Meeting Minutes

Douglas Elementary PTO

February 27, 2025 Douglas Elementary 8:30am

**Board Members: Birdie Holley, President – Ingrid Benson, Vice President – Chris Bowman, Treasurer – Raechel Hardin, Secretary – Michaelle Gust, DES Principal**

Meeting called to order by: Birdie Holley, President Attendance: 15

Board Members not present: Ingrid Benson

Minutes: January meeting minutes approved via email.

**Officer Updates**

**President: Birdie Holley** (birdiewester@gmail.com)

* There are currently two at-large positions available on the PTO board. Today, we will be voting to appoint Becky Starring to one of these positions. There is still one more position open for anyone interested. The board voted and has approved Becky Starring for the PTO board, and the new term will begin on July 1, as the fiscal year ends on June 30. Renee Russell is running for treasurer and is currently training to manage the reports and use Money Minder, ensuring she is prepared to assume the role in July. Raechel Hardin is a candidate for president, while Gaby Cote is running for vice president. The secretary position will be appointed to Alison Mixan, with voting scheduled for the April meeting. Birdie is collaborating with Emily Jipp and Meg Hurley to address the 501(c)(3) paperwork as she transitions out of the PTO.
* **Vice President: Ingrid Benson** (ingbenson2@gmail.com)
* No update.

**Treasurer: Chris Bowman**  (cjames.bowman@gmail.com)

* We have exceeded our budget for administrative supplies due to the software costs for Money Minder. However, we were under budget for the walkathon, and there are surpluses in other areas that will cover the overages. Please ensure that if you are managing a committee, all expenses are submitted and tracked meticulously.
* Birdie met with Mark Neidlinger to discuss transportation costs for field trips. We would like the school to cover all of the transportation costs since this has traditionally been done in the past and the PTO to pay for any overages incurred and DES goes over the allotted amount. If agreed upon, this arrangement is expected to take effect in the next school year.

**Meeting Information**

* **Principal Update (Michaelle Gust):** March is Reading Month, and we have many exciting activities planned! Parent-teacher conferences are scheduled for March 4th, 5th, and 6th, with in-person meetings on the 4th and 5th, and a virtual option on the 6th. March 7th will be a half day, and March 14th is an in-service day, meaning there will be no school.
* On March 18th, students will attend the Children's Film Festival. Students in TK through 2nd grade will attend a screening at the SCA at 8:15 AM, while 3rd through 5th graders will go at 12:15 PM.
* **Teacher Update (Mrs. Hale/Mrs. Robb):** The book vending machine is fully stocked, and the kids are always eager to pick a book to take home.
* **March Reading Month/Visiting Author (Mrs. Kelly/Mrs. McKee):** We will be collaborating with the SCA for a visiting author event. The SCA will come to the school to hold sessions with the students, focusing on themes of inclusivity, overcoming failure, and fostering creativity in writing. The authors, Brad and Kristi Montague, will visit in April, but in March, students will learn about the author’s books and participate in related activities. Mrs. Kelly has reached out to Mrs. McKee for assistance on this project, and together they aim to create an environment where students are eager to come to school every day. They have planned various engaging activities throughout these two months. As part of the excitement, the teachers are working on a 1,000-piece puzzle, but two pieces have gone missing. Over the next two months, students will earn puzzle pieces, hoping to find the missing ones. There will be interactive school-wide games and numerous opportunities for students to earn these pieces. Each week, every class will receive a top-secret envelope containing extra ways to earn puzzle pieces through reading, making it a fun and subtle way to encourage reading. One week, the library will transform into a Book Bistro where Meagan and Amy will dress up and serve books for a "book tasting," allowing students to check out the ones they sampled. This initiative aims to excite students about reading and being at school. At the end of the month, classes will bring their earned puzzle pieces to the library. If they have found the missing pieces, they can vote on a reward for the student who has contributed to finding them.
* **SCA Update (Whitney):** March marks Mountain Film Month, during which all students will participate in film screenings. There will also be a "Film for Families" event on Friday March 21st. Doors open at 6:00p and the film begins at 6:15p. Adult tickets are $5 and children are free. Following the film screening your family can enjoy hands-on activities led by our community partners: Velo Kids, Scrapyard Climbing Collective, Outdoor Discovery Center, and Eighth Day Farm. Free refreshments provided by Uncommon Grounds Roasters.
* In April and May, the entire third grade will go on a field trip to the SCA, along with assemblies and classroom visits from SCA representatives.
* A conference titled "Curiosity and Action" will be held for educators and creators, focusing on fostering creativity and wellness throughout the day. The conference will feature various speakers and artists and is offered on April 26th if educators would like to attend.
* Summer camp registration is now open, with scholarships available for those camps.
* Student tickets for theater productions at the SCA are also now an option, and matinee performances for Broadway shows will be added to help increase attendance.
* The "Jump into Summer" event is scheduled for the last day of school.
* **Family Dance Update (Kelli and Joelle):** The Family Dance is scheduled for March 22, and this year’s theme is Beach Party, chosen by the fifth graders. Attendees can look forward to fun beach-themed games, a DJ, and plenty of snacks. Kids are encouraged to dress as beachgoers or wear whatever they prefer, with some accessories available at the dance.
* A flyer has been sent out via Dojo, and a reminder will follow. Additionally, a volunteer form will be distributed for those who wish to help with decorating and setting up as the event date approaches.
* **Teacher Appreciation Week (Karen/Ashley):** This is Ashley’s final year with the committee, so if anyone is interested in volunteering to assist Karen next year, please reach out. Teacher Appreciation Week will take place from May 5 to May 9, and we would love to have more volunteers to help make this event successful. There will be dress-up days and activity days for students to get involved, as well as meals and gift bags for the teachers. This year’s theme will be a 90s theme. Additionally, we are looking to arrange for a massage therapist to provide massages in the teachers' lounge.
* **Eloquence Day Update (Meagan/Casey):** Planning for Eloquence Day is well underway. They have finalized the theme and menu and are now in the process of securing food and gift bag items. This year, we have a fantastic and talented group of parent volunteers. If you're interested in getting involved, please reach out to Megan Lampen (Meagan.lampen@finepointinteriors) or Casey Locker (clokker@saugatuckps.com). The next planning meeting is set for March 18 at 3:15 PM in the library at DES.
* **Parent/Teacher Meals Update (John):** The volunteer form for meals has been sent out and many volunteers have committed to bringing in meals for teachers. Thank you, parents!
* **Screen Free Week/Color Run (Lauren):** Lauren is looking to pass this committee to another person next year and would like to do it seamlessly, so if there is someone that is interested in taking it on next year, she would love to have them work on it with her this year. If this is of interest to anyone, please reach out to Raechel Hardin at [rhardinfbs@gmail.com](mailto:rhardinfbs@gmail.com). The library is helping with after school events again this year. Here is the lineup for Screen Free Week:
  + Monday - Sew Fun (this is a registration only class, so Monday will have no "drop in" activities available.
  + Tuesday - Creating with Perler Beads
  + Wednesday - LEGO Lab
  + Thursday - Board Games
  + Saturday - Puppet making workshop with the folks from Hystopolis Productions
  + Screen Free Week is April 21-25 with the Color Run on the 25th from 5:30-7:00pm at Schultz Park.
* **Outdoor Experience Committee (Dana):** Dana plans to determine a day this spring for a spring cleanup. Jess Gray is launching an after-school garden club that will offer students of that club a chance to work in the garden as well.
* **Parent Led School Safety Committee Presentation (Alison/Kelli):** A group of parents has been meeting independently to discuss school safety and the possibility of hiring a School Resource Officer (SRO) for our school. They aim to collaborate with administrators and the community on this important issue. The group has prepared a handout comparing our school to other similarly sized schools in the area that have SROs, highlighting that we are currently the only school in the district without one.
* The key points they want to emphasize are the need for an SRO, improved communication about safety with parents, and increased safety awareness for the community. They also hope to create an open Facebook group to facilitate the sharing of accessible information. The Facebook page idea was met with some resistance from other attendees in the meeting, so it’s not yet a certainty that it will happen.
* The school board had a School Safety Committee, and Amanda Frank attended the PTO meeting to provide an update on their findings. She has been part of this committee since joining the board. The committee has met monthly and hosted several school safety experts during this time. They selected consultants to conduct a full site assessment, which resulted in a confidential report presented to the board in a closed session. The consultants produced a comprehensive 94-page report detailing their findings and insights. A key takeaway from this process is that school safety is a framework that requires investment in all components to ensure a safe environment. The safety committee was instructed that the report must remain confidential and cannot be shared via email or social media. After consulting with Bob Tease and attorney Brad Banasik from the Michigan Association of School Boards, both advised against publishing the report online due to its sensitive nature regarding school safety. As a result, it has been decided that the report will be kept at the district's central office. Members of the public wishing to view the report can call the central office to set up an appointment. This process aims to balance public access to the report and the committee's work while also safeguarding the district's safety interests.
* The Safety Committee provided their recommendations from the assessment to Mark Neidlinger, who will ultimately decide on the course of action regarding school safety. He emphasized his desire for parents to be more engaged and informed about safety matters, as well as his commitment to transparency and communication.
* Mark wants the community to understand that he is taking a holistic approach to the situation and is dedicated to improving communication. After receiving the report, he moved forward by meeting with various officials and parents, and he plans to continue these discussions before making a decision. He aims to make a thoughtful and sustainable choice. So far, he has met with the Douglas Police Department, the city manager, the mayor, and other officials, all of whom have had productive conversations.
* He expressed that climate, culture, and community are top priorities for him. Since becoming superintendent, he has been focused on safety and security and plans to hire a part-time Director of School Safety, a professional who will work at both schools to enhance safety measures. This is just the first step in a series of initiatives to come. Mark will provide updates on school safety at each of the PTO meetings moving forward.
* **Member Comments:** Some members of the meeting expressed concerns that not having a School Resource Officer (SRO) in our schools is irresponsible, especially given that 74% of parents who responded to a survey conducted by SPS indicated their support for having an SRO. They argued that since the majority of parents are in favor, it is essential to act accordingly. Some members voiced that they would feel significantly safer with a law enforcement presence in the schools at all times. Another member pointed out that having an SRO goes beyond just safety and that the officer will have other responsibilities within the school that can be beneficial such as conflict resolution, mentoring, conducting educational programs on drug prevention and bullying, training staff and students on safety protocols, and building positive relationships between law enforcement and the school community. One member suggested that during a previous meeting, there was a willingness expressed by the township to assist with the costs, and that there are alternative options to explore if the budget cannot accommodate an SRO.
* There were also concerns about the potential intimidation some students might feel if an SRO were present, which could lead to more harm than good. Some parents worried that having an SRO could create a negative experience for certain children.
* The Safety Committee acknowledged that they have considered both sides of the issue and are working toward a solution. They noted that a common theme among all participants is the importance of fostering a strong relationship with law enforcement, while recognizing that different models exist to achieve this. It is crucial to ensure that the needs of our district are fully addressed.

Meeting Adjourned At: 10:18 am

Minutes Compiled By: Raechel Hardin, Secretary