

Shepherd Elementary PTO 2018–2019

- Membership meeting for Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Attendees

- Liz Bradley (President)
- Taryn Losch-Beridon (1st Vice President)
- Allison Berg (2nd Vice President)
- Andrea Smith (Treasurer)
- vacant (Assistant Treasurer)
- Karen Sloan (Corresponding Secretary) ((late))
- Theo Francis (Recording Secretary)
- Principal Jade Brawley
- Susan Catler, Shepherd Tutoring Program
- about 28 people attending

Meeting Notes

The meeting was called to order on January 16, 2019 at 6:42 PM.

Ms. Catler introduced herself and described the Shepherd Tutoring Program, which is held from 5 pm to 6 pm on Sundays at Tifereth Israel on 16th Street. Tutors range in age from 12 to 70. Tutors and students work together for an hour, reinforcing what children are learning in school. Some work on reading, others on math; some work on homework. Those interested in signing up should email shepherd tutoring program@gmail.com

Principal Brawley said that the classroom libraries, funded by the PTA using money originally raised during the 2016 gala, would be in place within a month or so. She said the company providing the books is aware the school is expecting a diverse range of books reflecting different people and families, heroines as well as heros.

Principal Brawley also provided an update about the Spanish and music faculty vacancies. She said a music teacher is in the process of being hired and is going through necessary steps in DCPS human Resources. She said she has urged DCPS to move swiftly, given the delays so far. She also noted that a candidate who had previously accepted the music subsequently tendered their resignation shortly before the term began, leaving that position vacant.

An attendee asked how the classroom time was being used, with or without substitutes, given the duration of the vacancies.

Principal Brawley said that when a substitute is available, students go to the classroom with the substitute; if the substitute has the appropriate subject-matter experience, they can teach that subject, but otherwise the classroom teacher still has time available as a planning period. Unfortunately, given that Spanish-speaking substitutes have been difficult to find, it means students in Spanish have done a lot of worksheets. For music, the school hasn't been able to get a long-term substitute, and so teachers typically lose that planning period.

An attendee said she told her son to do his homework during that period, but the teacher didn't allow it, and called handouts without instruction disappointing.

Principal Brawley acknowledged that the situation wasn't ideal, and noted that her focus for some time had been filling the vacant positions. She said she would talk to staff about better approaches.

In response to a question, Principal Brawley said the positions will be filled in such a way that the new hires could be retained for the following school year or not, as appropriate.

An attendee expressed disappointment that DCPS has done so little to help fill the positions, particularly given the commitments from DCPS staff and council members during the October PTA meeting and subsequently. Principal Brawley said the school received staffing support from central office immediately after Mr. Gonzalez's arrest; however, when the initial replacement candidate fell through and Principal Brawley requested that DCPS assist again, she was told the instructor who had previously filled in had resigned.

Principal Brawley said a Spanish teacher and a music teacher were in the on-boarding process at DCPS, and that she is unaware of any delays in background checks resulting from the federal government shutdown.

An attendee asked whether there are other options – including additional gym activity – to occupy and teach kids during periods when a specialist teacher isn't available.

Principal Brawley said the school is limited by its gym space. She said she is exploring the possibility of enlisting parent volunteers, particularly those furloughed during the federal shutdown; those volunteers would require a background check.

Principal Brawley said other schools also are having difficulty filling language and Spanish vacancies, and that DCPS's pool of available and qualified language teachers appears to be very shallow. In response to a question, she said the candidate that accepted and then rejected the music position took a job in New York City instead, despite having previously said it was her career goal to work in DCPS.

Ms. Hart spoke about plans for two evening programs in January elaborating on the school's International Baccalaureate mission. She said the 90-minute programs, one for elementary students and the other for early childhood, would include an informational session followed by classroom demonstrations. In response to a question, Ms. Hart said there can be a mismatch between the timing of the five or six IB units during the course of a school year and the DCPS instructional units, which aren't always completed until shortly before they are implemented in the classroom.

Attendees asked for written information elaborating on how IB is implemented at the school, and relating it to the curriculum. Ms. Hart noted that teachers typically include IB elements in the newsletter material they send home describing instructional activities. Attendees requested information explicitly detailing the IB principles and their relationship to classroom instruction, so parents can better understand how to support the IB approach.

Principal Brawley emphasized that IB is an approach to instruction, and is integrated with DCPS curricular requirements and common core standards.

Ms. Losch-Beridon asked about IB certification. Ms. Hart said the school is up for reauthorization in the coming school year. through the end of this calendar year, the school will be preparing for the upcoming evaluation, assessing how Shepherd meets the IB standards.

There was a discussion about the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which provides a comparable snapshot of 4th-grade performance. Ms. Hart explained that it doesn't affect the school's budget or resources.

Ms. Smith presented the financial snapshot for the school year to date.

An attendee asked if the PTA could share teacher wishlists in case there are items parents want to fulfill directly.

Ms. Bradley said she could send a list of everything covered, and invited parents and others to let the PTA know about teacher needs that haven't been addressed. She noted that technology can be difficult for the PTA or other outside groups to supply, given DCPS requirements.

Mr. Francis said he was unable to provide printed copies of the minutes for the December meeting, and noted that they are available on the Shepherd Elementary website. A motion was made and seconded to postpone approving the December minutes; the motion passed unanimously by voice vote.

Ms. Losch-Beridon provided an update on gala planning discussions, including venue options, and auction planning.

Ms. Bradley said she had enlisted parents Simon Messing and Derek Musgrove to form a committee to monitor the DC Department of Parks and Recreation community center planning and construction. She noted that Mr. Messing had previously served on Shepherd's School Improvement Team, during the recent partial renovation of the building.

Ms. Bradley noted that Mr. Francis was a member of the Local School Advisory Team that would assist Principal Bradley in making allocating funds and making budget requests to DCPS. She said the PTA would publicize budget hearing dates.

There was a discussion of the Deal-Wilson feeder pattern.

A motion to adjourn was made and seconded, and passed unanimously by voice vote at 8:09 p.m.