

Abernethy Community Meeting Minutes, 4/5/2018

Attending: Deepti Shinde, Robin Bruns Worona, Gretchen Kilby, Leah Woods, Brian Richardson, Lisa Delaney, Rose Caudillo, Caroline Bleckmann, Angelyn Solko, Kari Brooke, Megan Mishler, Heather Hull, Debi Adamski, Sean Matthews, Craig Stack, Jennifer Gerlach, Elizabeth Lannigan, Caryn Anderson, Carla Logan, Jim Wolf, Elaine Chin, Jess Hutchison, Susan Brown, Rose Hurner, Wendy Siri, Erica Arthurs, Suzanne Fortescue, Allison Lathrop, Tracy Sawyer, Allyson Wilinski, Sharon Weir, Alex Hofmann, Hollis Blanchard, Juliann Squires, Andrew Rice, John Grant, Gabrielle Hall, Susan Beal, Sharon Hatch, Richard McNeill, Leslie O'Connor, Beth Cavanaugh, Julia Silverman, Kirsten Isaacson, Rene Hendricks, John Hendricks, Missy Ryan, Amy Newton Ernst, Rachel Haas, Rebecca Sanders Carlton, Mark Leece, Melissa Cunningham, Jay Austin.

6:05 pm, Meeting called to order by Kirsten Isaacson.

MOTION to approve PTA board meeting minutes from 3/15, by Beth Cavanaugh. Seconded by Julia Silverman. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION to approve PTA community meeting minutes from 1/18 by Beth Cavanaugh. Seconded by Carolyn Duran. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION to approve PTA community meeting minutes from 3/15 by Beth Cavanaugh. Andrew Rice seconds. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION by John Grant to approve spending an additional \$40,000 to cover the cost of providing two FTE (full-time employees) in the 2018-2019 school year, bringing PTA's total costs to \$277,000. The increase is due to increased costs associated with those positions. Seconded by Richard McNeill. Motion passes unanimously.

Discussion of daytime garden program:

Jess Hutchison (4th grade), Rose Hurner (1st grade) Caryn Anderson (1st grade) and Wendy Siri (1st grade) reading aloud a letter from all the teachers at Abernethy. They are recommending the elimination of the daytime garden program, save for programs like Harvest of the Month, due to concerns about the best use of instructional time during the school day, preservation of instructional support and library at Abernethy.

Response from **Leah Woods, SKG co-chair**: Garden-based learning has been in existence at Abernethy for 18 years. It allows children to learn through time devoted to garden activities, exploration of scientific principles, gives them outdoor movement time, teaches about environmental and sustainable practices, provides incentives to make healthy food choices and gets them involved in the preparation of healthy foods. Studies have shown that garden-based learning programs can favorably impact standards; it is an avenue to making standards come alive, and can also just be about the joy of learning something new, and provide moments of wonder and realization. Successful garden programs require parents, teachers and administrators working together; without that, we will have only intermittent success.

Public Comment on Garden program:

Deepti Shinde, 1st grade parent: In support of garden — kids get their hands dirty, and learn about things like compost and recycling, which are not covered elsewhere. It seems like a false choice to say: Eliminate garden and we will have smaller class sizes, because that is not the choice that is in front of us. Garden seems like a great bang for the buck, and I feel that is missing from this discussion.

Richard McNeill, 3rd grade parent: Parents/PTA raise money and give it to the principal, who is in charge of signing off on what programs are in the school. Remember that every time a class goes to the garden, a teacher must come with them (since the garden teacher is a contracted, not certified, employee), so that time cannot be used for teacher preparation. We need to respect what teachers/principal want.

Amy Newton Ernst, 4th grade parent: Previous community surveys have shown garden coming in last on the list of priorities. Garden's supporters have great intentions, but their voices should not outweigh what the whole community feels.

Allison Lathrop, 4th grade parent: The community survey cited previously is flawed, because the question asks: If you could fund only one thing, what would you choose. I don't believe we need to choose to fund one thing only. We should consider a variety of things that make school a happy and healthy place. For my child, garden was a respite, and a chance to practice powers of observation.

Caroline Bleckmann, 4th and 1st grade parent: If it is really a choice about academic support, I have to support that; kids need more help than what has been available, give the class sizes.

Jay Austin, kindergarten parent: Have reviewed the documents and can't figure out how saving \$20,000 by eliminating daytime garden would translate to more instructional support. What happens if we keep pulling at this thread — will we keep the current garden specialist, will we keep a dedicated kitchen classroom, what happens to the garden itself?

Susan Beal, 1st and 4th grade parent: Hopeful for a creative solution to help garden survive. If the money saved can go to instructional support, so that kids who need extra help can get it, particularly with large class size, that is where my heart is. Appreciate our teachers and staff.

Craig Stack, K and 2nd grade parent: The real issue is not about money, it is about whether time spent in garden creates value for our kids. That needs to be the focus.

Amy Newton Ernst: Teachers and principal need to determine how the money gets spent.

Beth Cavanaugh, 2nd and 4th grade parent: Our best chance of getting more money for FTE from the district for next year lies with our kindergarten population, and hitting our target numbers to support 4 classrooms. Parents in our community have choices, and garden is one of the things that draws them to Abernethy.

Rachel Haas, 4th grade parent: As the parent of older kids, know that feedback from Hosford teachers has been that Abernethy students are not as prepared to handle science classes when they get to middle school. We could spend this money on other kinds of academic enrichment.

Rebecca Sanders, 1st grade parent: Need clarity about what is the choice, if we give up garden, what do we get? Not fair to frame it as FTE vs. garden.

Brian Richardson, 2nd and 4th grade parent, SKG co-chair: I am a scientist. Garden represents the most cost-effective and practical way to bring science to a school. Hurts to see garden blamed for poor science performance. Science is expensive, prohibitive, takes a lot to set up. Maybe it is not being used correctly, but we are working to turn it into what we want it to be. Don't give up on an experiment because we have a few obstacles.

John Grant, 2nd and 5th grade parent: For the garden program to be successful, it requires buy-in from us as a whole. I am hearing that we don't have that. On the face of

that argument, the garden program in some ways has already failed. I think garden has already failed, if we haven't convinced the teachers, we can't have a successful program.

Angelyn Solko (2nd and 4th grade parent): Is this an opportunity for shift in thinking about what garden could be?

Ideas/Brainstorming about the future of the garden program:

- Could the buddy program be tied into the garden some way?
- Can we start a garden preschool program?
- Could we have garden-related programming available before school, like the band model?
- Can we refocus the garden curriculum to be more centered on the new science standards?
- Are there certain grade levels where it makes more sense to be spending time in the garden?
- From the teacher perspective (Rose Hurner) for garden to be successful, teachers would need to be able to plan the curriculum and have an evaluative tool.
- Could the PTA and the community continue maintaining the garden for the teachers to have available to develop curricula around?
- Can half of the kids in a class go to garden at once, if space is a problem?

Special Fundraising ask:

Liz Weiler, 4th grade parent: Kids need to come out of elementary school with a certain level of proficiency. We need to support our kids so they will have that. Want to be able to help achieve that with dollars, and give others a chance to do so as well.

Beth Cavanaugh: Anyone who wants to donate can do so at any time, but we should not be doing a special fundraising ask. It allows us to buy our way out of the district's funding problems and create a semi-private system. Abernethy is already ahead of almost any other school in the district for per-student fundraising. This sucks up energy that could be spent advocating for change on a statewide level. Adding an additional fundraiser is a drain on families who have already met their budgets. Separating our foundation from our PTA would provide clarity and transparency on where our money is going. If we feel the pinch from fewer FTE, it might be a catalyst for us to work for broader change.

Amy Newton Ernst: With All Hands Raised, when we do raise money, a good portion of it goes to other schools.

Beth Cavanaugh: But the largest single payout any school gets from All Hands Raised funding is \$40,000.

Alex Hoffman, 4th grade parent: Concerned about high class sizes in 5th grade in 2018-2019. Can we try to fundraise to endow a fourth teacher for that grade level?

Julia Silverman (3rd grade parent): No, because Principal Hull has the final say, and has already said that she'd be likely to concentrate classroom FTE at the lower grades. But we can fundraise for instructional support and library which benefits the whole school. There are a ton of causes that we can and should and do support. It is okay to also support our own kids, while fighting for change systemwide.

Liz Weiler: The system has a lot of inertia. We can fight for change, but also need to take care of our kids.

Leah Woods: Are we running a fund-raising enterprise or a trying to build a collaborative community? Need to try to solve the problem of lack of funding statewide, not be distracted by fighting for scraps.

Kirsten Isaacson: We have two potential matching grants for the fun run, totalling \$20,000. Could also be used for a post fun run special ask.

MOTION by Julia Silverman to launch a special ask after the fun run, specifically to fun staff and increase our line item budget for All Hands Raised, including a short statement that considers the equity challenges. Seconded by Robin Bruns Worona. Motion passes, 17-9.

Advocacy:

Kirsten Isaacson: Supporting Portland Association of Teachers' efforts to push back against district's reliance on overage pay to cover class sizes that are far above the expected thresholds.

Another round of funding could be coming; PTA leadership is writing to ask for clarity on why Abernethy's staffing went down when other schools with similar profiles had their staffing go up.

How can we best organize ourselves to be present in the legislative session and beyond?
Want to form a PTA advocacy committee to address these efforts.

Caryn Anderson: Former teacher in Gresham, knows about children who don't have an advocate, need people to stand up for them. Oregonians can no longer expect services that they won't pay for.

MOTION by **John Grant** to form an advocacy committee. Seconded by **Beth Cavanaugh**. Motion passes unanimously.

MOTION to adjourn by Julia Silverman. Seconded by Carolyn Duran. Motion passes unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 8:02 pm.