

Downey PTO Meeting



1.16.2018

7:00PM-9:00PM

Room 1– Downey School

Type of meeting

Downey PTO – Greater Board (closed)

Attendees

Todd Nicholson, Sarah Young-Hong, Liz Gauthier, Jen Killilea, Anne McMurray, Beth Murphy, Maureen Sullivan, Hillary Mosca, Harshini Muttiah, Nayla Daly, Meg Kara, Liz Mullen, Pascal Haddad, Tara Billini, Jen Shea, Sudha Sarma, Joanne Stanton

1. Todd Nicholson – Introduction/Agenda

Focus/Agenda:

- PTO Communication with the Downey community
- Planning of Events
- Communication of fundraising efforts and how money will be spent (transparency)*
- Gala Committee update*

*Significant time spent in discussion. Please see Items 9, 11, and 12.

2. Old Business – Todd Nicholson

Discussion: Original Works

Original Works used to be one of the PTO fundraisers; it was organized by a parent volunteer each year. Last year's coordinator is no longer at Downey. In a prior meeting, PTO decided to take 1 year off and take this project off for the 2017-18 school year. Will need to decide soon if we do Original Works next year, as feedback from some parents are that they want it back so they can make items from their children's art work. Questions were raised if parents could go directly to the vendor to purchase art work, rather than coordinate through the PTO.

Action Items: Research and contact the Original Artworks vendor to determine how parents can order directly from the site. Communicate this to the Downey community.

3. Communication with new families- Todd

Discussion: Process for the Downey PTO to identify and communicate with new families enrolling at Downey.

- Sarah and Todd have documented a process to communicate with new families who move into Downey during the school year, so they can be informed of PTO events.
- Put together a document that can be provided each family along with the PTO/Downey Directory. The document will have all the names/emails of the PTO board members and grade-level reps (GLR).
- Diane Carde will handout the mailer/directory packet when the families enroll. She will also email Todd to notify him of the family/contact information. Todd will then notify the GLR to be in touch.

Action Items: None. Tasks completed.

4. Communication – Advertising Events

Discussion: Should the Downey PTO advertise other group events? What do we approve?

- SEPAC sent an email to all PTO presidents asking them to advertise SEPAC events on our website and Facebook.
- Todd asked the committee if we should proceed and, if so, how do we handle other requests from other groups.
- Tara asked how other PTOs handle this and whether they advertise SEPAC events.
- Given the SEPAC involves parents at our school, seems like we should approve this.
- Discussion began around offering to advertise these events to the Downey community via the PTO versus the school principal; if we advertise for SEPAC, will we be expected to advertise for other non-school related groups; and whether we limit the communication to school-based events or school-associated groups.

Action Items: (1) Find out what other PTOs are doing and be in line with them, (2) Ask Deb Gallagher if she can send out the SEPAC info to the parents.

5. Communication - Facebook

Discussion: Need someone on the PTO to take over the Facebook PTO group

- Lori Warren requesting another PTO member to take over management of the Facebook site for the Downey PTO
- Will need someone can post events but also monitor the people who join the group.
- Meg Kara and Hillary Mosca volunteered.

Action Items: None

6. Fundraising and Smaller Events

Discussion: Asking for \$\$ from the parents at each event.

- Last year, PTO decided to do less fundraising projects and instead went with the Gala. Tried to less events where we sell little items.
- As an example, PTO used to sell/auction baskets at the annual play. We will not do that or the flowers this year.

Kids Rule the School --- this is a highly anticipated event every year, so we should still go ahead with this and selling raffle tickets.

- \$1/ticket – sell at the play
- Also sell tickets in May for a second round.

Action Items:

1. Communicate that we are NOT selling flower bouquets at the play this year
2. Decide on a Kids Rule the School date (typically short Wednesday in June)

7. Communication – Constant Contact

Discussion: How is the Constant Contact process working? Are parents getting the email?

- Constant Contact is set up for an email/bulletin blast to all the Downey parents. Trying to notify parents of PTO events in a timely way.
- Communicates our PTO “newsletter” in an email format and tells the community “What’s coming” as far as events.
- Does it go to “spam” folder for some and they do not review the bulletin?
- Should GLR send a link to the Constant Contact page as a reminder? Could generate a URL link and embed in an email.
- Meg asked what events should be put in for the next communication for February. 3 day turnaround from draft to sending out at the 1st of the month.
 - Start with Play (beginning of February)
 - Use calendar order of events
 - Idea – put more upcoming events (the following months)
 - Each PTO committee should communicate with Meg regarding their events (write up)

Action Items:

1. Each PTO committee provide a “write-up” for Meg to include in upcoming events
2. Create a link for the Constant Contact bulletin that can be used by GLRs to send in an email.

8. Upcoming Events

Gift Book Program – ongoing

Box Tops (Cynthia Knox)

- Due Date in February.
- Instead of prizes by grade, will set an amount/goal to raise for the whole school. If we achieve the goal, there will be a school wide reward (spirit day, crazy hair day, celebration, etc).
- The school-wide prize was suggested by 3rd Grader Devon Knox.

Movie Night (Hillary)

- January 26th – Friday evening. Will be set for 6PM start.
- Created a flyer to hand out to each kid.
- Advertise that this is a FREE event. Popcorn and bottled water provided.

9. Fundraising Money and PTO spending – Communication to Downey

Discussion: Feedback from larger community is that they are unaware how the PTO is spending money raised. How should the PTO effectively communicate how money raised in last year’s Gala is being spent? How have we spent the money? Have we done more Enrichment classes?

Several board members and GLRs have been asked where the fundraising money (raised close to \$22K in the gala) is being used. This is a real concern. Discussion and feedback from some parents is that the PTO spending is not transparent. Parents want to know how the money is being used. Several committee members stated that we have not communicated this very well. Discussion covered that we are now starting to ask for donations for the Gala and are doing more fundraising, and that the PTO will be asked again how the money is (and will) be spent.

- **Gala Funds**– the PTO has not spent the majority of the funds raised in last year’s Gala yet. Set aside money for an Outdoor Classroom. Project has been slow to get off the ground. Set aside \$10K.
- **Enrichment** - PTO funds the Enrichment Programs for each grade. We have not paid for additional classes this year as compared to the prior year. Discussion continued that parents may not be aware of the enrichment courses that are occurring because they are offered in the classroom (instead of extra-curricular). Kids may not be telling parents about all of these activities. Deb Gallagher doesn’t want to do any more Enrichment Activities more than what is happening now; Tara stated that it ends up taking away teaching time in the classroom.
- **Buses** - PTO paying for buses. Liz Mullen liked that teachers “thank” the PTO for buses for field trips. Send to the parents.

Communication – How do we communicate our PTO spending with the 2nd Gala coming up? Should we send a specific letter to the parents?

- Nayla – We should use email, constant contact, and website to communicate the PTO accomplishments and goals. This should go out ASAP and in advance of the Gala email (in which the committee is seeking donations for the silent auction)
- Message should be “*Thanks to your generosity, we have paid for enrichment, buses.....*” Suggestion followed that this message should be in every email we send from now on.
- Sarah - We should (1) send a Constant Contact this week listing the PTO Accomplishments and spending, (2) Send a link to the Constant Contact via the Grade-Level Reps in an email the next day or two, and (3) Next week – Gala Committee can send an email to make requests for donations.

Action Items:

1. Draft a Constant Contact regarding the PTO’s accomplishments and goals for spending. Meg/Nayla. Send by end of week.
2. Send a GLR email with the link to this Constant Contact bulletin on the next day. Draft (Todd) + GLRs
3. Draft and send an email from the Gala Committee regarding sponsorship and donations for the Gala. Nayla and Ann.
4. Movie Night – flyer and or GLR email. To be sent on Wednesday (January 24th). Find out if the front office can send via Family Messenger. Hillary and GLR.

10. Downey Play (Sarah Young-Hong)

Discussion: Update on status and Discussion on buying the scenery flats

- Rehearsals going well. Play is on February 9-11th weekend. Parents are in charge of costumes.
- NO in-school performance. There will be a Spirit Day on February 9th but no school performance.
- Cast party will not be on the dress rehearsal day (makes for too long of a day); instead will have it on the Tuesday following the play.
- Tickets will be set for only \$5 (compared to \$7 last year). This is in line with the PTO plans for less small fundraising events. Do not need to use the play as a fundraiser.
- Hired an extra teacher (Erin) to help Catherine Starsiak with management of the kids. Going well.
- Issue – some parents are arriving to pick up too late. Need to address
- Issue – Do not have the screen “flats” that are to be painted for the scenery. The ones we borrowed from the Deerfield School have are too old and not usable. Downey does not have their own. Discussion involved buying our own or borrowing from the high school. While we may have funds to buy new ones, the school does not have any storage space.
- Request --- Gifts for Mrs. Starsiak and Erin. Should the PTO cover? PTO members approved.

Action Items:

1. Contact high school about borrowing scenery flats.
2. Gifts for directors will be covered by PTO. 5th graders at each play date will present.

11. Downey Gala – Nayla and Ann (Chairs)

Discussion: Status

- Nayla stated that Cramer Inc (Julie Walker- Downey parent) is donating significant time and services towards marketing and video production for the gala.
- Plans are to produce an invitation (to go out soon) and a video for the gala. Have met with the video producer.
- Nayla showed the draft flyer that will be sent with the theme “It’s a Small World”
- Vision – “It’s a Small World”, celebrate the Diversity of the Downey community. Everyone’s story.
- Trying to find a Downey alumni to be the guest speaker.
- Getting sponsorships

Donations – Asks/Ideas:

1. **Sponsorship and silent auction items.** – Need donations from the larger community for the silent auction, “wine pull”, and auction baskets. Need to send an email to parents – sponsorship, local businesses, vacation homes, etc.
2. **“cultural experience” auction baskets** --- parents or group of parents can donate or put together baskets representing their culture/heritage. International Baskets will be auctioned off at the gala.
3. **Teachers?** - Ask whether teachers/staff at Downey would be willing to “donate” an activity or service for students. Tara stated that she could ask the staff and respond back to the Gala Committee.
4. **Grade Level Reps/Each grade.** Put together a basket or item representing the class? Parents might be motivated to buy something from their kids’ classroom (photo, handprints, etc)

Action Items:

1. Email – send to parents for donations for the Gala auction. Nayla and Ann. Send by Monday/Tuesday January 22nd-23rd.
2. Tara – to survey teaching staff regarding their interest to “donate” an activity with the kids. Will provide response to Gala Committee - next week.
3. Get room parents involved from each grade on creating a class item to auction.
4. Find a Downey alumnus to be the key speaker.
5. Invitations – will be sent out in mail by January 29th

12. Outdoor Classroom Project

Discussion: Status -

- Sudha and Joanne discussed the start of the project. Met once and current committee is Sudha, Joanne, Paula Timofeev and Joe Mosca. \$10K from 2017 Gala set aside for this project. Need to demonstrate that we are using the funds and create a vision for the Gala.
- Joanne has written for a grant for an outdoor classroom at her school and is knowledgeable about the science curriculum that can be tied to this project.
- Paula has a contact that is a landscape architect who has designed outdoor classrooms before. She suggested that we contact local landscape architect/design programs at the local colleges to get students to volunteer time for the design.
- Gala Committee requested to see some draft designs that could be used for the Gala video (to be shot on February 12th). This committee is working on getting proposals and researching ideas.
- Thinking about the eventual build out of the gardens and space could be done with volunteers (parents, Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, students, teachers, etc) and/or donated services.

Action Items:

1. Meet with Deb Gallagher to discuss the site location visit that happened in the fall. Get her feedback on the vision for this Outdoor Classroom. Sudha
2. Reach out to local landscapers, landscape design firms, and colleges to determine costs and process for design.
3. Get teachers to be on this committee as well as other parents.

13. Other – PTO Spending

Discussion: Other business

- Discussion followed on other ways the PTO can use the money raised from the Gala and other events.
- Suggestion – Adding to the new playground. Seems like the district did not fully expand the playground.
- Suggestion – “Buddy Bench”
- Tara Billini suggested that we make a donation of “Buddy Bench” to honor Kristin Rocha (former Downey teacher). PTO members present all agreed that this was a good idea. Want to make this happen.

Action Items:

1. Todd – to discuss Buddy Bench donation (in memoriam of Kristin Rocha) with Principal Gallagher.
2. PTO Exec Board – to research new playground equipment costs and discuss district budget with principal.

**Meeting Ended at 9PM.
Next Meeting – Open Meeting on February 13th (All Welcome)**