

Shepherd Elementary PTO 2018–2019

- Membership meeting for Wednesday, March 20, 2019

Attendees

- Liz Bradley (President)
- Taryn Losch-Beridon (1st Vice President)
- Allison Berg (2nd Vice President) [not present]
- Andrea Smith (Treasurer)
- vacant (Assistant Treasurer)
- Karen Sloan (Corresponding Secretary)
- Theo Francis (Recording Secretary)
- Jade Brawley (SES Principal)
- Raquel Ortiz (DCPS)
- about 25 people attending

Agenda

Meeting Notes

Meeting was called to order on March 20, 2019 at 6:37 PM

Mr. Francis provided an update on the budget for the 2019–2020 school year. The budget Principal Brawley submitted, including a request for additional funding, was approved. This means the school will continue to maintain instruction in two world languages, hire an assistant principal, and also retain both instructional coaches. The school will also gain an additional custodian.

Principal Brawley said she will continue to seek a permanent Spanish teacher for next year.

Principal Brawley also noted that a meeting the previous week with the D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation was well attended. She said she had received assurances that the school will have first priority access to the lower field during the school day (8 am to 4 pm) during construction, which will eliminate portions of the existing playground. However, it remains unclear whether Star Achievers will receive similar priority from 4 pm to 6pm, given that neighborhood clubs use the field during those times.

She urged attendees to view DPR's website for the project (at <https://dgs.dc.gov/page/shepherd-park-community-center>). She said that construction, originally planned to begin this summer, would instead begin in October. However, none of the work during the school year would affect the interior of the school or student activity, with the exception of recess. Work on the cafeteria and multipurpose room (gym) is planned for the summer months; DPR has said the work in those areas will be done by the start of the 2021 school year.

Part of the playground will be closed off for construction, from the multicolored lanes south. The yellow and green playground equipment will be moved; only the early-childhood playground will remain as-is. Older students will go to the lower field for recess, using the pre-K exit. The playground, other than the area starting with the multicolored lanes, will return to active use after construction. There has been discussion that the roof of the rec center will be available as additional playground or outdoor classroom space.

Ms. Bradley said the PTA is pushing for permanent access to the lower field for the school and after-care on all school days.

Principal Brawley noted that DCPS is surveying parents through March 22, and that printed surveys were sent home with students, while links to the survey are in her weekly message.

Principal Brawley said the PTA-funded classroom libraries are in place and greatly appreciated by teachers and students.

An attendee asked why it has proven so difficult to hire a Spanish teacher. Principal Brawley said that prior recruitment depended heavily on bringing foreign teachers to the U.S., which has led to visa bottlenecks. She said DCPS has become more proactive about recruiting Spanish-speaking teachers.

Principal Brawley said staff from Deal Middle School would be at Shepherd Elementary to register rising sixth graders on April 20 from 3:30 pm to 5:30 pm.

Ms. Ortiz said one challenge in hiring a Spanish teacher is that it is more difficult mid-year. Hiring is most common in the spring, meaning Shepherd will have more qualified candidates available to consider for the coming school year.

Sharon Goodie, chair of the school advocacy committee, said two people had attended the previous evening's committee meeting. She discussed messaging priorities for the March 20 budget oversight hearing, including security, social-emotional learning and the school's International Baccalaureate program. Principal Brawley noted that DPR security for the community center is handled differently than DCPS security. Ms. Bradley noted this has been part of the ongoing discussions with DPR. Mr. Francis noted that Principal Brawley had requested financial assistance from the PTO for social-emotional learning materials; DCPS had provided materials for four of the school's 14 classrooms (i.e., two full grades), but would need \$5,000 more for the remaining 10 classrooms. Ms. Goodie said it makes sense to request it from DCPS.

Principal Brawley said a specialist would observe implementation, receive feedback about how the program is going, to help determine whether it's effective. The same program is being used throughout the city in different schools, but she notes that it takes time to implement and see results.

An attendee noted that Parents Amplifying Voices in Education, a District-wide parent advocacy group, is asking DCPS to increase SEL funding.

Another attendee noted that Lafayette has a "peace room" available for students. Ms. Bradley said the school's PTA funds a mindfulness coach. Ms. Goodie said funding for earlier testing for special-needs students would also be helpful. Ms. Losch-Beridon noted that Title I schools in the city receive \$3,000 per school to fund an extensive responsive-classroom program, and that schools west of the park can afford to implement it privately. Ms. Bradley noted that schools west of the park have much more private funding: Lafayette's spring auction recently raised more than \$175,000.

There was a discussion about Shepherd's IB program. Principal Brawley explained that IB isn't a separate curriculum, but integrates with the DCPS curriculum. Ms. Losch-Beridon noted that in the past, teachers have had opportunities to attend IB conferences. Principal Brawley said the

school does send new teachers to introductory events, but hasn't always been able to go beyond that.

Ms. Smith presented the monthly financial update.

Ms. Bradley provided a recap of the public meeting on the community center the prior week, including discussion of security, traffic flow within the buildings and air testing during construction. She noted that DPR is resistant to a formal oversight process involving parents and other community members, but has said it will provide more updates and specifics. She said DPR officials were clear that the community center would be closed, except for school activity, until 6:30 p.m.

Simon Messing said that although planning is in early stages, it appears there will be only one door between the school and the DPR facility. In response to a question, Ms. Bradley confirmed that rec centers are typically open until 9 p.m., meaning Shepherd's will be open from 6:30 to 9 p.m. on weekdays. There was a discussion about other schools with attached DPR facilities.

Mr. Francis said PTO elections would be held at the May meeting, with nominations beginning at the April meeting. He said he hoped to draft revisions to the bylaws to be considered at the same time, and asked for volunteers to assist with the effort.

Ms. Losch-Beridon gave an update on the gala, including plans for a VIP hour at the beginning, available to those who purchase VIP tickets or appropriate sponsorships. She said the goal is to draw 200 attendees and raise \$60,000 gross. The event will include honoring retiring staff and teachers with milestones. She urged parents to be in touch with their room parents on class auction items, and announced a house party to be held the following Friday to help collect wine for a wine raffle at the event.

Ms. Sloan discussed plans for the first annual Health & Wellness Fair, scheduled to run from 3:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. on Friday, March 29. Plans include information on healthy eating and regular medical checkups, as well as free 10-minute massages, a smoothie station run by a 5th grader, an ask-the-doctor station and nurse's station, blood-pressure checks, height-and-weight checks for kids, and a CPR demonstration. There would also be yoga, kick-boxing and karate for kids, among other activities. The event will also feature an exercise-equipment exchange.

Ms. Bradley announced a spring school cleanup for April 28.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and passed unanimously at 7:50 p.m.