

Bells Mill Elementary School Parent Teacher Association

Meeting Minutes – October 3, 2023, 6:30 pm

Welcome & Introductions - Deb Palisin, President

The meeting was called to order at 6:32 with 33 individuals present.

School Updates - Dr. Smith, BMES Principal

- The school will be looking to get feedback on school communications (frequency)
- The school continues to hear concerns from the community about parking. The PTA is looking to engage further with Safe Routes to School, who had an information table at the Back to School picnic.

Membership - Amanda Klueger, VP Members and Fundraising

- The PTA is 28 families short of our membership number from last year. Last year we had 228 families. We only need 2 more teachers to match last year. We encourage ALL families to join PTA to support your child's education.
- Our spirit wear fundraiser continues with 12 designs including glitter. Spirit Wear Direct offers flat rate shipping and an option to choose your own products. It will continue all year. So far we have raised more than \$1000 from this.
- There are two restaurant donation nights that are upcoming:
 - Shake Shack – 10/12
 - Potomac Pizza – 10/25
- Book Fair – Starts on 10/14 and there are in-school and family shopping hours (nights and weekends). Last year we raised more than \$10,000 in scholastic dollars. These are funds that the school uses to purchase books for the media center and classroom libraries or classroom supplies (e.g., rugs).
 - Still need volunteers – <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0E45ACAC2BA3FAC34-bmes3#/>
 - Pushing a cashless system this year for an ewallet – <https://bookfairs.scholastic.com/bf/bellsmilles>
 - For more information, see the Bear Post – <https://bellsmill.org/scholastic-book-fair-october-13-20/>

Treasurer's Report - Mia Bautista, Treasurer

- Budget and monthly reports are posted to the website – <https://bellsmill.org/about/financials/>
- This year we have a budget of \$45,274
- Only as strong as we are active – important to support PTA in any way possible!
- YTD: \$12,800 in membership dues and donations (\$14,000 as of October last year)
- Expenditures -- \$4,000 in expenses so far this year for welcome events, picnic, magic & muffins
- \$50,072 current bank balance

MCCPTA Delegate Report - Erin Penfold and Karen Lust, BMES Delegates

- 193 MCPS schools belong to the Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA), which is governed by a board of directors. They seek to coalesce all the PTAs together to work together and network at the county, state and national level.
- Each year MCCPTA sets advocacy priorities that set the tone and direction for their priorities. BMES delegates will be looking for input on the advocacy priorities this week and next via the Bear Post. Input is then shared with MCCPTA and the priorities are finalized at a delegates assembly.
- Briefly, the priorities this year are listed below. See the Bear Post for the full description.
 - Access to Equitable Opportunities
 - Capital Funds and Facilities
 - Access to Equitable Opportunities
 - Operating Funds
 - Communication
 - Curriculum
 - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
 - Health and Wellness
 - School Climate and Security
- At BMES, the school has been supporting Health & Wellness with expanding social-emotional learning (SEL) in the classroom. The school has identified monthly focus topics, they have students self-assess at the beginning and end of the month, and the curriculum is supported with books and other resources. It is tailored by grade. For example, 5th grade has had some teasing around identity so the school will be working with them on that topic.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Sister School Updates

- Hispanic Heritage Cultural Arts Assembly – the PTA is pleased to sponsor its first assembly featuring salsa dancers and latin jazz on October 13 in honor of Hispanic Heritage month. There is also an effort being coordinated by a parent and Mr. Fenton to hang posters in the school in celebration of hispanic heritage.
- South Lake Elementary – We are continuing our partnership with South Lake ES in Montgomery Village as our sister school. They recently moved into a new building and we will continue to support them with Thanksgiving baskets, a coat drive, and holiday toy drive. We are also giving them a Free Little Library identical to the one at BMES.

Communications and Family Engagement Updates- John Sorrenti, Comm Chair

- Each week the PTA distributes a Bear Post email newsletter with key updates. This is opt-in so be sure to subscribe at <https://bellsmill.org/get-involved/stay-informed/>
- Highlights on PTA activities are included in Dr. Smith's Friday email

- The PTA is working on a school-wide WhatsApp group that would broadcast information from PTA (no chat). The grade-level groups will remain informal parent conversation chats.
- The PTA recently launched a new communication request form for sharing PTA information. Will be linked on the PTA website soon.

Presentation, Ms. Kemp, Assistant Principal & Mrs. Abramson, Reading Specialist

Mrs. Kemp and Mrs. Abramson provided an overview of assessments at the Classroom, District (County), and State levels. This presentation was meant to help parents better understand the assessments that are given throughout the year and some of the testing information that is presented during parent-teacher conferences. Please see the 2-page handout from Mrs. Kemp, which identifies the assessments and also provides a yearly testing schedule.

- Classroom (within the school) – same grades that are being taken for report card are the same
 - Teachers plan with Mrs. Abramson for ELA and Mr. Fenton for math. BMES does collaborative planning (teachers plan as a team)
 - MCPS dictates measurement topics for report cards, but assignments vary across the schools
 - Most classroom assessments (eureka, benchmark) are gathering more information for measurement topics on report card
 - Eureka has “modules”; Benchmark has “units”. Both have assessments
 - Assessments are just one number. Teachers try to take multiple measures to inform a grade to provide multiple opportunities to demonstrate understanding.
 - The school continues to focus on structured literacy – spelling words based on phonics, not memorization
- District (County)
 - Certain benchmark and eureka scores get input into performance matters – big data warehouse. Each quarter there is a recorded module assessment. Way for MCPS to see how the school is doing at each grade level and how we are following the curriculum with fidelity. Allows for county oversight on performance.
 - For kindergarten only happens 2x. For 5th grade, they do not report eureka in the 4th quarter because of all the other assessments.
 - Interim Benchmark after Units 1,2,3. After Unit 6, take interim 3. Those aren’t for grades – are reported to districts and for an instructional tool.
- State (external measures) – These are required for all students in public schools in the state of Maryland, some are national. First three bands are wrapping up on Friday (see handout).
 - KRA – This is given to every kinder in MD. You will get the KRA report. Only started last year, used to be given to only a sample of information. It’s a lot of observation so it takes a lot of time to administer, but it provides helpful information to the school and families.
 - DIBELS – measures foundational skills in reading. Strong focus on structured literacy and phonics. Helps to look at benchmarks at the beginning of the year. Will do it again in Jan and the spring. Will progress monitor starting now if testing shows it’s needed. Will get information about it at the November conference.

- Cognitive Abilities – GogAT – given to the 2nd grade only. Historically part of the gifted & talented (GT) identification process. Coming back this year. Given at the end of Nov.
- NWEA – Includes MAP-R, MAP-P, and MAP-M. Students take it 3x a year.
 - MAP-P: Test for primary math (K ,1,2). It’s adaptive, meaning gets more challenging as students get things right. Gives a RIT score. Helps us track growth.
 - MAP-R: Test for reading in grades 3-5. Gives a lexile range
 - MAP-M: Test for math in grades 3-5. It doesn’t read it to you anymore (MAP-P does).
 - The tests are all multiple choice and on the computer. It controls for rapid guessing. It includes 40 questions. Report gets loaded into ParentVue under “documents.” See RIT score. If you have questions, ask your child’s teacher.

Q & A

- Absences – A parent asked for clarification on absences and the implications of unexcused absence on enrollment. The policies are set by MCPS
- Lice – A parent asked if the incidence of lice was decreasing. Lice is common in most educational settings and the current situation is improving. There are also incidents of Hand Foot and Mouth and COVID, and other viruses. The school strives to communicate with transparency while also maintaining student privacy. The school nurse’s contact information is on the website and she is very responsive to questions.

Upcoming Activities & Updates

The following activities are coming up and more volunteers are needed. See the Bear Posts for sign up links:

- Magic and Muffins
- Outdoor Movie Night
- Volunteer Recognition
- Recess Volunteers

National PTA School of Excellence Celebration

Bells Mill ES and Bells Mill PTA are one of only 368 PTAs and schools nationwide to be designated a 2022-2024 School of Excellence. National PTA’s School of Excellence program supports and celebrates partnerships between PTAs and schools that work to improve the educational experience and school environment for every child. The banner was unveiled and the membership celebrated with cupcakes.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50pm. The next general meeting will be held on December 5, 2023.