

PTO Board Retreat @ SPARK

November 20, 2009

8am-12pm

Attendees: Elizabeth Lieberman, David Rein, Guido Sacchi, Kris White, Elizabeth Mothershed, Aaron Danzig, Lynne Kushner

Individual Board Member Presentations:

Tell us the Why, How, When and What from each member...

David Rein – Why – He wants to be part of anything he is involved with through his kids, life, etc. so he had to be involved on the board. Enjoys it and finds it rewarding to volunteer at the school. He is new to APS and wanted to have his hands in the process. He wants to be integrated in the community. **Goals** – 1. Wants to make the communications to the families clear and effective..easier to comprehend on receiving end and streamlined for those working in the community to deliver info to the community. 2. Wants people to feel good about communications and that the board is transparent to the community. 3. Wants us to figure processes to work together better with the committees and those groups who support SPARK. He thinks there needs to be rules in place, set precedent for the How Tos of working together – develop board processes to guide interaction in the board and with other committees. 4. Create a more substantive newsletter that comes out every 2 months – with parenting info, stories, like a real paper....kids writing, parents writing.

Aaron Danzig – Why - Came from north side of Amsterdam,, needed to move...new house was in VaHi in 2005..got concerned with the split of the district. Decided to become involved. Wife Deb was one of the first involved in “spark” and Aaron was selected to run for the board. Personal reasons to make sure it was as good or better than MES. **Goal** – 1. get the infrastructure in place to make sure that moving forward there is an organized PTO with its committees in order to accomplish things important to the school. Year “2” is the year to put systems in place so that in 2010 and later there is an institutional knowledge in place to lead the school. 2. To make sure that the PTO raises money...we still need a lot more money for playground, traditions, school grounds, 3. Create a teacher grant program for our teachers – get the system in place so we know how to get them as needed. Find those special volunteers ready to commit for a few years to get this project going and set in place.

Kris White – Why - No idea. My daughter didn’t want to go to this school. Wanted to demonstrate commitment to her daughter in order to help in the transition. Wants to make sure 5th grade is good for her daughter. **Goal** – 1. get committee together to focus on 4th/5th graders. 2. Set up a connection or Liaison with school administration. 3. Work on special projects and needs that are unforeseen.

Elizabeth Mothershed - Why – Child not excited, came from Mary Lin, wanted to be involved in a big way because she feels like there are unique and great things from Mary Lin and wanted the group and school to be aware of those. She is missing the “community” at the school..wants to establish a community that our kids feel supported and have FUN. We are building a foundation for education. Kids need to learn that education is fun. She wanted to be involved in afterschool programs so kids could have fun, she wanted to make sure we could use the programs to alleviate the logistical problems of the school’s location. Was always involved at Mary Lin but wanted deeper involvement at the new school. **Goals** – 1. Clubs are going good, loves the variety and participation – wants this to solidify and make sure it is carried over from year to year – again systems in place, people in place who will support them. Initiate a club sharing day twice a year for the kids not involved. 2. Enrichment – Bring in an art and music element in a BIG way..not sure how to accomplish that....one thing is the talent show idea. Build music and art as part of what we do here and what we are about. 3. Career day – how we link the kids learning to what happens in the real world and how we tie that into the community. **TOP general goal** – Continuity and Teacher relationships are critical.

Establish PTO, Establish the community, Establish traditions...

Be realistic, setting the process will require a years worth of work...

Lynne Kushner – Why- Important that her kids go to the neighborhood school, she enjoys that they stand on the corner with her neighbors. Feels lucky to have that here, wants to influence the public schools. Direct her energy to be effective at improving the school. It has become her “job” now..requires energy and time and she is committed. Establishing everything, these processes are a years worth of work. **Goals** – Fundraising needs immediate results, taking a year to establish the programs will not bring in the funds..difficult struggle right now. How do we raise 50k in 2009-2010? Needs board assistance on handling that. 2. Create the structure, make it clear get it out to the community and establish ourselves especially the communications branch...need community support so we need to work with them. Need to let parent body know what the structure of the PTO is. 1b. fundraising, establish timelines for events to raise money. Set that in place. How best to organize the fundraising year..few big events that raise lots of money plus the smaller programs. School calendar for all to see and work with....

Guido Sacchi – Why – commitment to school excellence. Expectation that this school will have a great curriculum. For him extras are great but SPARK academic standards must be as good if not better than MES and Lin. Also wants to make sure school is fully integrated in the community to foster what this community is all about. Lastly he has a passion for technology – wants to make SPARK the model for the use of technology for APS schools. Is good at seeing a vision and implementing it. Was involved from the VERY beginning. **Goals** – 1. Define our identity – what is SPARK all about, what do we want to achieve in the community. Create an environment that is bottom up – but we let the parents, students, teachers establish the tradition...we just support it. Open up the channels to let parents step up and initiate things. Who are we..Environmentally friendly, farm to school, art teacher...allow the bottom to make it happen. He cautions to be

“dictators” verses “facilitators” ..we don’t want to dictate. 2. Enablement...open transparent goals to enable others to get involved and take these things on...3. Establish processes 4. Foster technology use and adoption **GAMEPLAN** – tech committee – 2 parents, 2 teachers, are developing a strategic plan....what do we have for each grad...camera, ipod touches....focus on news and adoption..we have so much more than other schools in APS.

Story of the technology budget – tech plan, budget was 440k...came in at 425k and used the rest for flips and itouch....one for each grade... with the tripods, cases, etc...

Elizabeth Lieberman – Why – Worked, started a business – healthy lunchables – she wanted to start a business so the school idea was great for her...focus on the concept of the new school – a green school. Build a foundation and a legacy. **Goal** – 1. Teachers and our relationship with them – nurture that relationship and work with them, supporting their ideas. Teacher appreciation, the lounge, all of it. 2. Work hard to support Ms. Brown above and beyond her administrative staff. We don’t qualify for a Vice, we need to think about how we can help her, lobby for her to get more support. 3. Community building, traditions, foundation, volunteers. 4. Angie Howell’s idea – concept of 80/20 rule...80% of what you are looking for comes from 20% of the population. Nurture on multiple levels that 20%. Our perspective needs to be “narrowed” in some aspect to focus on them...list of people who signed up to volunteer is even bigger than that 20%. Very confident and thrilled with the board...positive....

Ms. Jenna Mobley – Why – Background is in non-profit for kids – HIV care for children. Loves fundraising and working with kids. Being eco-friendly is very important to her. Travels out of the country at least twice a year and wants to share those experiences with the children.

Goal - Bring a teachers perspective to planning and implementing processes and programs as it relates to children. Wants to motivate the parents to get involved in the school and its community – create a balance between all parties in the interest of the kids – BIGGEST goal is to provide the children with opportunities in global enrichment.

KEY Goals and Discussions:

Narrowing from Master List:

Overall we need to focus on the 20% in all we do – volunteers, funds raising, etc.

1. Define School Identity and Community
 - a. Establish SPARK as a community
 - b. Establish Traditions
 - c. School community Cohesiveness
 - d. Enable children to have fun thru enrichment and clubs
 - e. Sustainable Established Clubs
 - f. Cultural Enrichment – Art, Music, Talent Show, Career Day
 - g. Create a “Bottom Up” environment – being facilitators not dictators

- h. Procedures for special projects – i.e. 5th grade committee and Buddy System
- 2. Organize Processes and Create Institutional Knowledge
 - a. Put in place processes and programs to create a clear structure
 - b. Develop processes to work within and outside board
 - c. Balance between long term goals and day to day responsibilities of the PTO
- 3. Communications
 - a. Easy, clear streamlined communication lines in and out of the SPARK community.
 - b. Create an approachable/accessible PTO board
 - c. Create a substantive Newsletter
- 4. Foster and Develop Parent/Teacher/Administrative Staff
 - a. Provide more administrative support for Principal either from the PTO or lobbying for more support staff
 - b. Programs and Processes for establishing positive relationships with school administration
 - c. Positive Organized relationships with teachers
- 5. Fundraising
- 6. Technology and Resource Use and Adoption

TOP Choices are #2, 3 and 1 then 5,4,6

Brainstorm about these 3 goals, work together in groups to establish attainable goals and strategic plan for that goal:

#1 Community/Identity – suggestion box, special events chair or NEW committee – community outreach and awareness...Community Spirit Committee who handles i.e. Spirit Movie Night for the kids to show off their school to their friend.....December 17th evening...Special Projects Procedures, How to Define Spark's identity, create bottom up atmosphere

#2 Processes – School calendar, Documentation for - planning, idea submission, for events and responsibilities, clearance/approval, checklists; Interaction and communication with Administration; Process for feedback; Events – “How do you do it”; Setting up mailboxes, access to the how tos

#3 Communications - Schedule for communication, appropriate content guidelines, channels for how to post it, Define communication channels, Define what will be paper/online, etc...Kids communications; 2-way communication processes; PTO define/transparency, DD – name, format, content

Who works on what:

#1 Kris, Elizabeth M, Claire

#2 Guido, Aaron, Elizabeth

#3 Lynne, David, Jenna

Submit the results of the brainstorming task forces in 2 weeks, December 4th

Communication between PTO and Teachers/admin:

Ms. Brown – Admin staff – will come in and introduce themselves to us.

She wants to define for us when we need stuff done who we go to in the staff..we need to define our needs and Ms. Brown will match that to her staff to take responsibility for assisting us in reaching those goals. She needs us to define and she will align the responsibilities with her staff. Streamline until we get a school administrative manager who is coming....SAM

Ms. Brown wants to communicate directly to the board member until the SAM can come in and take that over...SAM will keep principal calendar and coordinate with the PTO board on Ms. Brown's behalf.

EL – what can we do to work around having to get answers directly from Ms. Brown – that system is not in place yet – she is not comfortable because her staff is still in the learning process. She wants the board members to do the communicating, not committee chairs, etc. Channels of communication thus far are:

- Instructional Information – Ms. Fletcher directly

- Not defined yet - Ms. Walker, school secretary

- Needing copies, help in organizing – Ms. Ross School clerk

- Booking space/ meetings/events – Ms. Brown Directly

- Getting stuff in backpacks – Inform David/EL 1st, then DR/EL will send for approval to Ms. Brown (she needs at least 2 days for approval), cc: Ms. Fletcher / Ms. Ross and coordinate with Fletcher and Ross to get it distributed. Subject Line: Item for backpack with distribution date....typically 3 days later

- Academic Calendar/Bulletin – submit to David, he will send to Jenna who will get this to the teachers to incorporate into the bulletin Fridays...deadline to David Friday for the next week's bulletin - Jenna's deadline is Monday 5pm

- Announcements – Send to Ms. Fletcher

Ms. Mobley – Create a liaison between all teachers and the PTO Board. She wants teachers to take an active role – so yes the idea of having a member who they can contact directly will make us more accessible to the teachers...we just can not create more meeting, priorities or additional responsibilities for the teachers. Make it very loose and unofficial...PTO will do this and make teacher assignments..

EL – we want to invite teachers, want them to come but do we create pressure?? JM – no it has been great, teachers feel left out so we want to know what is going on and be involved. Teachers need notice, don't want requirements but the invitations would be great if they come from the PTO member assigned to them....Teachers need a weeks notice.

BIG Picture Board and School Feedback:

Feedback from Ms. Brown and Jenna Mobley:

Ms. Brown – The PTO board is great, it does create additional work – not unnecessary but man power is low right now....Ms. Brown needs help “understanding” how each committee works, how she can help facilitate the goals of those groups and committee...the more we can define the roles and goals the better she can coordinate with our efforts. She appreciates that the board is not trying to RUN SPARK and that we are patient and work with her and her systems.

She does know we are holding her and the staff to very high standards....Wants to carve out the communications with the PTO board and with our parents – what do we need to communicate, what is most affective way to communicate – and she will look to the PTO Board to help figure out the best ways, and identify what is reasonable.

GS – what are your TOP needs or wants from the PTO Board? It is important that you set some expectations for us as a board as well.

Ms.B – 1. Funding piece – access to a small misc funding amount to do nice things for the teachers...

Ms. M – 1. Communications open and informative; 2. Getting teachers motivated to be an invested part of this community and school – she needs support to make that happen. Her idea is to inform the teachers about what the PTO does, info about what we do, what we plan to do – share this information with the teachers. The purpose, our yearly goals. Teachers will not be hands on unless they are passionate about something, but they would give us feedback. They cant give feedback until we inform them. They will have more ownership if they are informed. Establish personal contact, the transparency of purpose and goals so they can give feedback; 3. Teachers have a great taste from the resources given to them by the PTO.... So keep it coming...love the feeling to know we are supporting them; 4. Sunshine Community support – morale building for teachers. Ms. Russo coordinates that committee. Work with EM and the creation of the lounge.

Mascot Announcement – SPARK mom’s drawing....

Ms. Fletcher’s Introduction – help teacher and monitor the instructional program – implementation and support the teachers. She is also the Chair of Student Support teams to assist children with emotional and personal difficulties, organizes EIP for students experiencing difficulties in reading and mathematics, works in aspects with transportation – arrival/dismissal procedures, works on discipline with Ms. Brown, works on logistical operation of the school, professional development to the teachers – classroom observations, debrief them and coach them to improve, holds school tours and anything delegated by Ms. Brown.