

Muraco Elementary School Parents Association Meeting Minutes October 20, 2010

Approvals

- The September MESPA minutes and the 2010-2011 budget were approved.

Annual Appeal Update

- As of November 2nd, 32% of Muraco families have contributed and we have achieved 75% of our financial goal. The Open House was instrumental in receiving donations early in the process.
- Many corporations have a matching gift program, whereby they will match the charitable contributions that their employees make. Companies that have a matching gift program include Fidelity, State Street, Novartis, Oracle, Wellington, GMO, Wells Fargo and Verizon. If you work for one of these companies, or another company with a similar program, please consider initiating a matching gift!
- While the Direct Appeal Update is launched in October, families can donate anytime throughout the school year. In order to encourage another round of participation, there was a suggestion to offer another gift certificate.

Committee Updates

Multicultural Fair

- The Multicultural Fair was a big success! It was well attended, the food was great, the crafts were really fun, and the performances were delightful! It takes so many volunteers to make the evening run smoothly and we (the committee) are thankful to all who pitched in! Thank you! Thank you also to Diane Davies for her article in the Winchester Star!

Book Fair

- THANK YOU to the Muraco Community for all of your support at this year's book fair. More than \$12,500 was spent in purchases, translating into over \$2,500 in cash profit for our library! Through your tremendous generosity, hundreds of books were purchased for the classrooms from the teacher's wish baskets. Juliana and Jessica will be using the profits to keep the library shelves current to meet the reading interests of our kids. While the majority of this year's profits will be used to update the non-fiction section of the library, the newest titles in fiction were also added!

Community Schools Association -- School-wide Enrichment Program

- Every year the CSA (Community Schools Association) brings a Fall program to all the elementary schools in town. (Last year it was Mr. and Mrs. Fish.) This year the program will be a global performance called World of Wonder by Leland Faulkner. "Mr. Faulkner combines Japanese art forms, shadow theater, illusion, improvisation, mime, and international folk tales with original special effects to produce an imaginative performance. Faulkner provides creative, mesmerizing presentations that encourage audiences to walk away with visions of their own. His program has garnered international acclaim for the past 20 years." The performance is scheduled for Thursday, November 4. It promises to be a memorable show!

Authorfest

- Authorfest is scheduled for Thursday, April 14, 2011. More news to come!

Publicity

- Attention Committee Chairs! Muraco's Multicultural Fair was recently featured in the Winchester Star, the Daily News Chronicle, Patch.com and WinCentral.com. Please submit any photos you may have taken at an event or happening at school (including field trips and enrichment programs) for possible submission to these news

venues. We would like for the town to see more about our fabulous school! Contact: Diane Davies at dd1212@verizon.net.

Grants

- Jodi Cranston will be meeting with Principal Kirby on the 21st to coordinate a plan for finding and applying for grants.

Enrichment

- Thank you to all the parents who are volunteering their time to help out with Enrichment! The Enrichment team had their kickoff meeting and the enrichment committee member for each grade has been having discussions with the teacher(s) and are busy organizing an exciting year for the kids! Watch for an email coming your way in the next week or so with specific details about the enrichment programs your child will be experiencing this year!

Winchester Coalition For A Safer Community (WCSC) Update

(Submitted by Sue Kim and Christa Russo)

- *Bullying Concept Mapping -Phase II:* The Coalition encourages all parents to go online and Sort & Rate. (<http://www.conceptssystemsglobal.com/winchestersafe/sort/rate>) Increased participation from all members of the community is critical.
- *Adolescent Anxiety and Stress Issues* are on the rise at all age levels with increases in sleep & eating disorders, intentional self injury behavior, hospitalization. This trend has been increasing in town (and across the US) and needs to be addressed by all groups in our community. Latest Youth Risk Behavior Survey reveals 1 in 5 students in H.S. with intentional self injury behavior. Much work needs to be done on all fronts.
 - "Road To Nowhere" recommended as a powerful film to bring to Winchester community.
 - On a broader scale, we discussed the importance of teaching kids management and coping skills to deal with stress

and the importance of changing the culture in which school, sports, extracurricular activities are all increasing their commitment levels of time and stress, etc.

- *High School Update* - Parent Conversations have been helpful with good discussions regarding the handling of "bullying/hurtful" behavior that arises. The Coalition discussed the importance of multiple entry points for students and parents to seek help, advice, report incidents, etc. Sometimes parents/students are reluctant to speak directly with administrators/faculty.
- *McCall Update* - No Child Left Behind (NCLB) 3 year plan will focus on bullying intervention plan. McCall Parent Conversations continue to be successful, with discussions re: transition issues, study skills, etc. Coalition discussed the continued problem of the Skate Park (not a part of McCall, but has a direct impact due to its location). Problems with drug dealers, risky behavior. The Police are aware of it and have worked toward prevention, but there aren't enough man hours. This is a Town safety problem that needs to be addressed.
- *WCSC Needs Funding!* The 10 year federal grant that the Coalition received has expired. It was originally given with the understanding that our local community would incorporate this into our town budget. At this time the Selectmen have not added the Coalition as a Warrant Article for Town Meeting to vote on. Please come to the next Board of Selectmen Meeting to advocate for the crucial need to further its work.

School Committee Liaisons Update

(Submitted by Chris Nixon and Christa Russo)

- Last month the WEA (teachers' union) ratified and the SC approved a new 3-year agreement, which provides for a wage increase of less than 4% over three years, and also includes two significant agreements on the part of teachers regarding health care.
- The Capital Planning Committee [CPC] voted its priorities last week. CPC decided to fund the WHS feasibility study, so voters will not be seeing this as an override question. This is an important vote

on their part, as it shows to the Massachusetts School Building Authority [MSBA] the Town's commitment to funding this first and crucial step in the rethinking, reinvention, and potentially reconstruction/renovation of WHS.

- *Vinson-Owen*: The plan is for the current school-- in poor physical condition and years older than Muraco -- to be demolished and replaced by a new energy-efficient facility that can accommodate 420 students with the capacity to expand to 480. An increased enrollment capacity at a new V-O will permit the School Committee to redistrict, alleviating significant and prolonged overcrowding at several of our schools (Muraco is not alone in losing computer labs, reading rooms, music rooms, etc.) and addressing our continued double-digit K-5 enrollment increases. The new V-O's Schematic Design package was submitted to the MSBA last week for review. Note: The Superintendent has made all V-O design and planning documents available online. For anyone interested, please visit: <http://mail.winchester.k12.ma.us/~wps/vo%20documents/vo>. The final budget numbers are being developed and vetted by the Education Facilities Planning & Building Committee [EFPBC] this week. The MSBA Executive Board is expected to approve the V-O project on November 17. After an affirmative vote by the MSBA, Winchester has 120 days to show a funding commitment.
- *V-O Funding*: The Board of Selectmen voted earlier this month to put forward a debt exclusion override to Winchester voters on Tuesday, January 11, 2011. The warrant article for the new Vinson-Owen School will be presented to Town Meeting members at Fall Town Meeting, which opens on Thursday, November 4th at the WHS auditorium at 7PM. Seating is available for members of the public who are interested in attending.
- *Redistricting*: This will be a public and transparent process, though it has not yet begun. Look for more information as we approach the January override vote. The goal is for redistricting to be complete by summer 2013, as this corresponds to the opening and occupancy schedule for the new V-O.

- *Town budget:* This month the Board of Selectmen asked the School Committee to consider funding a portion of the Town's deficit. Given that the SC's total funding came in slightly higher than expected, the SC unanimously agreed to contribute \$111,212 towards the Town's financial obligations.

Discussions

- Classroom DEAR Libraries - There was a discussion about the classroom libraries. Each classroom has a library of books that are comprised of books primarily owned by the individual teachers. These libraries are supplemented by books donated to the school through the Book Fair and Scholastic book sales. In addition, the teachers also supplement their classroom libraries with books from the Guided Reading library that is available to all of the teachers in the building. The books in the classroom libraries are used by the students during free time and DEAR (Drop Everything and Read). A question was raised as to whether newer teachers' classroom libraries are as extensive as the libraries of veteran teachers. There were several suggestions as to ways to supplement the existing DEAR libraries: donations from the community, additional ordering from Scholastic (the bonus points go straight to the classroom) and direct specific donations from MESPA. Whereas some favored direct purchase of books by MESPA, others raised questions as to which books MESPA might purchase, which classrooms needed books the most, the equity of MESPA giving to new teachers and not veteran teachers, how much MESPA would designate to the purchase of books and to whether MESPA funds might be more effectively spent on other materials. During the discussion, parents pointed out that children may go to the Muraco library and take-out books for DEAR time and that children may also bring in books from home for DEAR. Principal Kirby stated that she would ask the classroom teachers to make specific lists of books that are desired in the classrooms. After discussion, there was a motion to suspend the discussion and revisit the topic at the November MESPA meeting, when the teacher's lists will be available. The motion was approved.

- There was a distinction made between MESPA providing books for new teachers and offering a welcoming gesture for new teachers. There was a motion to start a new MESPA policy of officially providing a welcome gesture (specifics to be determined) to new teachers, as opposed to a specific monetary amount. The motion was debated and subsequently approved.

Guest Speaker - Perrin Tellock

- Muraco's psychologist, Perrin Tellock, was the guest speaker and talked about understanding the differences between bullying and normal social conduct. The goal is to prevent **bullying from occurring and to make sure** that kids feel safe and comfortable, a prerequisite for learning. Bullying can make students feel unsafe and disrupts the learning process.
- Historically bullying was thought to include a physical altercation, but verbal bullying is just as effective and harmful. Bullying can occur between anyone - boys/boys, girls/girls, girls/boys. Physical bullying tends to occur more with boys but verbal/non-verbal bullying can be occur with both boys and girls. In fact, bullying does not need to be verbal; it could be a raised eyebrow regarding someone's appearance. However, a simple disagreement between two students, where there is no power imbalance, is not bullying.
- The key characteristics of bullying are that it is targeted, repeated behavior that is aimed toward a specific child. It is intentional, constant, and takes power away from another child so that they feel afraid to speak up. Often normal social aggression is reflective of bad manners and can be a gateway for bullying if not kept in check. However, bullying is clearly identifiable if it is targeted, repeated, and aimed at a specific student.
- Examples of bullying and bad manners are everywhere - brothers, sisters, parents, friends, and even teachers (according to feedback from current students). To combat this, the community needs to engage in "climate change." Kids are looking to adults to understand

how to behave in certain situations. Adults need to be good role models and correct inappropriate behavior, even the behavior of others' children. We also need to empower bystanders to speak up when they witness bullying.

- Mr. Tellock is meeting with all members of the community, including teachers, lunch room supervisors, recess supervisors, and teaching assistants, in order to teach staff to recognize bullying and understand the benefits of speaking up and intervening early.
- If parents suspect bullying, it is important to get as much information as they can from their son/daughter. This can include understanding if this has happened before, where, and in what context. Although difficult, it is important not to get emotional or to let your child "lose face." Sometimes the issue can be normal social aggression that needs to be controlled. The most important thing is to empower students so that they can tell the bully to stop what they are doing. It is also important to convey to the children that they have done nothing wrong to deserve the bullying.
- Elizabeth Englander, an expert on bullying, will speak on Nov. 30th at McCall on the topic. Check the newsletter for details.

Upcoming Muraco Events

- Thursday November 4 Staff Appreciation Breakfast
- Wednesday November 10 School Advisory Council Meeting 4PM
- Thursday November 11 Veteran's Day - No School
- Wednesday November 17 MESPA Meeting 8:45AM
- Wednesday November 24 Early Release
- Thurs-Fri November 25-26 Thanksgiving Break
- Thursday December 2 Staff Appreciation Breakfast
- Saturday December 4 Craft Fair 10AM