

A Message from the PTO Co-Presidents

Several weeks ago we distributed an on-line PTO Parent Survey and are happy to report that over 25% of our families responded. The purpose of the survey was to find out how we are doing as a PTO, gather suggestions, and identify potential concerns. The following is a brief overview of our findings.

PTO Meetings

Open PTO meetings, referred to as Principal's Coffees, are held once a month throughout the year. Nearly half of our respondents reported that they had never attended a PTO-sponsored meeting and another 20% reported only attending once a year. Work conflict was cited as the primary reason for not attending the meetings. But, we also heard that many people are simply not interested in the topics presented and would like more information sharing and dialogue at the meetings.

To address these issues, the Executive Board is making some changes in the way that the meetings are conducted. The meetings will continue to have a particular focus, which often will include a guest speaker, and Ms. Peterson will continue to attend the meetings and afford all parents the opportunity to ask questions. In addition, someone from the Executive Board now will share information regarding current PTO issues/events and take comments or questions from attendees. Hopefully this will increase parent participation and feedback.

We plan to target a specific audience at each meeting by inviting parents (and teachers, if appropriate) of students in a particular grade(s) or program and tailoring the topic to that group. This way, if a parent is able to attend only one or two meetings a year, it is more likely that the content will be directly relevant.

Preferred meeting topics include:

- 1 Q & A with Nancy Peterson, our Principal
- 2 Parenting topics
- 3 Math curriculum
- 4 Q & A with School Committee Member

We will incorporate the above suggestions into future events.

When asked about the best time to meet, the majority of respondents preferred morning meetings. So, we will continue to host the meetings on Wednesday mornings at 8:30 am.

PTO Funds

At the end of last year many parents asked that we limit fund raising programs because requests seemed to appear in backpacks constantly. (Please remember that fieldtrip fees and room parent solicitations are not PTO fundraisers). 8 out of 10

respondents agreed that instituting a private donation program in lieu of multiple smaller fundraisers was the right choice. Some respondents commented that they miss the magazine and gift wrap drives - which is understandable - but these programs are labor intensive and the revenue raised does not warrant the vast amount of time volunteers invest. To date, total PTO donations exceed the revenue raised from the two smaller fundraisers last year. The suggested donation is \$30 per family; however, any donation (even \$1) is welcome and valued.

In terms of spending priorities, respondents ranked the top 6 as:

- 1 Staff appreciation
- 2 Principal requests
- 3 Technology
- 4 Family activities
- 5 Global Connect System
- 6 Beautification and landscaping

Overall, budget allocations for 2007-2008 are in line with what was communicated in the survey; however, two areas, staff appreciation and technology, did differ. Staff appreciation represents a small percentage of the overall PTO budget. Each year the Hospitality Committee plans a staff appreciation lunch which is funded by the PTO. We welcome additional suggestions on ways to recognize Fiske staff. As for technology, Fiske is fortunate to be the most technologically up-to-date school in the Lexington Public School System and so the PTO Executive Board has not allocated any monies to technology during 2007-2008.

Funds are allocated to the Administration to cover identified gaps in school supplies, etc. Already this year, Ms. Peterson fulfilled requests for rugs (5) in the new classrooms. In addition, Ms. Peterson purchased other supplies needed as a result of our increased enrollment.

Beautification and landscaping funds were increased this year to cover the cost of planting several trees needed to shade the playground area as well as replace Big Backyard trees uprooted during the demolition of the old Fiske School. New top soil was added to the planting beds on the Colony Road side of the building and over 400 bulbs were planted by students at the end of October.

The Global Connect System, a voice messaging system, was paid and renewed for the 2007-2008 school year. We are glad that parents understand the value of having a system in place for efficiently and effectively reaching all Fiske families.

PTO Communication

Nearly two-thirds of respondents felt well informed of the goals and activities of the Fiske PTO, but it is apparent from some of the additional comments that some parents are interested in more and/or different communications from the school. The PTO launched two new initiatives to improve communications between school and

home this year. First, the Fiske Yahoo Group was established and is open to all Fiske parents. There are 72 members enrolled to date and we hope that number will continue to climb. Second, a new quarterly publication, *Fiske Connection*, was mailed home to parents this month and is available in PDF format on the website. The *Fiske Connection* includes PTO and curriculum information as well as a calendar of upcoming events. The next issue will be published the first week in March followed by another issue the first week in June. These two initiatives should begin to close the communication gap identified by respondents.

More than half of our respondents told us that the *Fiske News* is the best way to receive information along with list-serv notices for more urgent issues. We are very fortunate to have a dedicated parent compiling this information on an ongoing basis. The *Fiske News*, a timely summary of events, information from our Principal, and other important school notices, is posted on the Fiske website - <http://fiske.ci.lexington.ma.us> - and also sent via email every Friday.

Note that the *Back-to-School Guide*, which came home in backpacks in September, is an excellent resource for all parents. Among other things, it contains the 2007-2008 PTO calendar of events (page 11), PTO Executive Board contacts (page 38), PTO Committee Chairs and descriptions (page 38-46), and the entire staff roster (page 7-8).

PTO Committees

We received a number of new volunteers for our various PTO committees. Thank you. We look forward to working with you all.

PTO Family Events

The Fiske Fair, our largest fundraiser, and two new events - Kids Pizza Night and the End of Year Cookout - were the events parents most hoped to attend. The PTO Executive Board is pleased to learn that the new family events planned for this year are likely to be well attended.

Respondents provided great ideas for future events including movie night, family science night, and more grade/classroom activities. With regard to more grade/classroom activities, the PTO Executive Board is engaged in an effort to re-launch the room parent initiative and this, along with our targeted Principal Coffees, should yield more interaction among parents at the grade level.

There was some interest in attending a training session on volunteering in the classroom. A similar program was launched at Hastings and has proven a great success. We are in the process of investigating this idea and will share information as it becomes available.

General Comments

There were a few comments about parents being welcome in the school. In the years since September 11th, 2001, security at Fiske has been tightened. Parents are not permitted to wander freely about the school. Every person entering the building

during school hours must sign in to indicate their presence and sign-out as they leave. As with other public schools in Lexington, it will soon be mandatory for Fiske to lock the entryways during the school day. These changes mandated by local authorities are for the sole purpose of ensuring the safety of our children. Remember that parents are welcome at the All School Meeting each Friday morning. There are more volunteer opportunities than volunteers so don't hesitate to raise your hand and offer your services.

Thank you to everyone who provided thoughtful feedback to the Fiske PTO Executive Board. Let's continue the dialogue throughout the year. Comments are always welcome - even if you are not happy about something. We cannot fix what we do not know.

Remember that everyone who serves on the PTO Executive Board is a volunteer. There are no perks, privileges or payment. We do it to make a positive difference in the educational experience of Fiske students. Don't hesitate to come to us with your wonderful ideas. Together we can make them happen.

Happy Holidays!

Sue Bruce, Co-President

Nicole Abair, Co-President