instruments, art display racks, Ipods with microphones, and animation bees. The PTO consulted with the senior staff and the group found ways to help to pay for most of the requests using PTO and other sources of funds. In addition, each teacher has \$350 in PTO funds to spend annually for classroom needs.

Ms. Suzanne Nystrom, Fundraising Chair, thanked the parents for making the check writing campaign such a success. Currently the PTO is just short of its goal, with a week to go. A pair of Red Sox Green Monster tickets have been donated and all families that contributed to the campaign will be entered into a raffle to win the tickets.

The Books for the Heart campaign kicks off on February 14th. Additional volunteers are always needed. This has been a very successful way to assure the library can continually update its collections.

Ms. Barbara Dawley has information on the PTO financials for any interested party. The PTO is on budget. There were no questions.

Approval of the Minutes

The final order of business was approval of the minutes from the last General PTO meeting on September 17th, 2010. Ms. LoDato had distributed the minutes. Ms. Nolen asked if there were any changes to the minutes. Given that there were no comments, there was a motion for the minutes to be accepted.

VOTE:

To approve the minutes from the September 17th, 2010 general meeting of the Dover PTO.

The motion was proposed, seconded and passed unanimously.

The next general meeting of the Dover PTO is planned for April 29th, 2011.