

February 2023 General PTA Meeting Minutes  
2/27/23

Call the Meeting to Order/Welcome at 7:35 pm.

1. Welcome (Geoff)
  1. We have 3 former Dragons here this evening!
  2. Our main presentation is about the transition to middle school.
  3. Ms. Alston-Harrison will kick it off.
2. Transition to Middle School
  1. Last week, the 5<sup>th</sup> graders visited GW Middle School.
  2. Feel free to ask us questions.
  3. Our 3 former Dragons will talk about their experience.
  4. We're also joined by the GWMS PTA President, Joy Pochatila.
  5. Presentation
    1. 1,382 students
    2. A Day/B Day
    3. 4 randomly assigned teams
    4. 1 Academic Principal/grade
    5. 2 school counselors
    6. There will be another open house tomorrow on 3/21. Info has been shared via ParentSquare.
    7. Course Selection
      1. 5 required classes
      2. 2 electives
      3. General ed and honors classes
        1. Honors open to all, except for math (TAG students do honors math)
      4. Gym uniforms
      5. World languages: Spanish, Spanish for Heritage Speakers, Dual Language Spanish for Mt. Vernon students, French, Latin, German, Chinese
      6. Music options
        1. Bands, Orchestras, Chorus
          1. Skills assessed before level determined
      7. 2 Semester Courses
        1. Art 6, Make It Your Business, Family and Consumer Sci, Intro to Tech, Speech & Drama
      8. Support Courses (Full Year)
        1. Reading for Els
        2. EAP English
        3. Reading Enrichment
        4. Math Enrichment
    8. No one walks them to their classes.
    9. Course selection process

1. Ms. Alston Harrison meets with each 5<sup>th</sup> grader. Recs go home to the family. You can make changes. Just let Ms. A-H know.
  2. Things are flexible. You're not locked in, even when you get to GWMS.
  3. Final decision goes in PowerSchool.
  4. Select back-up electives.
10. Credit-bearing languages
1. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade = 1 credit
  2. 8<sup>th</sup> grade = 1 credit
  3. Must take German, Latin, or Chinese starting in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
11. You cannot request certain teachers.
12. School counselor is your liaison.
13. TAG
1. Rising 6<sup>th</sup> graders in TAG math will take Advanced Math 7 with other TAG students
  2. For other subjects, they are in honors and clustered with other TAG students
14. Lots of extracurriculars and clubs
15. GWMS students are called "Prexies" (Presidents)
6. Student Ambassadors
1. 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes are on 3<sup>rd</sup> floor
  2. Your kids should talk to their teachers if they need help.
  3. Check PowerSchool to stay on top of your work.
  4. Recommend having a calendar.
  5. Sports – you can take HS sports in 8<sup>th</sup> grade
7. Parent Qs
1. **What electives are you taking?**
    1. French and band
    2. Band, art, intro to tech (one is woodshop, which is hard to get into; the other is making drones, using computers)
      1. If your kid doesn't get their 1<sup>st</sup> elective, they have lots of other opportunities to take it later.
  2. **How much guidance do you get in your first few weeks?**
    1. Academic Principal tries to help but there are a lot of us.
    2. Workload is light the first few weeks.
    3. All of your core classes are just down the hall from each other.
    4. If you get lost, there are security guards and teachers patrolling.
  3. **If you are an 8<sup>th</sup> grader doing a HS sport, is there transportation?**
    1. Yes, there's a bus and if you miss it, you can take the DASH bus.
  4. **Are there honors classes for TAG kids and different ones from non-TAG kids, or are they mixed?**

1. Mixed but the TAG students have a Differentiated Education Plan.
5. **How do you get into TAG?**
  1. Email Stacy Palmer. There are TAG options at the MS that don't exist in the ES.
  2. Application is similar as in ES. That's to get the Differentiated Education Plan.
  3. Anyone can be in an honors class.
6. **What's the homework load like?**
  1. It depends on your teacher. It's not too bad, especially because of the A/B schedule. At times, it can be a lot. It's a huge step up from elementary school.
7. **How much reliance on computers?**
  1. Depends on the teacher.
  2. Better than elementary school – more paper and pencil in math.
8. **Do you have text books?**
  1. Yes, but we don't follow up on them. Mostly use pamphlets and study guides.
9. **What's an Anchor Period?**
  1. You have it every single day. 45 minute blocks. Good for the complicated subjects because you revisit the materials every day.
10. **Do you get breaks in block scheduling?**
  1. No.
  2. One ELA teacher tries to give small breaks.
8. Joy – coming from a parent perspective
  1. Important to use the PowerSchool app and help students navigate it.
  2. The kids learn how to advocate for themselves. No Thursday folders.
  3. Canvas pages have all the links to intramurals and afterschool activities, and it's for the students to navigate.
  4. Take what your kids say with a grain of salt and if something sounds not right, follow up with an adult at the school.
  5. I brought GMWS PTA info and car decals (\$5/decals).
3. Approve January 2023 Meeting Minutes (available on the PTA website - [georgemasonpta.org](http://georgemasonpta.org)) -- approved
4. Principal's Update (Dr. Oliver)
  1. School is closed on 3/13 (PD day) and 3/24 (Teacher Work Day), then spring break is first full week of April. Teacher Work Day on 4/10.
  2. Mr. Hershberger (5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher) and his wife welcomed a baby girl on Friday.
  3. Changes for upcoming school year
    1. We don't have any teachers leaving.
    2. K: We have 3 classes this year and we will have 3 next year.

3. 1<sup>st</sup>: 2 classes this year, and there will be 2 next year.
4. 2<sup>nd</sup>: 3 classes this year, and that **will go down** to 2 classes.
5. 3<sup>rd</sup>: 3 classes this year, and that will stay 3 classes next year.
6. 4<sup>th</sup>: 3 classes this year, and that **will go down** to 2 next year.
7. 5<sup>th</sup>: 2 classes this year, and that will stay at 2 teachers next year.
4. Primary changes for next year: 2 classes in our building will house an autism program. Teachers for those classes will come from another building.
5. Reduction means we'll lose 2 teachers. No one has indicated that they want to leave but they still have time to make that decision. If none decide to leave, the teachers will go to teaching positions at another building.
6. Reduction is related to our enrollment decreasing.
  1. K: 47 this year; 58 next year
  2. 1<sup>st</sup>: 49 this year; 46 next year
  3. 2<sup>nd</sup>: 58 this year; 45 next year
  4. 3<sup>rd</sup>: 58 this year; 54 next year
  5. 4<sup>th</sup>: 53 this year; 52 next year
  6. 5<sup>th</sup>: 45 this year; 49 next year
  7. There are class size caps and they're different from different grades; lower for younger kids
  8. 304 students projected for next year
  9. We'll have a FT psychologist next year
  10. We will not have an instructional assistant who will support 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
7. Questions from Parents
  1. **Is the autism program brand new or coming from another school?** Another school but we don't know which one.
  2. **Do parents/school staff have any say in this?** No, it's up to the central office.
  3. **I'm worried about the impact this will have on the academics at GMES. I know it's not your decision, Dr. Oliver.** There's an opportunity at school board meetings to provide feedback and ask Qs.
  4. **How are the projections established?** It's formula-driven. I can't say exactly how these numbers are derived. That's a good question for the superintendent.
  5. **If the numbers change and actually grow, is there flexibility?** If it increases, a teacher will be added. We'd have to move the Mason Market. We're slated to move out of this building in fall of 2024.
  6. **How many students will be added through the autism program?** I don't know.
  7. **How can we organize to help you and the teachers, Dr. Oliver?** Dr. Oliver will gather some info and share it via Geoff and ParentSquare.

8. ***This seems to be a problem with George Mason. Is it?*** No, there are other schools with declining enrollment. Before redistricting, we had too many students for the building.
  9. ***Does this change plans for the new building, which is for 600 people?*** Every time a new school is built, there's the possibility of rezoning.
  10. ***Are these the same formula and caps as before COVID?*** That's a good question. I don't know.
  11. ***I looked at the budget book provided to the school board. Why do we have all of these coaches and interventionists when we actually need more teachers? Can we have some team teaching?*** Consider has been given to that, but that's a different process. Those FTEs are separate from the teachers.
  12. ***How are these decisions made?*** They come directly from HR.
  13. ***How do you make the decisions about which teachers need to leave?*** Last hired, first to go.
  14. ***What are our 4 specialists doing? I have a son struggling to read and I can't get a specialist to help.*** Right now, we have an academic coach. She supports teachers, model lessons. We have a reading specialist who focuses on the lower grades. We have a math and STEM specialist for K-2 and another for 3-5.
  15. ***Any chance the autism program is for preschools?*** I don't know; we'll find out.
8. Please send Geoff any additional questions that can be shared w/the superintendent.
  9. Dr. Oliver – our actual budget is more next year (~\$60K) b/c of the psychologist and the cost of benefits increased.
5. Chair Updates
    1. Programs (Julie)
      - . Going great, will be done next week.
      - i. 45 students enrolled and ~30 on scholarship.
      - ii. Let us know if you have feedback.
    2. Fundraising (Brooke and Liz)
      - . Dragon Week: Dragon Fest (5/12) and Party on the Patio (5/20)
        1. Theme is "Off to the Races"
        2. Abbie is leading the online auction. Let's us know if you can donate anything.
    2. Outreach/Modernization (Crystal)
      - . Nothing new since last meeting
      - i. There were Qs from parents about busing and schedules but I don't have any new info.
      - ii. Trying to coordinate a special meeting to hear from someone from ACPS.
    2. PTAC (Geoff)
      - . Notes from last PTAC meeting on the PTA website.
      - i. PTAC is a great resource for advocacy.

2. Treasurer (Lisa)
  - . We should spend the money we have.
  - i. We have field trips coming up and Gylil concert from Ghana that PTA is funding.
2. Future PTA Meetings
  1. Mar (3/27) PTA Meeting - BE Smart
  2. April (4/24) PTA Meeting - Academic coach Ms. Heckel will present on something related to reading
  3. May (5/22) PTA Meeting - new officers and year-end wrap up
3. Meeting adjourned at 8:52 pm.