

Oak Knoll PTO

Minutes of the Regular PTO Executive Board

Oak Knoll Teachers' Staff Room

May 11, 2016

2015-2016 Executive Board Officers:	
Stephanie Chen, President	Kristen Gracia, Oak Knoll Principal
Janelle McCombs, Vice President	Leah Kessler, Oak Knoll Assistant Principal
Jill Wurster, Parliamentarian	Trish Stella, Teacher Representative
Jennifer Joffe, Secretary	Terry Thygesen, MPCSD Representative
Emily Record, Treasurer	Ashley Honerkamp, MPAEF Representative
Karen Dobbyn, Financial Secretary	Sherrie Feinstein, Auditor
Tamara Russel, Communications Chair	

Absent: Jennifer Joffe (Secretary), Ashley Honerkamp (MPAEF Representative), Trish Stella (Teacher Representative), Leah Kessler (Oak Knoll Assistant Principal).

Also present: Jonathan Coldoff (Shadowing Kristen Gracia)

Quorum present: Yes

I. Call to Order - Stephanie Chen

The meeting was called to order at 8:15 a.m. by President, Stephanie Chen.

II. Approval of Minutes – Stephanie Chen for Jennifer Joffe

The regular PTO Board Meeting minutes of April 13, 2016 were approved as presented.

Motion: Stephanie Chen, Second: Janelle McCombs

III. Treasurer's Report - Emily Record

The Proposed 2016-17 PTO Budget was approved by all voting board members via email on May 5, 2016. A PDF copy attached to the minutes.

Emily reported that \$37,000 has been shaved out of the proposed budget for 2016-2017. Discretionary funds were decreased but we were able to increase enrichment programs such as art, music and science.

No surprises in the current budget and tracking to current expenditure. More field trips are coming in before the end of the year, but all looking good and as expected.

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Kristen commented that she appreciated the time and meaningful conversations that she, Emily, Stephanie and Janelle had had during the budget creation process. It is important to her that money is spent on items that are necessary and important. It felt like things had been cleaned out and tidied up.

Emily mentioned that the account has been changed so we are not liable for any fraud going forward. As long as the account is changed in the event of fraud, then we will always be covered.

IV. Auditor's Report – Sherrie Feinstein

Audit is complete August 2015 – April 2016. Handful of hiccups that are believed to likely be a software glitch. There are three checks that were cancelled but did not stay on the uncleared list and then they disappeared – so they cannot be reconciled. Apart from the Jim Wilton check, they are small amounts. Emily will confirm that that is what happened on those three checks.

Emily mentioned that they are working with a very old version of Quickbooks, which no longer gets updates, so during the transition to Karen they will be updating the version of Quickbooks. Work to clear all old stuff out. There are also a lot of old checks which have not yet been cashed, including to the Principal.

V. MPAEF Update – Stephanie Chen for Ashley Honerkamp

It was Stephanie's understanding from the District Council meeting that the MPAEF raised \$280,000 out of the \$300,000 Auction goal. That figure will continue to increase - reopened parties and people still come on the day and so on.

The Schoolhouse Rocks 5K RUN is coming up on May 22. Oak Knoll is having a Spirit Day on Friday May 13. Students are asked to wear running gear/crazy running gear. Everyone please encourage parents to register for the run and also to volunteer.

VI. District Update – Terry Thygesen

Terry

Terry reported on last night's board meeting and the fact that the District is now beginning the difficult process of determining what to do given that, although both measures achieved yes votes by a significant majority of votes cast, both measures still fell short of the 2/3rds majority required to authorize parcel tax measures. Consequently, the District must now plan for how to close the \$6M funding gap we will soon face without the funding these two measures would have provided to our schools. The 2010 parcel tax which would have been renewed had Measure A been approved does not expire until June of 2017, so the District can still collect that tax for the upcoming 2016-17 school year, but the District will be immediately short the incremental funds it would have gotten from Measure C. Consequently, the

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District will start cutting expenses to the extent possible for the upcoming 2016-17 school year. Given that 88% of our expenses are due to personnel, the reductions will accordingly come primarily, but not entirely, from personnel expense. The Superintendent has announced a hiring freeze and will be making recommendations to the Board at the upcoming June 7th meeting for a reduction in expenses. Remaining headcount reductions of certificated staff cannot occur until school year 2017-18 since certificated staff who have already been hired for the coming school year are under contract and must be given notice by law of potential lay off by March 15.

The demographer's prediction was for 71 additional students this fall, but the actual enrollment increase for this fall is currently tracking over 80, somewhat above the demographer's projection. Within 5 years, the demographer projects 213 additional students, with additional enrollment increases expected to continue in the longer-term 5+ year horizon as well. Without additional funding sources such as parcel taxes or MPAEF giving, significant additional reductions in service levels will be required to balance the budget.

Terry outlined, as had been covered at the Board meeting, that as a community we have 3 levers:

1. Revenue: under our community's control are parcel tax funding & community giving
2. Staff compensation: salaries & benefits (pension contributions by the the State are out of our control)
3. Program: breadth & depth of the programs offered

Terry made a couple of points to put the numbers in context: Even with the \$6M in funding from Measures A and C had they been approved, the District would still have had to find new operating efficiencies as enrollment increased in order to maintain existing programs and staff compensation levels. It in an unrealistic goal to close the funding gap entirely through community giving – current contribution is on average \$1,225 and you would have to increase it to \$3,047 contribution per student. So for a family of 3, your Foundation contribution would be around \$9,000. So that is an unrealistic goal to ask the community to increase their charitable giving like that. Menlo Park does not collect as much charitable giving per student as Portola Valley, Las Lomas, and Woodside, and is more comparable to Palo Alto in this respect. Terry stated she doesn't believe it is realistic or sustainable to expect increased MPAEF/PTO giving to close the \$6M funding gap, so the only realistic solution is to either get the community to maintain and increase existing parcel tax funding to cut expenses or some combination of both.

Terry explained that, once the Board voted to put the parcel taxes on the ballot, District resources cannot be used for advocacy purposes, therefore she was restricted by law in her ability to provide advocacy oriented information through school channels during the campaign. Now that the election is past, this restriction no longer applies and Terry therefore stated to us that she strongly believes it is in the best

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interests of voters with K-8 students (about 15% of all voters) as well as the remaining 85% of voters non-parent community to provide the funding necessary to maintain existing programs and teacher compensation levels. She said that our schools are delivering tremendous value to our community, both directly to students through a higher quality of education and indirectly to the broader community through the impact on property values of high quality schools. The fact that we are doing this with less funding per student than neighboring districts is evidence that the District is currently deploying its resources efficiently.

Terry also provided historical context the impact of our parcel taxes: when her own children first began attending MPCSD schools in the mid 90s, the community was very similar in terms of the education levels of the parents, but the programs were not nearly as robust as we see today. Class sizes averaged 27, and many important programs and services were bare bones or non-existent because we had less funding per student from property taxes (as remains the case today), and we only had a very small parcel tax. The significantly higher funding (increased per student funding by 20% at the time) enabled by the 2000 measure established the major improvement in programs that we see today: class size average reduced to 22 on average throughout the District, professional development for teachers was increased, and programs in music, art, PE and counseling were significantly expanded. The 2000 measure was approved as an on-going authorization in order to provide for improving programs for the long-term. These improved programs were then maintained achieved by the 2003 parcel tax which renewed an existing expiring parcel tax and added an additional new parcel tax to replace funding lost due to state budget cuts -- both of these were also approved as on-going authorizations since the expectation was that State funding would never recover to previous levels (which has certainly proven to be the case). The improvement was maintained once again with a new parcel tax in 2010. In the case of 2010, the additional funding was needed to maintain existing programs as enrollment increased. This measure was given a 7 year term because, unlike the 2000 and 2003 measures, the enrollment increase creating the additional need was projected to be temporary. However, it is now clear that enrollment will not only not decline back to 2010 levels, but will actually increase beyond the higher levels we already see today. Given the enrollment situation, real per student funding cannot be maintained without additional parcel taxes based on any realistic projection of likely property tax funding and state funding net of state pension mandates.

At issue is that MPCSD already has a total parcel tax burden of approx. \$850 per parcel which is significantly more per parcel or per student than neighboring districts. Does the No vote suggest that our community is hitting their limit for how much they are willing to pay in parcel taxes to support our schools? Since our regular property tax funding is less than neighboring districts with comparable programs and teacher compensation, the only way we have been able to keep up is by having this larger parcel tax contribution. We need to understand what actually happened. We do not yet have final data & analysis of the final vote totals from county elections. However, preliminary analysis suggests that major difference between this election and the May 2010 parcel tax election is that parents did not vote in the same numbers. In the 2010 campaign (a week before deadline figures), there were 2,454 votes from

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parents (obviously not all parents voted – no where near 100%). In this campaign, 939 parents voted (again as of a week before deadline figures). So it seems only 38% of the parents that voted in 2010, voted during this election. Had we gotten the turnout from parents we had in 2010, then the measures would have been approved. Did parents not vote because people were unaware, or confused, or was it a “soft no”? If it was a soft no, what were the parents concerns?

Prior to placing the measures on the ballot, the feedback from all the Board and community meetings held by the District as well as from the three focus groups (used to gauge reaction of non-parent frequent voters) was that both parents and non-parents want our schools to maintain existing quality levels and are willing to increase parcel taxes to maintain the quality. During the campaign, opponents criticized our teacher compensation, our small class sizes. Opponents also criticized program breadth in areas such as technology and Spanish Immersion as evidence that the District is providing unnecessary and expensive programs. Opponents continued throughout the campaign to use incorrect figures for our schools' funding even after the District's figures were independently verified by The Almanac's reporter, suggesting that our schools could maintain existing programs without approval of A and C. Opponents criticized the District for going out in a special election despite the fact that 2 of the past 3 parcel tax elections were also special elections. Opponents asserted that the fact that the District went out of a temporary authorization with the 2010 and was now seeking to renew this temporary authorization was evidence that the District intentionally misled the public into believing the 2010 tax would be temporary, yet conversely, opponents now criticized the District for the fact that the new measures were proposed as on-going authorizations even though the District was very clear that the need was not expected to be temporary. Opponents inaccurately described the taxes as "permanent" when, in fact, the rates are established annually by the elected board of trustees. Emily said she felt the measures were unclear – even for her who heard the material many times, and yet still needed clarification. She suggested they should look into how the focus groups were conducted. Terry said the facilitators conducted the focus groups well and did not lead them by the nose. However, she thought they could have probed more into some of the possible objections, which had been prepped for them. Kristen felt that the opponent's characterization of the lack of sunset clause as a permanent tax successfully bothered people.

Given all of this, Terry said the Board discussed the need to to a very thorough engagement with the entire community about about the financial situation of the District and the choices that must be made. First steps are to reconvene the ad hoc community to orchestrate outreach. We need a discussion with our parent leaders – PTOs, Site Councils, Foundation. Terry said that the campaign reported they had significant difficulty attracting the depth and breadth of campaign volunteers needed, and consequently the campaign was only able to do about 1/5 of the voter contact during the campaign than has been done in past and, the contact that occurred happened much later in the election process than was the case in previous campaigns. Was the lack of parent volunteers to staff the campaign a sign of a soft no by the parents? Terry acknowledged the wonderful volunteers who did a lot of work with inadequate resources. Tamara commented that there seemed perhaps a sense of complacency and lack of engagement in the

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community. Whilst there were maybe fewer voter contact pieces in this campaign, parents did know about the measures. But they did not they get involved and did not vote in the same volume. Jill said that in the 2010 parcel tax the fact that a number of teachers wer given pink slip notification on March 15 of potential layoffs raised awareness among parents about the parcel tax. Sherrie said she felt there had been a change in parent involvement, caring about education, since she had been in the District.

Terry agreed this was an issue, that it was difficult getting PTO volunteers too. Terry believes being able to attract and retain high quality staff is the most important thing, and it needs to stay as our number 1 priority. The absolute last place we should be looking to cut expenses is teachers. 20% cut in salaries would be necessary to close the funding gap. And class size is the biggest cost lever. If you want to fire administration you are not going to get much budget back. Biggest lever is teachers and class sizes. Would have to increase average class sizes from 22 to over 30 without eliminating major areas of our current program. Even with eliminating programs, class sizes would still have to rise significantly to maintain teacher compensation levels -- certainly raising class sizes above 27 -- to close the funding gap. Tamara and Emily agreed that some people doubted the numbers behind the statements so then the messaging was not as powerful. Kristen thought some of the messages like losing 42 teachers were slightly unbelievable, hard to really comprehend. Terry stated that either parents were not aware or they didn't believe the information, but that nothing gets attention like losing a campaign. Terry said that there is always a hard core group of 1800 or so no votes no mater what, and the problem is not so much that we had more no votes but that we had so many fewer yes votes. Terry believes that the parent community will roll up their sleeves, come together and solve the problem. While taking away so much of our management's time and attention from the real work of educating the kids is not ideal, we have adequate reserves to get through this coming year and carefully plan for how to solve the problem.

Terry has done this work for a long time, co-chaired 2000 parcel tax, and provided Board leadership for the subsequent campaigns. She said it is important for the Board to listen to all parts of the community in the lead up to campaigns, but it is equally important for all aspects of the District's leadership -- Board, Administration, and parent leaders -- to provide leadership in advocating for the best for our children and our community. There will always be a core of no votes for any tax measure, and it is impossible to craft a proposal that will appease all elements in the community. As long as we are thoughtful in our work and then united and in force as a parent community, we can do what we have done before -- come to a decision on what we want on the ballot, and come together, and make this pass. We are the only ones who will stop this from happening. We will get through this. We need to create places to decide what we put on the ballot and when. And we need to be ready and prepared to do a "soup to nuts" campaign that fully engages our community. The parent community may also have to step up to engaging a "perpetual campaign" with campaigns every few years to reauthorizing parcel tax measures for on-going needs rather than rely on their elected school board members to not set the tax rates at the maximum allowed in the unlikely event that circumstances change such that the funding is no longer needed for the allowed purposes.

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Tamara said the MPCSD Board meeting had felt positive with open lines of communication with the parent and wider community, and the Board's discussion of the need to ensure community is educated and engaged. Terry left the meeting at the conclusion of this discussion for a conference call.

VII. Oak Knoll Update – Kristen Gracia (with Jonathan Coldoff shadowing as part of an admin program)

Smarter Balance testing will be wrapping up next Friday. Kristen acknowledged Leah's hard work on this – keeping student anxiety low, teachers' anxiety low, all the social emotional side, but also on the huge technology piece to the testing that is needed.

Testing has gone smoothly. Kristen felt that the level of perseverance at Oak Knoll is really high. Students wanted to keep going, adding paragraphs, keep working – some kids took all day. Students gave it their best. Kids got to learn anxiety strategies like breathing, taking breaks, stretching.

Before the board meeting, they celebrated the students who are designated proficient in English. Proficient in their home language and also speak English. In the past this has been called "RFEP" and treated simply as proficiency in English. Kristen wanted to change way it was messaged. On KNOL during braintime, students learned about language development, and that if you learn more than one language, all the connections your brain makes and how amazing it is to be bilingual - then read out all the names. So at the ceremony did a great job of celebrating bilingualism. Susan Hogan has done a great job on this.

Kristen has been conducting a sign initiative, asking students what they would say as they passed each other in the hall. The results of those (Smile, Way to Go, You're Awesome, Treat Otters like you would like to be treated) have been made into colorful signs and will be hung around school.

The lunch tables have been repainted, a new power wash method used and cleaning now takes place right before lunch instead of at the end of the day.

Toilets have been in a bad state, with students not flushing. The custodian timetable is fine and the toilets are cleaned several times a day - that is not the issue. "Flush" signs have been made for the back of toilet stall doors and near the sink signs "Did you remember to flush". Kristen going on KNOL as part of the "Are you flushing?" campaign.

400 Parent Input forms received. Majority are very supportive and nice. Kristen & Leah reading all of them. Taking the feedback into consideration and sharing with teachers. There is no need for a lottery on 3rd grade traditional/multi.

Kristen has been conducting one-on-ones with the teachers (a day's worth last week) and has been having great conversations and sharing survey results with them.

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Kristen wanted to acknowledge the Music team. The recent 1st & 5th grade concerts were great.

A lot going on but spirits are high.

VIII. Other Business – Stephanie Chen

Volunteer lunch is coming up May 20, RSVP by May 12. Communicated well. Numbers so far are at the same level as usual – about 155 including teachers/staff so far.

Kristen went through the list of teachers receiving awards this year.

Spring Picnic has been rescheduled to June 3 due to rain.

Stephanie outlined Jennifer Joffe's proposal to saving the minutes in the cloud. Everyone agreed. Sherrie asked if we could do the same for the audit papers. There was a discussion on what needs to be kept and for how many years - Stephanie to check and clarify what needs to be done.

We will invite all the new incoming board members to the next board meeting. If there is a transition, please make sure the training & hand-off is done.

IX. Kindergarten Q&A – Janelle McCombs

The Kindergarten Q&A will be held this Saturday, May 14, 10am-12noon. Janelle asked Board member who have not responded to coming to help, to please let her know.

Kristen commented that there is a waitlist for Kindergarten and that it is much fuller than they expected. They will know more mid/end June.

X. Adjournment - Stephanie Chen

President Stephanie Chen adjourned the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Tamara Russel (Communications Chair) for Jennifer Joffe (PTO Secretary)

Date approved: June 8, 2016