

Bigelow Middle School PTO Meeting #1, 2024-2025

Bigelow Library, 7pm

September 24, 2024

Attendance: Approx. 19 in person, 9 on Zoom

PTO President Alex Rolfe welcomed parents joining in-person and online and introduced the PTO Board members and shared names of volunteers.

PTO Vice President is Alexander Lee

PTO Treasurer is Rachanee Nelson

PTO Secretary is Lanni Isenberg (who was a little late to this meeting, but is catching up!)

PTO Communications is by Elizabeth Apgar

Heather Philbrook manages the PTO Directory where you can update your contact information and find other Bigelow families and students.

The Bigelow PTO meets at least monthly and sometimes bi-monthly with Principal Dan Green.

Alex Rolfe welcomed Principal Dan Green to his first PTO meeting as Bigelow Principal!

Principal Green and Alex Rolfe described many opportunities for families to get involved during the school year. We really want to build the community and create opportunities for students to spend time together and for families to connect.

School Council Volunteers Needed

Alex Rolfe invited volunteers for the School Council. One parent described his experience serving on the School Council a few years ago as a positive one that did not require a ton of time and was a good way to connect with the community.

The Council rep works with teachers and the school principal. The school has a legal obligation to have a School Council. Reps can be someone from the neighborhood, not necessarily with students in the school. The Reps will often work on budget items.

There are 6 one-hour meetings each school year. Meetings take place in the afternoon (2:30p/3p). Looking for 2-3 parents to join.

Bigelow Volunteers So Far

There is leadership for Creative Arts & Sciences (CAS) programming, volunteers to run *three* dances (in past years, there have been 2 dances, but students are interested in more), and a leader for teacher appreciation events.

Bigelow Event and Project Opportunities

The Bigelow PTO Board heard from parents that they noticed there is a 6th grade potluck event and 8th grade events and wondered if 7th grade might want to have a potluck event or other social.

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There are always lots of ideas for after-school clubs for students, but there's not always funding for that.

General Discussion

Q: Are there funding equity limits for after-school programs?

A: No. Some clubs required more funding than others. The costs for popular Cooking Club and Woodworking activities have risen a lot in the past few years, so they could use some extra support. We could raise funds for them.

There's been interest in a Global Diversity Festival – a food and culture event that families can get involved in. Principal Green said that 41% of district families are multi-lingual. Bigelow FORJ (Families Organizing for Racial Justice) Committee leadership has expressed interest in leading this event.

One potential online fundraiser suggested is to have a Bigelow school store so students and families can purchase Bigelow clothing and gear (e.g., hats, shirts, sweatpants), with a percentage of sales going to Bigelow PTO.

One parent posed the questions, "How much can we (PTO) do, and how much do we want to do for our kids?" How much capacity is there to do these events.

Q: Are events meant to be fundraisers?

A: Not every event needs to be a fundraiser. Mostly, events at Bigelow are intended to be Net \$0 – we sell pizza at events and the sales pay for the pizza purchased.

Someone raised questions about the equity of a school store. We would want all kids to be able to have Bigelow tshirts, and some kids who want Bigelow gear won't have the money for that.

Q: What is the Bigelow PTO budget? What do we need to raise?

A: Estimated about \$24,000 for the year. Last year, the PTO under-fundraised and under-spent.

We should have enough money for CAS (Creative Arts & Sciences), teacher appreciation and reimbursements for teachers' supplies requests.

There are 450 students at Bigelow, so the total budget for year works out to about \$53 per student.

Q: Will there be field trips this year?

A: There used to be overnight field trips for the 8th grade, but that has become too expensive, i.e., \$1000 per student to go to NY or Washington, DC for an overnight.

The 8th grade does its own fundraising for end of year commencement events, where they go on day trips to amusement parks and do other activities, and the PTO does contribute some funding to the 8th grade week.

There was a discussion about setting up categories for giving to the PTO Annual Fund, i.e., directing dollars specifically to after-school clubs or field trips, etc.

In discussion, people said that making designations could become complicated.

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One parent said that they'd like to avoid being asked again and again for money all year, so the Annual Fund ask would be a good time to contribute.

There was discussion about the timing and type of ask the PTO should present for the Annual Fund. The ask can include a specific dollar amount and should clearly indicate that the amount is a suggestion and it's entirely optional, though those who feel they can give more, are welcome to do so to potentially include students whose families are not able to give for any reason.

Fundraising ideas

- Someone suggested an auction and the discussion included having experiences (i.e., Principal for Day, teacher engagement) as well as things to purchase/bid on. For raffle type events, it's important to include all students, so have students get at least 1 free ticket. Can ask local businesses for contributions to the auction.
- Lunch & dodgeball game of Principal & Faculty vs students and charge families to attend (with sliding scale or payment exceptions for families as needed),
- Movie night (or maybe just as a get together – sell pizza and popcorn)
- One parent talked about an Underwood event that a family hosted – a Dumpling Cooking Party – families paid \$30 to join and went to someone's house where someone showed everybody how to make dumplings.

The ultimate goal is to engage the entire school in activities.

There was a discussion about why parents do or don't join PTO meetings and how to get more volunteers and participants in events.

Parents may have different capacities with their PTO participation. Some families want to give money. Some families want to volunteer at specific events. And, there's the social-emotional development of middle school kids where some students are resisting having their parents attend any school event, even as volunteers.

Q: Can we survey the Bigelow Community to see what kinds of events and participation they'd like this year?

Q: Can the PTO indicate how fundraised money is allocated in a pie chart or other visual representation? Indicate programs/projects/purchases, etc.

For PTO priorities, parents suggested looking for what activities engage a wide span of students to encourage high participation. Identify best time and location for the activities.

How do you reach the students whose parents can't make it to PTO meetings?

How do you engage parents in general?

Suggestion to connect with the Student Council to get a sense of what students are interested in doing.

One parent suggested having regularly scheduled events – something for students to look forward to each year.

The PTO is asking for volunteers to lead any event.

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Some parents want to join a project in progress with specific tasks to accomplish.

The PTO will ask for volunteers to join planning for the International Night, potentially a movie night.

More information to come about dances and other activities.

We really need people to step forward to lead activities.

There will be 4 PTO meetings this year. Dates to come.

Notes compiled by Lanni Isenberg (7th grade parents), Sept 25, 2024.