

Hill-Roberts Elementary School
PTO Minutes
Tuesday, November 11, 2019

Location: Hill-Roberts, School Library

Attendance: Amy Young, Alisa Libby, David Lankford, Jackie Bonya, Mary Dugan, Jen DiPietro, Derrek Di Pietro, Amy Princiotta, Paul Princiotta, Jennifer Grenon, Sherrie Knightcloud, Beth Dimond, Jen Gilardi, Dan Gilardi, Dianne Sawyer, Kate Marsland, Lynn DellaGrotta, Abou Kaba, Sarah Kamara, Carrie Montgomery, Melissa Gravit, Adam Gravit, Soklim Souza, Andrea Phillips, Shannon Johnson, Frank Rich, Evan Chelman, Terry Hughes, Angela Amiro-Shirley, Suzanne Brough, Caitie Medeiros

MINUTES

1. Meeting called to order at 6:35pm.

- 2. Principal's Report**

David Sawyer, Superintendent, and Laurie Regan, Assistant Superintendent, presented a plan to re-distribute the elementary school grade levels. They are looking for feedback and want to hear your concerns. Tonight's goal is to make the community aware of the idea, hear your concerns, and get feedback. Mr. Sawyer and Ms. Regan are meeting with all of the elementary school PTO's.

Proposal is to reconfigure the grade spans.

Grade spans = a span of grades that make up a level.

There are currently three levels: (1) Elementary Schools for Kindergarten through Grade 4 (2) Middle Schools for Grades 5-8 (3) High School for grades 9-12.

Proposal is to discuss dividing the elementary school level into two separate levels:

- (1) Lower Elementary for Pre-K, Kindergarten, and Grade 1
- (2) Upper Elementary for Grades 2-4

Continue to have three middle schools: Coehlo, Brennan, and Wamsutta. Under the new plan, there would be a one-to-one relationship between upper elementary schools and the middle schools. Hill-Roberts students would all go to Coehlo. Hyman-Fine students would all go to Wamsutta. Willett students would all go to Brennan.

Currently in some of the elementary schools, half the students move up to 4th grade in one middle school and the other half to a different middle school. This would solve that issue.

The lower elementary schools would be Thacher and Studley. Most Hill-Roberts area students would go to Studley for Pre-K, K, and G1.

History: It has taken years to get to this point. A strategic plan was created a number of years ago (5?). They've spent two years to get to this point on school levels. It started with a concern over 5th grade being in the middle school. In an ideal world, 5th grade would be in elementary school. Based on the number of buildings and the size of the buildings, it's not possible to move 5th grade. In those conversations, the question came up, 'Is there a better way to restructure the grade levels at the elementary level to maximize students' education benefits?'

Research suggests there is no single right way to organize a district. We need to make the best decision for Attleboro based on the community and resources available.

Mr. Sawyer and Ms. Reagan are testing to see if there is community support for change. They already met with educators and the new plan received enough support to bring it to the community. If the majority of parents don't want it, then this plan will go away.

They're going to take all the feedback, review it, improve the plan and return to the PTO's in the spring with a more detailed plan. If it has support, the Superintendent will recommend it to the School Committee who will vote on it.

Positives:

The transition to middle school might be easier. Students stay with the same group of students.

Currently anytime there's an improvement to one elementary school (for example a specials staff member), they want to do that across all 5 schools but it's a budget issue. Under the new plan, offering the same services across same-level schools is easier on the budget.

They can focus the lower elementary (PreK, K, and Grade 1) on literacy skills, learning to read.

They can focus the upper elementary (Grades 2-4) on comprehension and using what they have learned.

Class sizes would be more equitable.

Two more issues.

- A. The city must be redistricted to look at the boundaries for who goes to what school. This hasn't been done in 20 years. It's a big project. Where kids live has changed in that time span and some neighborhoods now have less kids while others have more. Currently, children are being bussed all over town and it doesn't make sense. Redistricting needs to be done to keep children in their closest school.

Once the new proposal is decided, (whether or not to have lower and upper level elementary school), regardless of the decision, redistricting will happen.

- B. New school start times discussion.

All the research states that we are torturing high school students by starting school so early while younger kids are generally awake earlier and hit a wall (max learning for the day) in the afternoon.

The idea is to flip start times for the High school and elementary schools.
Decision on both A and B above will be made after the decision on the proposal.
The town of Sharon already changed their start times.

Questions from parents:

Q: Is the open floor plan (in Hill-Roberts and Hyman Fine) better for older students?

A: John Hattie's education research on open vs. closed classrooms shows it doesn't impact learning. It shows students do better in large learning environments later on and those students are more adept at focusing.

Q: How do the teachers feel?

A: We did a survey in the spring. They supported the plan enough to move forward to the community. 2/3rd of those surveyed are interested in learning more.

Q: How will it work splitting pre-k into two schools?

A: We see it as a district benefit. We'll be able to have future growth. We'll have room to spread out and expand pre-k into two schools. There are enough resources to split.

Q: What effect will there be on the number of teachers and support staff?

A: We'll have the same number of teachers and support staff but more equitable class sizes. Currently there are 4 teachers per grade in each school but some classes have a higher or lower enrollment per class depending on what school it is. We can fix that with the new plan.

Attleboro is underfunded. We have a \$10 million deficit to deliver an adequate education. (\$20 million is the wish list amount.) \$10 million covers basic services; what would be normal in other districts. There's a new bill being discussed that if passed should bring in a significant amount of funds to Attleboro. Current analysis shows we're short 200 staff members. Once we get funding from the bill, we can hire back some of those positions. There are no plans to eliminate any staff. There were severe cuts a few years ago. We've hired back most of those positions. We still need 200 people.

Q: Will all the elementary students take the same buses?

A: No. There could be two buses stopping at the same stop – one for lower elementary and one for upper elementary. Plan is not to add transportation costs but we're not certain yet.

Q: Why not redistrict now?

A: We haven't ever done this. It's difficult and painful so it hasn't been done. Given the current proposal, we'd rather do it once than have to do it again in a few years.

Q: What if I have a kindergartener and a third grader? I can't pick them up at the same time.

A: Right now the plan is to have upper and lower elementary have the same start times. Thank you for bringing this up. We'll come back later with an answer to this.

Parent: One idea is to stagger the start times for upper and lower schools.

A: It's possible. Attleboro has the longest school day in the Commonwealth. We'll look at how other towns do this.

Q: What other communities have lower and upper elementary schools?

A: Mansfield has K-G2 and G3-5 while Norton has K-G3 and G4-5.

Ms. Reagan: On the Attleboro school website, under Community – [Grade span discussion](#), we're going to post FAQs.

Q: What's the next milestone?

A: This month we finish up meeting with the community through the PTOs. Then we'll come up with answers to your questions. There will be social media posts. Later winter / early spring, we'll meet again with the community to get feedback. Then we'll make a recommendation to the school committee.

Q: If passed, would this go into effect for 2020-21?

A: In 2021-22, we'd implement phase 1, maybe kindergarten. There will be multiple phases over a couple years.

Q: Are you hoping to lower class sizes?

A: Not lower overall, but more toward equity. We can bring class size down quicker in three schools. We're hoping for kindergarten class sizes of 18, not 25. Under the current system, we don't have enough classrooms to lower class sizes.

If parents have questions, contact the Superintendent. His info is on the school website. You're also welcome to contact members of the school committee.

School committee members, Shannon Johnson, Ward 5, and Dianne Sawyer, Ward 1, attended this meeting. Both support the plan and believe it's a great idea for the district. The school committee is who will make the final decision and vote for or against the plan.

Q: Will this impact upper elementary offerings?

A: We want to offer a more enriched experience. We can do that with more focused teachers at each grade level.

Q: Would teachers need to switch buildings? For example, the kindergarten teachers in Hill-Roberts would go to another building?

A: Yes, some teachers will switch buildings. They would need to choose between staying in their building and teaching at a different grade level that fits that school or continuing to teach their grade level at a different school.

Q: What's the social impact? Right now older students mentor the younger ones.

A: We're not sure the impact is measurably strong. However, other parents have mentioned this as a concern. We want to do a thoughtful job of grouping students.

That concludes the presentation. Thank you for letting us meet with you.

3. Approval of October Meeting Minutes

Motion to approve October meeting minutes. Motion approved.

4. Officer Reports

a. Treasurer's Report

Currently \$15,035.45 in funds. \$8,000 is earmarked for expenditure on taxes, insurance, scholastic news and science spin, etc. \$8,000 left for the year which needs to cover \$3,000 in field trips and carry \$5,000 to next year for start of year events. PTO cannot do much else this year. Discuss future fundraising ideas.

5. Committee Reports

a. Race for Education Fundraiser Update

- i. Race for Ed fundraiser goal is \$15,000. That's about what's been raised the last 3 years. The total raised this year is \$13,615. About 100 students participated. About 75 students created a webpage. 25 students raised over \$200 and 3 students raised over \$500.
- ii. The PTO welcomes your fundraiser ideas. It was really hard to run the Race for Ed this year. Two people organized it. The PTO would appreciate any help parents can give.
- iii. Mr. Chelman suggested looking at the strengths of the Hill-Roberts community. What drives families to be involved?
- iv. Perhaps a gift card fundraiser.

b. October Book Fair Recap

Congratulation to new book fair coordinator Beth Dimond on running a successful book fair! Her goal was \$7,000 in sales and we surpassed it with a 4% increase over last year. The addition of the book fair at the fall festival put sales over the top.

The norm is to take the profit in scholastic dollars because we get 50% of total sales in scholastic dollars. The other option is to take the cash option but we will only receive 25% of total sales.

Scholastic dollars are used to buy scholastic news but Scholastic has changed the rules and after this year, we can no longer do that. We must pay by check using PTO funds. Scholastic dollars are also used to purchase books for classrooms, to stock the library, for CREST incentive awards, and given to teachers for teacher appreciation.

At the end of the book fair, the PTO purchased (with scholastic dollars) any books left in the teacher request boxes.

6. New Business

- a. Mrs. Cotsalas is requesting \$1,848.15 in Scholastic dollars to purchase library books. As the PTO has \$6,700 in scholastic dollars before we receive the funds from the recent book fair, it is possible to say yes to Mrs. Costalas's request. Motion to approve \$1,848.15 in scholastic dollars for the purchase of library books. Motion carries.

- b. Parent in attendance wants to volunteer to help with amazon smile. Yes! Please contact the pto.

7. Announcements

- a. November 22: Hill-Roberts alum and author Cassandra Federman is coming to talk to students about being a writer / illustrator. H-R is not receiving any profit from the event and Ms. Federman is not charging a fee either. November 23 she'll be at An Unlikely Story.
- b. Next PTO Meeting Date: January 14th at 6:30pm in the library.
- c. March 10, 2020: Blue Pride STEAM night at the High School. The rain date is March 12, 2020. The High School is asking all PTO's to donate \$100 to help fund the event.
- d. November 19, 2019: Literacy Night in the H-R auditorium. K-Grade1: 5:45-6:30pm while Grade2-Grade4: 6:45-7:30pm.
- e. Mr. Rich announced that there is a heating issue. One of the heating coils has failed. Maintenance is already working on the problem and are optimistic that the temperature in the school tomorrow will be reasonable. Due to the age of the building, parts for this heating unit are made to order. It will take 10 days for the new part to arrive and a few days to install it. It may be 2-3 degrees cooler. Send your kids to school in extra layers. They'll try to keep the school 65 degrees or above and if they can't, school must be cancelled. Those days must be made up in June.
- f. There is no Holiday Breakfast / Santa Breakfast this year due to lack of volunteers.
- g. No December meeting.

8. Motion to adjourn at 8:20pm.

Helpful links

Website: www.hillrobertspto.wixsite.com/hre-pt

Facebook: www.facebook.com/groups/hillrobertspto

REMIND Download the app to your phone, or text @hrepto1718 to #81010 for updates and reminders for spirit days, reading minutes, events, etc

Support our school at <https://smile.amazon.com/> and select Hill-Roberts Elementary School PTO as your charity of choice. Make sure to shop from <https://smile.amazon.com/> every time in order for the school to earn.