

Minutes of CES PTO April 8, 2025 Meeting

Officers: Aaron Zain, Heather Cobb, Jen Rice, Mia Park, Tyson Stoddard

Attendees: Aaron Zain, Jen Rice, Mia Park, Brendan Bell, Brendan Mahoney, David Champlin, Evin Liljengren, Heather Cobb, Tyson Stoddard, Laura McGuire, Allison Abramson, James Grybowski

Motion to begin at 6:03 pm.

Approval of March Meeting Minutes (Mia Park)

- Motion to approve minutes 6:04 pm by Heather Cobb and Brendan Mahoney seconds.

President's Report (Aaron Zain)

Preface:

Thank you to every parent, teacher and staff member who has stepped up to help the CES PTO with volunteering this year! Please know, your help is appreciated and we could not / cannot do all that we do without your support!

President's Report:

Last night, I attended the VRHS Music Boosters meeting. They are currently looking for members for every one of their Board positions. There was a discussion about parents and volunteering. That they had been able to get volunteers to step up for "one off" help, but not find parents that were willing to be in charge of an event or step up for the Board. This has been an increasingly difficult situation since the pandemic...

We, the CES PTO, is in the same situation here.

- More than fifty percent of our Chair positions remain unfilled.
- We have every Board position open this year. We have talked about this all year. No one has stepped up. No one has approached us to ask questions or inquire.
- When we approach parents about this, the usual response is that parents are willing to help out or volunteer for a specific task/time but not to take a lead role...

It is always the same parents, again and again, volunteering. There should be a sense of responsibility that each parent take a turn - but that is not the case.

The CES PTO Executive Board is responsible for the Administration aspect of the CES PTO and has job duties and responsibilities to keep the organization going, record and document for future volunteers and fundraise.

- the Chairs coordinate the events with their Committee to offer our children and teachers these great programs.

* When the bottom drops out and there are no Chairs & Committees - the Executive Board ends up stepping in and running the programs.

- Each time that this happens, it chips away at the effectiveness of the organization because we don't have the time to do our jobs properly.

- Your Executive Board is exhausted holding each event together.

- It becomes more work for the volunteers who do step up and they get burnt out...

* It is really going to come to a point that the current structure of the CES PTO - and all of these great programs we assist with or put on - will not be sustainable.

This Is Not Sustainable.

It may be that the CES PTO becomes a scaled down version of what it once was, due to lack of participation. We have already eliminated the end of the year Fun Run and Obstacle Course. The fate of HalloweenTown is currently unknown. We had a huge turnout for the CES BOE Budget Meeting to discuss the Budget and possibly sharing one staff member - but we have NO Chair for the Teachers Appreciation Luncheon (or Welcome Back Teachers Lunch last fall)....

Do we cancel this and not show our thanks and appreciation to our teachers? Or is the expectation that one of the PTO Officers step in to take care of it.... again? What would you do?

The Nominations for the Board positions take place next month. The vote is at our Annual Meeting in June...

** The CES PTO is in trouble. On multiple levels. The fate is in the hands of our younger parents!

I feel strongly, on my third year as CES PTO President, (two terms) that parents and students would feel a dramatic change if all of this went away. That maybe not everyone is clear about what the PTO does and provides every year

For the kids

For the teachers and staff

For the community.

But I am fairly confident that it would be noticed and missed if it all went away...

What is the answer?

That is in YOUR hands!

Thank you for listening and thank you for taking some time to give this some thought.

Where we go from here is up to you....

Principal and Teachers Report (Tyson Stoddard)

- NGSS and SBA testing has begun.
- Chester Board of Education (BOE) 2025-2026 Budget
 - March 31, passed by BOF/BOS
 - April 29, will be presented at Public Hearing at Town Hall
 - May 13, 2025 - Chester Town Budget Vote at Meeting House, 7pm
- CES PTO nominating committee is still actively looking for volunteers for all 4 officer roles (President; Vice President; Secretary; Treasurer). If you have questions please reach out. The PTO provides enriching programming, supports teachers, builds community, raises funds for large projects and more.
- Kindergarten Orientation occurred three weeks ago and Kindergarten visitation and registration is coming up throughout the months of April and May
- Spring session of academies began last week and will run for 6 weeks
- Mark your calendars: May 29th, Spring Arts Festival

Committee Reports

Spring Fling (Jen Rice on behalf of Caitlin Calder and Meg Stewart)

- Saturday May 17th Spring Fling 5-8:30pm at the Chester Meeting House
- Brian Wilkens will provide live music
- Planning committee meets weekly and the event is coming together nicely
- Tickets available now!
- Most funds from Spring Fling will go towards a new fish tank at CES (\$12k)

Room Parent Coordinator (Becca Sinusas)

- Heart cart provides snacks for teachers once a month to build morale and show appreciation.
- Becca continues to send heart cart emails to each grade, but unsure how much parents are responding to requests.
- Tyson reports that there were enough snacks through February, but March was slim pickings
- Skipping April because 6th grade is overwhelmed and April break
- Last cart will be in May
- Becca will talk to Andrea about viability and suggestions moving forward

Year book (Jen Rice on behalf of Adele Andrew)

- Customizing the year book is due April 23
- With Lori Lenz's help, the cover is a mosaic of student artwork.
- Adele is stepping down next year and Elaine Thyse will chair next year. Thank you, Adele and Elaine!

Spring Book Fair (Heather Cobb)

Our spring book fair was held March 18th through the 20th. We had two busy days in which classrooms visited the fair, with our third day dedicated as a make-up day and family shopping time. Our total sales before our school earnings were \$4,656.25 with 677 items sold. Our schools' earnings were \$1,164.07. With the Share the Fair funds, the PTO was able to purchase 3-4 books for each classroom.

The PTO is still looking for a book fair chair for Fall 2025 and Spring 2026. If anyone is interested or wants to learn more about what it means to be a book fair chair, please reach out by sending an email to cescpto@gmail.com or connecting with an executive board member.

Thank you, Heather, for stepping in and organizing this event!

Teacher Appreciation and Welcome Back Lunch (Jen Rice)

- Monday, May 5th is our Teacher Appreciation Lunch. Potluck with some ordered food.
- Welcome back lunch is the first day of school. Lunch is ordered.
- **Looking for a chair!** Not an onerous responsibility. For teacher appreciation lunch, chair sends out a sign-up genius for parents to donate food, order food to fill gaps from the Wheat Market, and set-up.

Cultural Arts (Laura McGuire)

Playful Engineers will be visiting CES on **Thursday, May 8th**. They will work with both K classes and 1st grade. The workshop is called "**Maker Space Build Along: Chain Reactions!**". **Eli Whitney** worked with 4-5-6th grades in March. Friday April 11, **Eli Whitney** will come back and do workshops with K-1- 2-3 grades. K+1 is going to do "measure mobile". 2nd life stages with butterflies. 3rd bird beak variation.

Nominating Committee (Tyson Stoddard and Aaron Zain)

We have solicited nominations through email and chalk talk, and have no formal recommendations for executive board nominations. If anyone has questions, please come talk to any of the e-board members. Email cesctpto@gmail.com.

Halloween Town (Mia Park)

Info and brainstorm meeting April 8th after PTO meeting tonight. If Halloween Town is to continue it needs to be reinvented. Halloween Town needs a new Chair. Another fundraiser will likely need to be pursued if we make the event smaller.

Why the change? The PTO and Halloween Town (HT) committee were informed by the Chester Cemetery Association (CCA) and Selectwoman Cindy Lignar in late February that we can no longer use Laurel Hill Cemetery or parking lot for our Halloween event. The CCA praised the efforts that went into making HT such a success and recognized the impact the PTO's fundraising has on school programming. In February, the trustees agreed that the event had "outgrown the space" and voted unanimously to discontinue hosting HT. CCA's primary reason is to maintain a sacred space within the cemetery but also mentioned concerns over the safety of visitors and cemetery property.

Treasurer's Report (Heather Cobb)

Income

- Spring Book Fair \$1,164.07
- Bank Interest \$6.47

Expenses

- Book Fair Coupons \$462
- Social Development \$1000
- Cultural Arts – Eli Whitney \$3,796
- Operations Budget \$63.98 for Acrylic Display Stands. Note: The PTO executive board unanimously approved this purchase on March 13th

I wanted to take a moment to update all on the fish tank fundraiser special project current financials and I'm sure Aaron will have additional information to share shortly. As voted in a prior meeting, the PTO reallocated the remaining mini grants budget to this special project. We deducted last month's expense for the Fish Tank Fundraiser t-shirts from this total. With the direct donations we've received this far, the PTO has available funds of \$1,472.48 dedicated towards the PTO contributions towards the new fish tank.

Aaron Z.: No record of voting to use the funds to purchase \$662.50 for 50 t-shirts for the fish tank fundraiser, so retroactively voting now. Motion to vote by Aaron Z, seconded by David Chaplin. Unanimously supported.

Aaron Z: Almost out of pre-ordered t-shirts. How to proceed? Take orders and then order t-shirts when we have enough orders? Need more information to decide: Are the t-shirts the same price? Is there a minimum order?

Jen R: Spring Fling, we don't need to buy shirts for this event because people are willing to spend without having a t-shirt. The QR code for the funding campaign will be available at Spring Fling.

Evin L: Opportunity to "sell" t-shirts May 3rd, 1-4pm at the Conntucky Derby event. Jan from Rotary told Evin we could have a PTO table at the event to get folks interested in the organization. This is also an opportunity to

get involved with the Rotary again. Table could have a kids activity with t-shirt sales. Would need to ask the Rotary if giving away t-shirts for donations is ok.

Old Business

Bus Driver Appreciation (Jen Rice)

In collaboration with Deep River and Essex, 25 drivers will attend a thank you breakfast at Chester Town Hall on April 9th. We used a different vendor, Stop and Shop, to save money, which was requested by all PTOs.

Fish Tank Fundraiser (James G and Aaron Zain)

- James sent a letter to the gifting department at Whelen Engineering, after talking to the CEO about the fundraiser.
- James is also meeting Ted Teagan, President of Rotary, at CES tomorrow to discuss the fish tank fundraising. Will forward sponsorship page Heather created. Rotary is investing heavily into the North Quarter Pavilion.
- We have received donations and given out t-shirts (\$20 and over).
- Giving Tap at Little House will be devoted to the fundraiser.
- The PTO's current allocation towards this special project is \$1,472.48, which includes reallocation of the mini-grant remaining budget and cost of tshirts.
- Heather crafted a press release and fundraising campaign platform to open the fishtank fundraiser to the community with sponsorship levels. Same platform we used for the outdoor classroom.

New business

Halloween Town meeting (Aaron Z)

Please join us for the Halloween Discussion following this meeting.

Wellness Day (Heather Cobb)

PTO typically provides bouncy houses to play outside on Wellness Day. Will the PTO be doing that again this year? Tyson says yes! This year is planned for Friday, May 23rd. Heather will contact the vendor and Aaron Page re: insurance and logistics.

Comments

Aaron thanks everyone for coming to tonight's meeting.

Mia asks if we should shift our meeting next month due to Chester town budget vote on the same night. Someone brought up that there is also a Region 4 budget referendum vote 12-8pm on May 6th at Chester Town Hall. All agreed that we will shift the meeting to start at 5:30.

Next PTO meeting is 5:30-6:30 pm on Tuesday, May 13th to accommodate the town budget vote at 7pm the same day.

Motion to adjourn at 6:49 by Aaron Zain and Jen Rice seconds