

Burning Tree PTA Meeting Minutes – September 2, 2008 at 7:30 pm

The meeting was called to order by President Lisa Sanfuentes. The June 3, 2008 meeting minutes were approved.

President's Report: Lisa Sanfuentes welcomed everyone to the first PTA meeting of the school year. She introduced the PTA board and thanked everyone who has already been working this summer, to help get the school year off to a great start. Thanks to Building Services for cleaning up the building, to Vicki Herson for painting the lobby, to Pamela Janssen for landscaping the grounds, to Allison Ellis, Lisa Norwalk and Ellie Abramowitz who made the school look great.

Some changes from last year: the school will not be holding the Adult Auction Fundraiser this year; the "Fill Our Pond" campaign replaces it. The campaign is off to a strong start – thanks to all the generous families who have already donated. Please consider donating if you haven't yet. There will still be a party in the Spring – cocktail parties on March 21st - where we will auction off the popular teacher offerings (such as a trip to Barnes & Nobel with ice cream and Principal for the Day). There is a new committee on the PTA: Environmental Education headed by Ira Feldman. We are no longer going to ask for monthly sandwich donations for Martha's Table. Instead, we will support Food for Kids. We need to form a committee to evaluate which religious holidays are appropriate to include on the school calendar. Currently, the BTES school calendar includes Christian and Jewish holidays and some members of our community have requested we consider other holidays. Additionally we need a Chairperson for the Inter-Cultural Committee, and the Holiday Committee would fall under it.

Several Chairperson positions are vacant:

Spring Fair – we have helpers, but if we cannot get a Chairperson, we will be unable to hold the Spring Fair

Chess Club, Fitness Frogs at lunch and Public Relations

Cindy Campbell, Co-President: Please fill out the form for the Directory by September 5th. Karen van Loon and her committee will get the Directory out earlier this year. You cannot live without the Directory. It's great for play dates and the front of the book is a handbook with PTA programs, guidelines on how the school runs, etc. The Directory costs \$5 and is free of charge if you join the PTA (\$25 membership fee). The PTA membership fee is a great fundraiser for the school, so please join. At the beginning of the year, the PTA gives each teacher \$100 for school supplies and we purchased microscopes and necessary items for the media center.

We are looking forward to a great year with Mrs. Erdrich and Mr. Tark. We are so glad to have Mr. Tark back with us.

Principal's Report: in all the schools I've been in and the PTA meetings I've attended, I've never seen so many people at a PTA meeting. The school looks great. The mural on

the way to the gym is spectacular. Our Building Services staff have been working so hard you can almost see your face on the floor and they were one person short. Our school population has remained the same, although there are fluctuations. What makes BTES very interesting is that the classroom #s fluctuate in that the classes are larger with Science and Social Studies than with Reading, Writing and Math because we do a wonderful job including the Learning Center students. I am aware that the 1st grade classes are huge (27 kids in each of the 3 classrooms and 5 in the Learning Center). I am in constant contact with our Community Superintendent and we are working together on this. They are aware of our numbers. I will keep you informed if I need parent support. What I can promise you is that the powers that be meet once a week and we're constantly being asked how many students showed up and how many didn't. For Reading and Writing in 1st and 2nd grades, the students are broken up into 4 classes, versus 3 because Montgomery County is trying to lower the class sizes and so we have a reading initiative teacher. Hence, in reading and writing we have 20 students per class for 1st grade and 17 per class for 2nd grade. The classes are balanced and we're trying to give each teacher a manageable class size.

We have 3 wonderful new teachers. We did well and I'm hearing the same from parents. We have a new Building Services staff person and she's great. We also have some new para-educators. Whenever our Learning Center students go into a mainstream classroom, they are accompanied by a para-educator. All the kids benefit from this inclusive experience.

In the office, Theresa Halabi replaced Damara Dockery.

Regarding the Math curriculum, BTES students successfully transition to Pyle Middle School, so things have been working. However, the County is asking if even more students are ready for accelerated math and hence going forward, there will be some changes. Currently, when students get to 5th grade, some stay with 5th grade math, and others do 6th or 7th grade math. Also, students in 3rd and 4th grades can study math that is one grade higher. This will now happen for 2nd graders also. The school will start the advanced placement the first week of September and parents will be informed of this change at the first PTA meeting on September 2nd. Students in 2nd grade should be told that they may have a different math teacher than some of their classmates. The October PTA meeting will have a special program on the math curriculum and the changes going forward.

It was a cluster decision to use "Everyday Math" and our teachers supplement it. We could choose that or Harcourt Brace. Some parents are concerned about the math curriculum and at our next PTA meeting we'll have a special program on math. Sharon Tompkins asked if there can be a PTA committee focused on math curriculum. Lisa Sanfuentes said she would look into that.

When our students go to Pyle, they know if the student was in accelerated in math. I loved Math and in closing, our goal is that kids love math. If issues come up, please speak with your child's teacher and my door is always open.

Vicki Herson, VP of Community Affairs: we are teaching our kids to be good citizens. BTES has a sister school, Broad Acres in Silver Springs and we donate monies, clothing and other items to them. We will also be donating to the Capital Food Bank in Washington, DC. You'll find out more about these programs and others in the coming weeks.

Ellie Abramowitz, VP of Fundraising: "Fill Our Pond" campaign is our major fundraiser this year and we have had an overwhelming response! To date we have collected \$13,460. Families can donate at any time, by sending in a check through their child's backpack, during Back to School nights, and at the cocktail parties to be held on March 21st. The Sally Foster fundraiser (where you can find fun gift wrapping) starts in 2 weeks. We get 50% from all our SF sales. There will be a raffle also. Bingo Night is on November 7th at Pyle Middle School and it's a ton of fun – it's always very well attended. Our Book Fair is on Dec. 2nd at the Barnes & Noble in Bethesda. Come out and buy books for yourself, for teachers, for gifts. Our teachers come and play games in the evening. We have 4 Dine Outs this year, where our school gets a percentage of the restaurant's sales from that day. This year the Dine Outs will be at Cosi, Mama Lucia's, Baja Fresh and Mongolian Barbeque. Our School Spirit Shop sells BTES t-shirts, pencils and other items. It's open throughout the year. For Original Artworks, Mrs. Payne creates pictures with our kids and the company turns that into mugs, t-shirts, coasters, magnets, etc. They make great keepsakes. The Spring Fair is in May and it's super fun. We have games, prizes, slip 'n slide. You can get information on these programs from Burning Issues and on our website.

Karen Van Loon, VP of School-Based Programs: a huge thank you to Sujata Chakrabarti and Julie Zebrak for running the family to family program. We have many after-school programs that are offered right here at the school and are for all grade levels. The Back to School picnic is on Sept. 12th and we need many volunteers, about 14, so please sign up. It's on the back field, divided by grades. It's great fun and goes for about 2 hours. You can order food like pizza or subs or bring your own dinner. We're once again offering FLES which is a great opportunity to have your child learn Spanish, Chinese or French. We have the Creative Writing Club for 3rd to 5th graders where they meet once a week after school to write poetry, fiction, non-fiction and they get their work published. Our newspaper comes out 4 times a year. October 8th is Walk to School Day, where we promote a safer way to get to school. We meet at a family's yard and a huge group of kids and parents walk to school. On October 16th we have International Night and let's not forget that America is part of the International community. 40 different countries are represented here at BTES. Children perform, we have a parade, and food from around the world. We need a couple more people to help us chair it. It's very rewarding. In January, we have the Science Fair where kids first have Lunch with a Scientist and then a week later we have the Science Fair. Everyone can participate and the kids come up with amazing projects. Later in the year we have the Arts Festival where our school is nicely decorated with the students' artwork. The 5th grade Farewell is the official graduation for 5th graders. Look for more information on all these programs in Burning Issues, Thursday updates and on our website: [HYPERLINK](http://www.BurningTreePTA.org)
<http://www.BurningTreePTA.org>

Elissa Ginsky, VP of Volunteers: all the other school activities fall under here. I want to thank everyone who has been helping at Lunch and Recess for the past 5 days. Please help for a ½ hour, 1 hour, whatever you can spare. In the Fall and Spring we have Beautify Burning Tree days. Come and help us landscape the school – no experience needed. We need 2 chairpersons for Public Relations to get news about what our school is doing into the newspaper. Fitness Frogs is an incentive to get our kids to run around. There are also openings for heading up Recess equipment and to become a Room Parent Coordinator. We also hold Staff Appreciation luncheons as a way to thank the teachers and staff for all they do.

Katerina Papaionnou, VP of Membership: it's very important to join the PTA – the school needs your support. We have 255 members so far and we had 321 last year. When you join, you get special member discounts from companies like Southwest Airlines.

Lisa Norwalk, Treasurer: our 2008-2009 budget balances. Teacher appreciation is under Community Liaison line item; the Cultural Education line item is to bring in artists in residence and for performers. For Curriculum, we help with extras like supplies; Overhead is for copiers; Media Center is for books and other types of media; Student Activities is for teacher and staff support such as the \$100 we gave each teacher at the beginning of the year to purchase supplies. Teachers can get an extra \$100 by submitting receipts for supplies they bought. We're happy to do this because teachers end up spending their own money sometimes. The 2008-2009 budget is approved. We have a wish list and as a 5013c organization we cannot have money left over that is more than what we need for start up at the beginning of the year. Anything more than start-up costs need to be allocated. The KG playground was completed last year. We may do plantings around the playground. The lobby renovation is done. We need to install a Digital TV Studio. The on-line check scanner is very near and dear to my heart as I won't have to go to the bank to deposit checks and it puts an extra check for accuracy into the process. Assessment tools are enhanced tools for MSAs to record assessment tests they give.

Mrs. Granof: the staff is up and running. We reported into work on August 19th. Summer really is over. We have a great staff and everyone always extends themselves and helps out. Thank you for painting the lobby, the staff luncheon and for the \$100 check which we are all using. Hopefully, we'll get the paper cutters and die cut tools. 7 of us attended MATI which is a wonderful program by the Maryland State Arts Council. We spent a week this summer at the course and it was great. We learned that we don't need to be an artist, musician, or a puppeteer to teach these subjects. We figured out different lessons we could do to incorporate art into the curriculum. And, we did lots of poetry. It was exhausting to do puppets at 10 pm, but great. Our artist-in-residence, from Brazil, is a visual artist and she makes paper books. Every class will do a visual book and we'll get the parents involved.

Respectfully submitted
Surya M. Shah, Recording Secretary