**Minutes of the Tuesday, January 17, 2017**

**Gunston Middle School PTA Meeting**

**Attendees:**

Dr. Lori Wiggins, Principal, Sal D'Itri, PTA President, Irene Liebman, Vice President Communications, Courtney Holmes, Vice President Social, Libby McNulty, Vice President Fundraising, Meg Riley-Jamison, PTA Secretary, Cindy MacIntyre, Hospitality, List of parent attendees attached.

**Guests:** Carrie Wolf, Math Coach, Carolyn Clark, AVP 8th Grade, Carl Seward, AVP 6th Grade, Brianna Milton, Director of Counseling

1. **Approval of the Minutes by Consent** – Minutes from the December 13, 2016 PTA meeting were approved.

2. **Block Scheduling**

Sal D'Itri opened the discussion to remind attendees that he sent around some resources on block scheduling via the PTA list serv and that these links will be accessible on the PTA website. He explained that two of the resources he sent were from the NEA website, which has a great overview on block scheduling and its pros/cons. (<http://www.nea.org/tools/16816.htm> ) Also, the Kojo Nnamdi show recently debated block scheduling (start at minute 30 - <https://thekojonnamdishow.org/shows/2016-12-20/arlington-debates-a-change-in-class-scheduling>).

Sal reminded attendees that all Arlington High Schools use a block scheduling format. Kenmore Middle School uses a modified block schedule format in 6th grade. Currently, the Montessori middle school program at Gunston is also working on a modified block schedule format.

Dr. Wiggins elaborated on the schedule and showed an example of a modified block schedule or "flexible" schedule in which students attend all classes on Monday for 45 minutes then have a subset of classes for 90 minutes each on Tues/Thursday and Wed/Friday. Immersion students will have immersion classes scheduled into each day (minimum 90 minutes). She introduced Briana Milton, who created the model of block scheduling that Dr. Wiggins is proposing for Gunston. Ms. Milton worked in block scheduling in the Fairfax County School System.

Dr. Wiggins explained that in the current system of 8 periods a day, there is a rapid pace of instruction. Teachers have little time for personal interaction. Some projects are hampered in a standard time block and there is less time for focused, small discussions.

For students, the current 44 minute class schedule only allows them to go to their lockers two times during the day. There is not enough time to for students to complete tests in math/algebra classes. Even bathroom breaks are limited.

Why block? There is more instruction time in an hour and a half. It enables teachers to personalize learning and meet with students more readily. Better able to capitalize on transitional time. Students can focus on fewer classes scheduled per day. More time for extra support and interests during the day. Classes, such as science, will be able to expand learning opportunities.

Dr. Wiggins explained that she met with lead teachers before the winter break to discuss block scheduling and rolling it out in school year 2017-2018. She has discussed it with the APS Department of Instruction and they are committed to working with the school to implement it. Many of the current staff taught in block scheduling in previous positions.

The proposal is a modified block schedule where Monday is the "anchor" day or a regular schedule day where students attend all periods. Tuesdays and Thursdays will run on Schedule A – TA and Periods 3, 5 and 7. Wednesdays and Fridays will run on Schedule B – TA and Periods 2, 4 and 6.

Carrie Wolf, Math Coach, taught elementary school in a 75-minute block. It allowed her to have time to: review homework, have physical movement in the lesson, direct instruction, target instruction, conduct small group instruction, allow time to incorporate technology into the lesson, have peer to peer and teach to student time and allow time to close the lesson. Currently some of these are going in her lessons but not in depth and not the way teachers would like. The challenge is to change the focus to teach in longer sessions.

Carl Seward discussed the modified block schedule proposed was crafted to provide consistency for kids and with input from teachers.

Questions asked and answered were:

- Has block scheduling at Kenmore Middle School been a success? The Kenmore PTA president relayed to Sal D'Itri that there is a generally positive response. There are some growing pains but it is working.

- Explain how immersion will work? Immersion students will have 1-3 classes in Spanish each day. Mondays, the anchor day, will be 3 classes. The other days will be 1 or 2 classes each day.

- Why Block for Gunston? What's the driving force? Arlington County behind it? Dr. Wiggins stated that she has not been asked to change Gunston to a block schedule by anyone within the county to include the superintendent.

- Will the school conduct testing and research before rolling it out? The montessouri program is currently working on a modified block and it is working. The plan is to roll this out in the fall of 2017.

- Is it better for the students to have some classes every day, like math? The data is not there to show a control group using block verses not using block. This is being proposed to improve instruction time.

- Teachers need training and time to change to a longer block/lesson plan. How will that happen before next fall? Dr. Wiggins explained that APS will support additional resources identified to assist teachers and instruction. There are also two professional development sessions identified in February and March for teachers to discuss and focus getting ready for block scheduling. In addition, there is a summer opportunity and before school starts in August.

- Perhaps it is too rushed to implement for Fall 2017. Maybe it should be rolled out to one grade? Maybe take a year before rolling it out to any grades? A suggestion was made for more opportunities for parents to discuss. A request was made for a session outside of a PTA meeting to get to a wider audience. Dr. Wiggins will coordinate a date for an open forum with parents.

3**. Financial Report**

Phoenix Bike - Sal D'Itri shared a request by Luis Matos, Activities Director, for the PTA to give the Phoenix Bike program a $500 grant to maintain the program. The Phoenix Bike program is a non-profit that meets every Tuesday for 12 weeks. Each student works on a bike and learns how to repair a bike to return to the community and to keep a bike that they repair. Motion was made to grant the program $500. Motion approved.

Sports Equip by Mr. Reich – This request was made two months ago that the PTA purchase sports equipment for students to take home as loaners to practice. The group asked if Mr. Reich would consider other items since the list of equipment provided was specific items and brands. Sal D'Itri will talk to Mr. Reich.

4. **Nominating Committee**

Sal D'Itri requested attendees to consider being a part of the nominating committee for new PTA positions which need to be filled. One is the Treasurer, since Jim Oliver is in his second and final year according to the bylaws.

5. Adjournment at 8:55 pm.

**Parent Attendees:**

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| **Parent Name** | **Student Name(s)** | **Grade(s)** | **Email** |
| Luis Matos | Luis Matos Rodriguez | 6th |  |
| Kristin Haldeman | Charlotte | 6ht | [kristinhaldeman@hotmail.com](mailto:kristinhaldeman@hotmail.com) |
| Lois Koontz | Lucy | 6th | [ltkk@hotmail.com](mailto:ltkk@hotmail.com) |
| Tori Brantley | Rachael | 6th | [Vic22301@yahoo.com](mailto:Vic22301@yahoo.com) |
| MiaStephens | Gianna | 6th | [miacstephens@gmail.com](mailto:miacstephens@gmail.com) |
| Stephanie Kutler | Madeline | 6th | [stephanie\_kutler@yahoo.com](mailto:stephanie_kutler@yahoo.com) |
| JayneMejia | Audrey | 6th | [jaynemejia@gmail.com](mailto:jaynemejia@gmail.com) |
| Rebecca Carr | Audra | 7th | [rcarr@pbs.org](mailto:rcarr@pbs.org) |
| SHHumes | Elias | 7 | shhumes@me.com |
| Angel a Edmonds | Talia Penn | 8th | Aatpennergy@aol.com |
| Julie Kluge | Ethan | 8th | thekluges@yahoo.com |
| HarriettMorgan | JoannaWahl | 6th | [hmorgan@wah.-morgan.com](mailto:hmorgan@wah.-morgan.com) |
| Beth Hicks | Kaya DeMarco | 6th | beth@demarcoip.com |
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