

# Shepherd Elementary School Parent Teacher Organization

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## Minutes: September 5, 2018, general business meeting

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Board members in attendance: Liz Bradley (President), Allison Berg (2nd Vice President), Andrea Smith (Treasurer), Karen Sloan (Corresponding Secretary), Theo Francis (Recording Secretary). Absent: Valerie Lewis Taylor (1st Vice President). Vacancy: Assistant Treasurer.

The meeting was called to order at 6:38 p.m. Between 55 and 60 people were in attendance.

Liz Bradley introduced Principal Brawley, who told parents the school would be holding its first of two lockdown drills planned for the school year, on Thursday, Sept. 6. These drills are required by the district, similar to fire drills. She said teachers would talk to students in advance about what to expect; that teachers would lock their doors and no one would circulate in the building during the drill; however, there would be no frightening aspects to the drill. She said the procedure might differ from those in other organizations, but that the school's process is at the district's direction.

Principal Brawley also said the school has two unexpected vacancies. Ms. Prins, recently hired to teach Spanish, stepped down to attend to an emergency in her home country of Panama. There is a long-term substitute in place, and Ms. Brawley said her goal is minimize further changes until a permanent Spanish teacher is hired. In addition, Ms. Liggins, the school's guidance counselor, has moved on to another position, and Principal Brawley is interviewing candidates for the vacancy.

Principal Brawley also provided information about Back to School Night, scheduled for the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 5. She said she planned to provide three sessions for parents to meet with teachers, instead of the usual two, to help those with more than one student in the school. The amount of time faculty and staff address parents in the gym would be reduced.

Ms. Bradley called attention to the PTO sign-up sheet circulating among parents.

Mr. Francis noted that the PTO executive committee had voted to make membership in the organization free, to encourage participation.

Mr. Francis gave an informal report on the progress of the annual audit committee, which he chairs. The committee was unable to make a formal report at the meeting because some document necessary for completing the audit hadn't been obtained. However, Mr. Francis said the committee had received documentation or accounts for much of the organization's spending and income, and he felt confident that the audit would show that the organization had put all the contributions it received to good use for the school. He recounted some of the accomplishments also detailed on a handout provided during the meeting. He said he hoped the audit committee would be able to provide a final report at the October meeting.

Ms. Smith provided the treasurer's report. She detailed the budgeted and actual line items for the 2017–2018 school and PTO fiscal year, noting that some figures may still need to be finalized as documentation is completed. She also provided details of the planned 2018–2019 budget, and answered questions. Ms. Smith noted that the organization's goal this year is to encourage more members to participate in the 180 Fund – committing to contribute \$1 for each day of instruction, or \$180 for the school year – and that the PTO would seek to follow through better on those commitments. She noted that 180 Fund contributions can be made in one payment or several over time. She explained that T-shirt costs last year were significantly higher than budgeted in large part because of the board's decision to provide a free T-shirt to each student and staff member. In addition, she noted that a \$10,000 budget item for purchasing computers for the school, which had been carried over from prior years, would likely not be spent on computers because of complex school-district procedures; after consulting with Principal Brawley, the executive committee had decided to seek other uses for the funds.

An attendee asked whether the PTO continues to raise money through Amazon Smile. Ms. Bradley said it does, and that she would circulate the details.

An attendee asked about water fountains that could be used to more easily fill water bottles, which came up during Councilmember Brandon Todd's July visit to the school. However, some said repairing malfunctioning water fountains is a higher priority. Ms. Bradley said she would follow up with the council member's office.

An attendee asked about fundraising goals. Ms. Smith detailed to goals outlined in the budget document distributed at the meeting. She also noted that the PTO's goal is to raise money in order to spend it on the school and students, rather than to stockpile it.

Mr. Francis noted that some of the delays in finalizing the audit report and budget stemmed from the PTO transition in summer of 2017. Just two members on the seven-seat board who were elected the prior spring continued to serve at the beginning of the school year; the rest of the board (including several members of this year's board) were elected in November, meaning considerable time was spent catching up and getting to know the PTO. He and Ms. Smith emphasized that the board is working on standardizing its procedures and making sure this year goes more smoothly.

Ms. Bradley introduced Byron Greene, program director for Shepherd Star Achievers, the independent nonprofit that runs the school's before- and after-care program. Mr. Greene introduced himself and Angela Jasper, the program's operations manager. Mr. Greene noted that the program gets no funding from the city or school district because less than 30% of the student body are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. He gave a summary of the aftercare program, highlighting some of its components for this year, including: violin; reading and English tutoring; chess; arts and crafts; yoga and fitness; Imagination Stage; music production; and martial arts. Components with an additional cost include soccer, basketball and Robotics, Bridge Design & Construction, Aerospace Technology. Mr. Greene introduced Everton Barrett, the robotics program leader, and Shaka Greene, who is heading the chess program. Both spoke about their background and program goals.

Mr. Byron Greene explained that the Star Achievers registration process is entirely online, that payments are due on the first of each month (which can't be changed), and that parents may pay up front or spread the cost over nine monthly payments.

An attendee asked about time to do homework during aftercare. Mr. Byron Greene said that, after a snack, students have from 3:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. to do homework. He said parents should work with older children to understand how much time they need to do their homework. He also noted that Star Achievers will have a tutoring service available for first through fifth graders.

An attendee asked if girls could be separated from boys in the chess program. Mr. Byron Greene and Mr. Shaka Greene indicated that boys and girls play at similar levels. Ms. Jasper noted that eight girls are in the chess group now.

Ms. Bradley outlined the PTO's goals for the year. These include strong communication with parents and the school – she encouraged attendees to sign up for emails and to use the AtoZ app, both possible through [www.shepherd-elementary.org](http://www.shepherd-elementary.org); teacher support; parent engagement; fundraising, both through the 180 fund and by securing parent and corporate sponsors; and financial management and transparency. She noted that her goal is to rely less on the two big fundraising events of the year – the Fall Festival and the annual Spring Gala – and institute additional, smaller fundraising efforts as well.

Ms. Bradley indicated that the executive committee had already established several committees, and is seeking additional volunteers for almost every aspect of the PTO's operations. She also said parents would soon receive a survey seeking input on the PTO's fundraising and other goals. She encouraged attendees to follow the PTO's Facebook page, Instagram and Twitter accounts, and to email with any questions or concerns. She solicited room-parent volunteers, and stressed that the PTO's goal is to spend the money it raises on the school and its student body, rather than to stockpile funds.

An attendee expressed concern that teachers were soliciting funds for multiple events. Ms. Bradley noted that the PTO normally funds teacher wish-lists from money raised at the Fall Festival.

Another attendee noted that her child's teacher had asked for money for an in-school assembly, and said she thought school events should be free. Principa Brawley said there was a cost associated with the event, which was a performance arranged during the summer, before the faculty and staff were fully engaged with the new PTO board. She said the school will not normally charge students for activities at the school.

An attendee raised concerns about busing for field trips. Ms. Bradley noted that Principal Brawley is comfortable with fourth- and fifth-graders taking public transit, but not younger children.

An attendee asked about the school's International Baccalaureate program. Principal Brawley indicated that the broader IB program would be issuing new guidelines to schools in October, and that the school would hold an IB Night to provide more information to parents.

Ms. Smith noted that anyone interested in the subject could volunteer for the PTO's education committee.

An attendee suggested that the PTO and school look into fundraising programs available through major supermarkets.

Ms. Bradley noted that the PTO is collection box tops for fundraising, with a collection bin at the school.

Ms. Bradley introduced Ayana McIntosh, who is leading the Fall Festival efforts. She explained that it will be held on Oct. 20 from noon until 4 p.m. on 14th Street NW in front of the school, and that it is open to the entire community. This year it will feature games, moon bounces, a video-game truck, a rock wall and possibly a dunk tank. She said ticket prices hadn't been set, and that the event's budget was set at \$7,000 based on the prior year, but that she hoped to spend less than that. She noted tickets were \$1 apiece last year.

Ms. Bradley solicited candidates for the vacant assistant treasurer's position on the board, and said would be filled by special election at the October meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.