

**Sycamore High School PTO  
General Membership Meeting Minutes  
Friday, September 9, 2016**

The meeting was called to order by Angela Radakovich at 9:07 am.

There was an announcement reminding those in attendance, current PTO membership is required in order to be eligible to vote on PTO matters. Tammy Fales offered to take any last minute membership forms and payment.

The 2016-2017 Executive Board was introduced.

**Approval of May 2016 Minutes**

Mary Tyler motioned the minutes of the May 2016 meeting be approved as presented. Kathy McClure seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.

**Principal's Report**

Doug Mader, Principal announced there would be several extended ACE bells during the school year. This allows counselors to meet with their own students of a specific class in small groups rather than assembling the entire class for a class meeting. ACE bell composition was adjusted this year so each section is made up of students who have the same counselor. When there is an extended ACE bell, there will be a parent meeting for the parents of the "targeted class" either that same night or the night before so parents hear the same information being presented to the students. The counseling department is creating class specific web pages on the Sycamore website where this information as well as videos of the parent presentations can be accessed. There is currently a senior page and a junior page. The sophomore page will be available after the sophomore class meeting. Additionally, there is a College Application Pit Stop section on the senior page offering students and parents assistance with the college application process. Wednesdays continue to be collaboration day during ACE bell. Lunch passes are given on Wednesdays when students have done something staff or administration would like to recognize.

The PSAT will be administered on October 19. Freshmen will be taking ASPIRE on that same day. There will be a study skills workshop for sophomores and juniors not taking the PSAT on October 19. Staff including Valerie Nimeskern have been involved in developing this workshop to be meaningful for the students. Feedback from many seniors, especially those in band and athletics, has indicated they do not have time to visit college campuses in the fall. In response to this, October 19 is a college visit day for seniors. They may visit a campus in the local area or work on college applications.

All juniors will take the ACT on March 29. This is considered a state test now, and the State of Ohio is funding the testing. Practice for the ACT will be imbedded in ACE bells, and there will be study sessions and a "boot camp" run by Sycamore teachers at various times including weekends to make it easier for all students to attend.

National Merit Scholars will be announced on Wednesday, September 14. There will be a Walk of Champions for those students.

Marching band has its first competition this Saturday at Kings. Anyone is invited to watch practice between 1:00 and 5:00 on the turf here Saturday before the competition.

Scheduling for the 2017-2018 school year will start on October 1. There have been several road blocks to this going smoothly in the last two years. Two years ago, we received updated software that did not communicate with DASL. We applied an update to that software which also did not work. Last year it was decided to upgrade to new software, "the best of the best" administrators were told. After much troubleshooting, the creators admitted it will not work for us, which put us way behind on scheduling for this school year. There will be a blended model for next year. Mr. Mader reported the administration, counselors, and teachers together will use some technology and also personal skills and experience. One of the challenges we face with scheduling at Sycamore is the variety of classes available that are only offered once a day. It is challenging to align those to create conflicts in the schedules of the fewest students. Mr. Mader feels a really good team has been put together to start early, take a close look at

the way classes are scheduled, and work through conflicts. The goal is for students to have next year's schedule before this current school year ends.

Hotdog cookout for seniors is today. Hotdogs will be cooked outside, but students can still eat inside.

This time of year requires some setting of expectations for students as they tend to test limits a bit at this stage of the school year.

Video announcements at least weekly are in the planning stages. Daily announcements will be emailed to students starting next Monday. The high school will be sending a weekly email this year, and there will be a monthly High School Flyer as well.

Class of 2016 had the highest average ACT score in Sycamore history with an average score of 26. The average score in the state is 22. Now that 100% of students will take the ACT, we anticipate the average score will be a little lower in subsequent years

### **Faculty/Staff Representative's Report**

Ann Delahnty-Koenig reported the high school registered and scheduled 93 new students for this school year. That is about 20 more than usual. Twenty-four of those 93 students do not have English as a first language. ESOL services are currently being evaluated for those students.

Ann also talked about extended ACE bells. She explained extended bells are 40 minutes rather than 30 and are a way of counselors "sneaking" extra time with their students. Eleven extended ACE bells are scheduled this year. Counselors have already talked with juniors and seniors. They talked with juniors about mental health issues as well as typical "junior stuff" including ACT and SAT testing. The extended ACE bells are created by shortening each class by a few minutes; students also get ten minutes longer for lunch on extended ACE bell days.

About 70 college representative visits are already scheduled during the school year. Juniors and seniors can sign up to attend through Naviance. Counselors have been attending college representative breakfasts. At these gatherings the college representatives talk about changes in application processes and entry requirements and other general information to keep counselors informed of their processes and changes.

October 19 is PSAT for sophomores and juniors during the school day. Ms. Delahnty-Koenig noted the PSAT is also the qualification test for National Merit Scholar semi-finalists. Seniors will not be at school that day but should visit a college campus or work on their college applications.

Sycamore High School is hosting a University of Cincinnati dual admission meeting for BS/MD program on September 27.

Student assistance has started student support groups including groups for new students, grieving, stress less, and social skills. These are small groups where students can process with each other and obtain professional guidance in areas that concern them.

Career Speaker Tuesday will be starting again in November. Students interested in a specific speaker or career will be able to sign up. They will happen at various times during the day so students are not missing the same class repeatedly.

Based on feedback from parents, the counseling office will be sending a newsletter every other Monday with updates and information. The counselors are active on Facebook and have posted live videos of both junior and senior parent meetings. The recorded videos can also be accessed through the counselors' Facebook page.

The National Merit Scholar semi-finalists will be announced Monday, September 12. The "cut store" was high for Ohio this year, which means most school will have fewer semi-finalists than in previous years.

The first Coffee with the Counselors is September 21 at 9:00 am.

## **Treasurer's Report**

After a reminder that parents must be current PTO members to vote, Sheila Kidd motioned the 2016-2017 budget be approved. Kathy McClure seconded the motion. There was no discussion, and members voted to approve. Current financial statements were reviewed.

Sheila expressed the PTO's appreciation to the bookstore leadership, Rhonda Augustine, Lisa Tosh, and Jill Whaley. Sheila also mentioned fundraising via membership, after prom, and senior class continues to come in. The book store is off to a good start.

Jill Whaley reported flyers are being prepared for the book store promoting current inventory and reminding district parents and students to get their spirit ware at the Hangar. Planners are available for \$7. The book being read by Spanish 3 is also available in the bookstore for \$7.

Jamie Green reminded everyone to save and turn in Pipkins receipts, as Pipkins will donate a portion of the sales to the PTO. There is a City Barbeque fundraiser homecoming weekend, October 7, 8 and 9<sup>th</sup>. City Barbeque will donate 25% of proceeds to the district. This fundraiser raises funds for PTO scholarships. We received a check from Kroger for \$433.30. Instructions are available online for members who would like help designating Sycamore High School as the recipient of their Kroger plus community contributions.

## **Guest speakers regarding upcoming Sycamore Levy**

Frank Forsthoefel and Beth Weber were present at the meeting to discuss the levy on the ballot November 8. Frank Forsthoefel, Superintendent, noted that he and his staff are honored every day to work with such a great student body. He thanked parents, administration, and the PTO board for their contributions in the lives of Sycamore students.

Frank Forsthoefel and Beth Weber, district treasurer, presented information about the proposed levy. A summary of the levy campaign indicated the levy equates to a six million dollar annual intake for operations. This translates to \$228 per \$100,000 market value of homes in the district or about \$19 per month. This income would be collected starting January 2017. The last levy was approved 12 years ago. Average for other school districts is typically every 3-5 years. Over the past 12 years, the school board has implemented strong fiscal practices. Operating expenses have increased at an average annual rate of one half of one percent since 2004. The school board has looked at efficiency and reductions where needed.

The ongoing financial plan goals are to maintain academic excellence and opportunity, maintain investments in buildings and grounds, and a safe transportation fleet, continue to provide up to date technology for learning, and have a low tax rate for our residents. Of 25 Hamilton County and neighboring districts, Sycamore has the third lowest tax rate. This is attributed largely to the great mix of residences and business we enjoy in our community.

The levy is needed now because in upcoming years, expenditures are projected to exceed revenue. There will be a loss of state revenue. In past years, the Sycamore district has received 12 million dollars annually from the TPP tax. Currently, the district receives \$9 million annually (12% of the operating budget), and this funding source will be phased out by 2023. The district is also committed to continued investment in building improvements and bus replacement and technology which creates a need for additional operating budget.

The School Board has approved new financial parameters and committed there will be no additional levies for operations for at least five years. It was also noted that Sycamore Community Schools has a AAA bond rating from Standard and Poor (which is a measure of the financial health of an entity). This is the highest rating available, and Sycamore is one of only 4 schools in Ohio with this rating. The school board was also cognizant of maintaining a low tax rate. Even with the levy, Sycamore would have the fifth lowest tax rate of surrounding districts (20<sup>th</sup> out of 25).

One parent had a suggestion of printing bullet points on 3X5 cards that could be handed out on Election Day and before. She pointed out that a lot of us remember a previous failed levy, and while working at the poles, she was asked many times why the district needed the money. Her point was to be sure the district is doing a good job of getting the word out, and that there was preparation and information for people who don't make a decision until Election Day. Another parent suggested that the district prepare a response that we can use when people ask why

our spending per pupil is higher than other districts. She felt we needed to be able to explain why in a way that shows support for the district.

Tami Comerford and Greg Leader presented information about the levy campaign. Greg and Tami are leading efforts of CLASS (Community Leadership for a Strong Sycamore) to inform the community about the levy and the need for it. Greg indicated being willing to lead the campaign because he cares about his home value, the community where he raises his kids, and knowing his children are getting the best education and that we have the resources for that. He believes other members of the community are motivated by the same values.

Tami explained the CLASS Mine+9 effort. They are asking individuals in support of the levy to be out talking to neighbors who are not engaged (your vote plus 9 others). The committee is hoping parents with students in the district will support Sycamore and convey to importance of the levy to community members who do not have students currently in Sycamore schools or who are not familiar with the reasons the levy is needed. Tami noted while the levy is a tax, the committee hopes the community will look at it as an investment and that we will help to convey that.

The CLASS website will have talking points. Yard signs will be available at no cost. Community members can host a coffee and CLASS hope to attend to help convey support of Sycamore.

### **Vice President's Report**

Suzanne VanDenBrink explained a new timeline for projects. Projects are teacher, department, student group, or parent PTO member requests for funding directly from PTO. We want to move this process earlier in the year. Applications will be available September 19. Applications are due October 7. The projects committee will meet in late October, and projects will be presented at the general meeting January 13 for a vote. The purpose of moving the process earlier in the year is that hopefully the funds can be utilized in the current school year. The PTO budgets \$10,000 for this purpose. A PTO member asked and it was confirmed that the cafeteria tables and chairs have been completely paid for. (This project was paid over about two years.)

### **President's Report**

Angela Radakovich reported about the TIP coffee program. The coffee at PTO meetings is provided by the Sycamore Transition Internship Program for special education students age 18-21. The program is housed in the Aldine house next to Greene school. Angela shared a little about the program. The students grocery shop each Monday and prepare lunches for the program students throughout the week. They are learning other practical skills such as doing laundry. They take field trips, attend classes at Blue Ash Recreation Center and are exposed to work experience. In addition to the coffee program, some of the students work in The Hangar. Students also provide daily coffee services to teachers who request it. The coffee service for PTO meetings is billed monthly, and there is a tip jar available is anyone would like to contribute to the TIP program.

Most PTO members have noticed the #sycamorestrong signs and magnets. This was an initiative sponsored by all PTO boards as a way to promote our excitement about the district. Each board contributed to purchase 1000 car magnets. They were available at the meeting for parents who wanted one or any PTO president (in any Sycamore building) can get one for anyone interested.

With the weekly newsletter from the high school and the High School Flyer, and in an effort to reduce the frequency of emails communications, it is our hope to include PTO news primarily in existing high school weekly and monthly publications, and Constant Contact will be used less and can be reserved for more pressing matters.

Angela encouraged parents to attend Coffee with the Counselors on September 21.

The PTO Website has been updated. Thank you to Sue Shuetz for her work on this effort. The website can be accessed at <http://tinyurl.com/shspto>. Thank you to Sue Shuetz

Rhonda Augustin reminded senior parents about a class donation. The Senior Class Parents plan fun activities for seniors throughout the year but can only plan what they have funds for. The recommended contribution is \$40 per family.

PTO funds PIE breakfasts. Frequently a PTO representative attends these breakfasts (once a month at 7:15). Please see Molly or Angela if you are interested in representing the PTO at these recognition breakfasts.

Tami Comerford is the only chair for after prom and would really appreciate having a co-chair. Please see Molly, Angela, or Tami if interested.

### **Recording Secretary Report**

Mary Tyler announced a draft of general meeting minutes will be posted online prior to general meeting for those who would like to look them over before the meeting.

Thank you to Kim Bennet who helped organize picture day. Pictures will be distributed Tuesday September 13 and Wednesday September 14. A few volunteers are needed, and a sign up was available.

Thank you to Tammy Fales for coordinating our membership efforts and navigating the first year of online memberships and PayPal payments. Tammy reported to date, 284 parents have joined the PTO this year and 87 staff. The numbers are a little behind last year's numbers. Please submit membership if you have not already. Tammy reminded parents only PTO members receive a school directory.

Thank you to Elaine Kerr for coordinating PTO volunteers. Volunteer lists are being finalized.

Initial preparation is underway for the high school directory. Student information is still being compiled by the school office.

A few volunteers are needed in The HUB. This will be a smaller role than last year and will be similar to shelving and other responsibilities volunteers complete in other media centers in the district. Weekly volunteers should be sufficient.

### **Corresponding Secretary Report**

Elizabeth Bruggeman thanked Maria Wright and Becky Dawson for providing hospitality for curriculum night.

Conference night is coming up October 6, and staff appreciation will provide a meal for staff that evening. There will be a request for salad, side or dessert contributions soon.

In an effort to recognize academic achievers as well as athletic achievers, 2-3 academic achievers will be selected to be recognized at half time of football and basket ball games.

### **Old/New Business**

None reported

### **Announcements**

#### ➤ Upcoming Events

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|---------------------------|---|
| ○ Sept. 6th-16th          | PSAT registration during lunch bells          |
| ○ Sept. 11, 1p-4p         | College Fair @ Duke Convention Center         |
| ○ September 14            | Cincinnati Country Day Community College Fair |
| ○ Sept. 21, 9:00-10:00 am | Coffee with the Counselors                    |
| ○ Sept 23                 | No School – Professional Development Day      |
| ○ Oct. 1                  | Flight Fest at the JH                         |
| ○ Oct. 6, 3p-8p           | Parent Teacher Conferences                    |
| ○ Oct. 7-8                | Homecoming/Band Night and Homecoming Dance    |
| ○ Oct. 13, 7p-9p          | Orchestra Senior Spotlight Concert            |
| ○ Oct. 14, 9:00 am        | PTO meeting                                   |

The meeting was adjourned at 10:42 am.