



**Columbia Secondary School for
Math, Science & Engineering
Parent Teacher Association**

**March 15, 2022
6:15 PM - 7:30 PM via Zoom**

WELCOME: PTA President, Veronica Villalpando welcomed everyone to the meeting.

APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY MEETING MINUTES: Co-Recording Secretary, Ali Auth, quickly reviewed the minutes (which also appeared in the Newsletter sent days prior to the meeting). Veronica launched the poll. 80% of parents present officially approved the February meeting minutes.

TREASURER'S REPORT:

- As of 3/12/22, our total cash balance was \$91,231.81. There are four outstanding checks to be presented for payment for \$2,387.59, leaving a current register balance of **\$88,844.22**
- February Income:
 - Uniform and Spirit Wear Sales were \$134.00
 - Farm to People - \$441.55
 - Membership Donations were \$740.00
- February Expenses:
 - Cultural Heritage -\$968.23 (food/supplies Black History Month events)
 - Teacher Mini Grant - \$866.66 (sewing machines and dissection equipment)
 - PayPal/Square Expenses - \$30.23
- Now at 93% of meeting Membership Donation Goal; need \$1600 to reach our goal! (Let's try for exceeding it!)
- The PTA Financial Report has to be presented to the Principal before January 31, 2022, and IT WAS, we just forgot to mention it in the February meeting.
- A reminder that last month, a new line item was passed by 100% of the families present at the meeting for Engineering Tables, at the cost of \$9000.
- Last month another amendment was passed by 100% of families present to increase the School-Wide Support budget line from \$10,000 to \$16,000. This allows for more flexibility for funding re-socialization activities like field trips, even after having to spend for Covid-related items like KN95 masks for students.
 - In the past few weeks, we have received about \$15,000 worth of requests for funding (including the \$9000 for new Engineering Tables, as well as sports uniforms, team-building event attending a CU men's basketball game, and we expect to have more requests as some Covid restrictions are lifted.)

PRINCIPAL'S UPDATES:

- With Spring weather and the lifting of Covid mandates like social distancing, we will be able to go back to some of our cherished traditions:
 - 8th grade trip to Frost Valley
 - 10th grade Physics Day (which also includes 11th grade this year)
 - 6th, 7th, 8th grades starting to plan activities and out-of-school experiences after the state test, as has been our tradition in the past "J-term."
 - Outdoor field trips, outdoor graduation, all are coming back. (Indoor destinations that still require vaccines are still off-limits for school-sponsored academic activities.)
- The 6th floor cafeteria is open!
 - Right now, CSS students with 3rd, 4th, 5th and 7th period lunches can use the new cafeteria.
 - CSS students with 6th period lunch can now eat lunch in the 3rd floor cafeteria with tables (no longer have to use the auditorium.)

- Though CSS initiated the new cafeteria project, it was always understood that it would benefit all schools on the campus. (The same will be true with the Library.)
- Anticipate all CSS lunch periods will have lunch in September in the new cafeteria.
- Because of staff shortages, the food operations of the school are limited. Typically there are 10 cafeteria workers, right now there are 4, so it is impossible to serve as many people in as many places as before. Right now the basement cafeteria, which the two co-located schools use, cannot be in use.
- Other staff vacancies have been impacting us:
 - Both school safety agents have left and now have finally been replaced, however we are still short safety agents on the weekends.
 - There are still teacher shortages and the “pool is shallow.” CSS families have referred great candidates in the past and are encouraged to do so again. Hope to fill all vacancies by September.

Q: Can't we change the schedule so that all classes can use the cafeteria now by taking turns?

A: We can't because that would require reprogramming for all students which is too complicated and difficult at this mid-point in the year.

Q: Where and When is Graduation?

A: Graduation will be outdoors at Riverside Church at 5:00PM on Thursday, June 23rd. AP Lenice Nelson and Wendy Lin are the senior advisors.

Q: Why isn't graduation at Columbia University this year?

A: A graduation at Columbia University would be indoors, which would require vaccination and we do not want to exclude anyone who is not vaccinated from graduation.

Q: When is the SAT for 11th grade students?

A: This Wednesday, 3/23

Q: Some 12th grade families have expressed concern about the costs of the Senior Trip and other graduating students' activities. We don't want financial limitations to exclude any students from anything.

A: (A broad overview of types of expenses and funding at the school)

- In general, Seniors do have a large portion of the “funding pie,” since the college office runs on a \$200K budget and is dedicated to Seniors.
- We make sure all *academic* activities are available to ALL students: ex, Frost Valley and other academic trips, but meeting every need, including those of optional trips, is beyond us. Remember there are two classes of students (classes of '20 and '21) who did not get to do any trips at all because of Covid. We are not able to make things up to them.
- The 8th grade Step-Up is fully family-funded, wherein some families pay more to assist those who may not be able to pay as much.
- There is also an independent CSS family-initiated group that began in Spring 2020 to assist CSS families who were struggling with meeting basic needs, due to the pandemic (rent, food, clothes, etc.) The group was then called “Parents helping Parents.” This group is still working currently and is now known as “CSS Parents Helping.” An email recently was sent to the entire CSS community about this topic.
 - To ask for assistance: CSSparents helping@gmail.com
 - To make a donation: [donate to CSS Parents Helping](#)

Q: This makes me wonder what else can be done? Could the PTA or a group of parents organize a bake sale to help out with some senior costs?

A: There are strict rules about this. PTA money cannot be funneled to seniors-only non-academic activities, nor can it go to individuals. Also, just FYI, PTA is allowed one bake sale per month. Any sale of food outside of that during school hours is not permitted because it is considered competition with School Food.

Q: I am a bit confused. Some activities seem to require that students be vaccinated, others don't.

A: Yes, you're right. During the school day, students participate in activities and do not have to be vaccinated to do so. However, in certain activities after school hours, vaccines are required.

- For example, during the school day, students can sing in music class whether they are vaccinated or not. But to sing in the after school chorus, students must be vaccinated.
- Students may play a sport in Phys. Ed. class without being vaccinated, but to play a sport after school, students must be vaccinated.

- Also, there is a distinction between indoor and outdoor activities: the senior prom is indoors and will require students to be vaccinated, the senior trip is outdoors and will not require students to be vaccinated.

Q: Are there advanced classes in Math available to middle school students?

A: Our teacher Brandy Kovac runs the Math Team. Typically it is for high school students, but a middle school student could talk with her about joining the team. Also there is a new opportunity for rising 9th grade (current 8th grade) students to take accelerated courses through the pre-college program on Columbia University's campus, in-person, this summer. (Deadline for applications extended to 3/21, emails sent from Megan Thomas on 3/16 and 3/18.)

FUNDRAISING & EVENTS UPDATES:

- **SPRING FLING!**
 - Online Auction opens on Thursday, 3/24
 - **“Live” (yet virtual) Event is Thursday, 4/7, from 7:30 to 8:30**, hosted by our fabulous, talented, lovable, wonderful, own 8th grade parent Laurie Brown Kindred
- **64+** - Total contributions so far:
 - \$16,000 - Donation value
 - Eighth Grade - The families who have contributed the most items so far (36!)
 - (Seventh grade is in second with 13 items)
 - Gift Cards, Classes + Lessons, Shows + Experiences - The three most popular types of contributions
- We're also seeing vacations, books, accessories, homegoods and so many more fun things!!
- **BUT WE NEED MORE TO MEET OUR GOAL OF \$25,000!**
- We would LOVE some hand-made, artistic items, from our own CSS community - a true meaningful keepsake
- You can also donate to the grade baskets by Monday, 3/21. Reminder of themes:
 - Sixth Grade: Date Night
 - Seventh Grade: Spa Day
 - Eighth Grade: Rainy Day Fun
 - Ninth Grade: Home Movie Night
 - Tenth Grade: Needs a basket manager!
 - Eleventh Grade: Travel
 - Twelfth Grade: Summer Fun
- **Social Event: Parents' Night Out!**
 - When: Wednesday, 3/30, 5:30-7:30
 - Where: Harlem Tavern (116th & Frederick Douglass Blvd.)
 - Why: To see each other in person and socialize!!!
 - What: indoor and outdoor options, a few trays of apps will be provided by the PTA and then individuals are responsible for their own tabs
 - RSVP: Yes, please - [RSVP HERE \(so the Harlem Tavern staff can prepare\)](#)

SLT UPDATES & UPCOMING PTA ELECTION

- The School Leadership Team (SLT) meets once a month, usually on the 3rd Thursday of the month at 5:30PM, mainly to form the school's Comprehensive Education Plan. All CSS community members are welcome to attend the meeting. Only SLT members may vote on matters.
 - If a CSS community member wishes to have a topic addressed at the meeting, the topic should be submitted in writing at least a week in advance of the meeting to any SLT parent representative or to Isis Ramos, CSS Parent Coordinator.
 - If a non-member wishes to speak at an SLT meeting, a request must be made in advance of the meeting.
- Here is what the SLT is working on right now:
 - Updating our school's mission statement

- reviewing close-to-final version this week
 - Setting our school's goals:
 - starting extensive data review this week (prior to setting our goals and measurable KPIs)
- **Upcoming PTA Elections**
 - Open positions include: - President / Co-Presidents, Treasurer, + other positions
 - Step up, help out! Details will be coming soon via email
 - Please ask what it's all about: cssptapresident@columbiasecondary.org

SPECIAL PRESENTATION: Helping Your Child Succeed (an interactive presentation)

- Colette Young, Ed.D., Academic Dean and Athletics Director
- Roxana Bosch, Director of Admissions

Dean Young explained some of the key aspects of Executive Functioning skills - skills that help you to plan and achieve goals. Students need support in these areas until their brains are fully developed (around age 25.) Dean Young highlighted **four areas** in which families can support their children with Executive Functioning skills:

- Using a Planner
 - Organize planner by each subject each day
 - Should be able to tell what the assignment is just by reading (details: page #s, dates)
 - Check the planner before student starts HW
 - Important to write "none" if there is nothing assigned for that subject that day
 - Families don't have to check students' homework, "that's teachers' job," just check the planner to make sure they have done the HW.
- Backpacks and Filing System
 - Should be cleaned out weekly - make piles by subject, organize
 - What, exactly, do students need?
 - A list was created by each grade level of teachers to **try to reduce what students have to carry** while they don't have use of lockers: [essential school materials list by grade](#)
- Study / Work Space
 - Should be a clear space, not cluttered
 - Keep phones away or off during work/study time
 - Make the student's computer face out, where you can see it
 - Sometimes working in groups is useful - "peer pressure can help sometimes."
- Communication
 - Talking with your kids is good on many levels, keep trying
 - Talking helps their meta-cognition, big picture understanding
 - Talking, explaining, helps their comprehension - you can ask them for a summary
 - Ask about their social lives: who were they with at lunch, other places?
 - Other communication: reading the planner
 - *USING A FAMILY CALENDAR* - good way to communicate, plan and MOTIVATE

Thank you, Dr. Young and Prof. Bosch for the presentation and for sharing the slides with the CSS community!

Dates of next meetings:

- April 12th (Tuesday) 6:15 – 7:30
- May 10th (Tuesday) 8:30 - 9:30 (DOE rules require one PTA mtg. be held in the morning)
- June 14th (Tuesday) 6:15 – 7:30

91 parents participated, meeting adjourned at 7:30pm