

George Mason PTA 10/17 Meeting Minutes –

1. Welcome from PTA President – tonight we will hear from Dr. Erin Stone (ACPS Director of Special Programs and Services); Mrs. Janet Reese (ACPS Parent Support Specialist); Mr. Finan (GMES Principal); and reports from PTA officers.
2. Dr. Erin Stone – Director of Special Programs and Related Services.
 - a. Citywide program overview and services to the students.
 - i. Special education is offered on a spectrum to ensure that the needs of all students are met
 - ii. One of the programs that service a small % of students is the citywide program – very intense services for students with intense disabilities (including medical fragile & intellectual disability; autism; emotional issues...)
 - iii. GMES – now has the Citywide Communication & Learning program – some students have autism, some have intellectual disability, some have both; the teachers & IA's have specific training & are supported by specialists
 - iv. 8 of ACPS's 13 elementary schools have these programs; both middle schools and the one high schools
 - b. Helping your typically developing child learn about diversity and inclusion. Typically developing children might notice differences in how other children are acting. How can I talk to my child about diversity and inclusion?
 - i. Disability is one part of diversity. Be open with your child and communicate that all children learn in different ways. Talking with your child about what makes them different and special makes them more open to differences in others.
 - ii. Some learners in Citywide program have differences that make them unique but doesn't make them unable to be accepted in the community.
 - iii. When the children in general education talk to the children in the citywide program, the communication should be child-to-child, not the typically developing peer addressing the disabled child's instructional assistant. Please encourage our children to talk directly to the children in the citywide program.
 - iv. Some of the kids in the GMES Citywide program have communication aids like AACs (iPads programed to vocalize the child's communication) or core boards (picture boards so the child can request items).
 - v. If a typically developing child needs to ask a question of the disabled child's instructional assistant, it should be something like, "How can I ask Johnnie to play on the swings?" Not, "Can you tell Johnnie I want play on the swings with him?"
 - vi. Sometimes students in Citywide programs have different behaviors – related to dysregulation – e.g., student paces back and forth in cafeteria due to noise. "That may be how that child is getting their body back to feeling calm." You can help your child to understand why the behaviors happen without stigmatizing the citywide children. Some students with autism may engage in repetitive behaviors.

- c. Having students of all ability levels has benefits for all learners. Helps with understanding diversity for typical learners. Help with leadership opportunities for typical learners. Helps to understand how to interact with broader world.
- d. Question and answer:

Q – My children come home asking how to interact with Citywide children on the playground. Are Instructional Assistants able to provide tips or guidance for how typical children can play with the children in the Citywide program?

A – Your kids can talk to the adults to ask for guidance – both from Instructional Assistant’s and also from the classroom teachers.

Q – Are the Citywide children incorporated into regular classrooms?

A – No child in Citywide ACPS class are in the self-contained class 100% of the time; all children have opportunities to interact in typical classrooms. Lunch, recess, Encore, maybe morning meeting are all opportunities to be included in general education class. Maybe some child will get a specific academic subject (e.g., math) in a general education classroom with support. It is a very individualized program.

Q – Have there been lessons in classrooms for how general education kids should interact with citywide kids?

A – Mr. Finan and Mrs. Buckley both gave examples of lessons on this topic in General Education classrooms as well as discussing ongoing teacher training. Ms. Dykhuis said that she has seen great progress in her 1st grade art class, which has several kids from the Citywide program joining their GenEd peers.

- e. Dr. Stone came in 2010 – 5 at elementary level, now is 17 – will add another one, due to level of need – we added a classroom. We have had to add levels of support to address increasing need. Classrooms are split by ages. Need to prep kids for middle school, be able to find their own classroom, be able to line up with their class and follow their class.
3. Mrs. Reese – Parent Support Specialist for ACPS – also works in office of specialized instruction. She needs to support parents & help kids navigate challenges. Mrs. Reese runs the Special Education Parent Resource Center, located at Minnie Howard. At the Resource center they have:
- Lending library, lots of emphasis on autism
 - List of service providers in the community (e.g., respite care, SLP, math tutor)
 - Webinars (e.g., ones on supporting siblings of students with disabilities)
 - Individual consultation (in person, zoom, phone, can come to the school) – confidential – she won’t go back to our school with the information the parents disclose
 - Special education process
 - How to prep for IEP meeting
 - My disabled child hasn’t slept, I need help
 - Help parents build collaborative constructive relationship with the school
 - Can create a social story
 -

- a. These children are individuals, they are not the personification of a disability; they are just kids who want to be treated with kindness and respect. Please include these kids in birthday party invitations if it's a large group.
- b. Please include Mrs. Reese as a resource for questions posed by neurotypical children to their parents. 703-824-0129. Please don't just drop by – Mrs. Reese may be out of the office – an appointment is best. The Resource Center is closed in July.
- c. Question and answer:

Q: are you just a resource for children with IEP or diagnosed disability?

A: Her primary focus is on the disabled. But at the elementary level not all disabilities have been identified. The process to get an IEP is confusing and long; a parent who isn't sure if their child needs an IEP can call Mrs. Reese.

4. Mr. Finan. Lots of celebrations in October – just wrapped up Hispanic Heritage Month – literacy week.
 - a. Are moving into Digital Citizenship Week – new tech specialist at GMES. How to use tech in a healthy way.
 - b. Bullying prevention spirit week is next week. Culminating event is Friday the 27th as book character day.
 - c. 1st quarter ends Friday the 27th. No school on Monday 30th. Friday November 3 is full day off for students, Monday the 6th is a day off for conference, 11/7 is day off for students.
 - d. ACPS has partnered with Hazel Health – teletherapy program for students. Parent approval necessary if there's a referral.
5. Report from PTA officers:
 - a. Report from Dan Jones (Treasurer) - \$70k in the bank. Over \$3k in membership come in, appreciative of that.
 - b. Brooke Johnson (VP of Fundraising) –Bake sale is on 11/7 – you can sign up to bake, you can sign up to man the booth. Email brookemarra@gmail.com if you want to volunteer!
 - c. Catherine Estes (PTAC Representative) – RaShonda Goode is our newest PTA board member, she is serving as our representative to PTAC's DEI committee and also the PTAC SpEd committee. If your child doesn't have an IEP – RaShonda can be a resource for the process (goode_rashonda@yahoo.com). Lots of PTAC meetings coming up and tons of ways to get involved -- please contact Catherine if you are interested (catestes19@gmail.com).