

13 October General Meeting Notes

Led by PTA President Alison Aughinbaugh via Zoom

34 Attendees, including Mr. Jackson and two teacher representatives

Despite challenges associated with distance learning, Woodlin parents, teachers, and staff echoed the need to stay positive with our students and to reach out to teachers and/or Woodlin staff with any questions or concerns during the 13 October discussion on distance learning. The PTA thanks **Ms. Shniderman**, **Mr. Tomasulo**, and **Mr. Jackson** for sharing their perspectives on how distance learning looks for teachers and Woodlin staff and parents **Danielle Dae**, **Elisse Lassiter**, and **Joanna Snyder** for sharing their unique experiences. We are proud to hear that Woodlin students, especially this year's kindergarteners, are able to continue to learn, build their community and relationships, and work on overcoming obstacles.

Announcements:

- Communications -- Biggest challenge in this environment. Please join listserv--it's a great option for disseminating information.
- After schools -- Please take our survey so we can tailor options.
- Build Woodlin's community with yard signs and spirit wear.
- Enjoy some adult beverages while supporting Woodlin through the Fenwick Beer Fundraiser this Sunday 18 October. 10% of sales will be donated.
- Parent Elisse Lassiter is offering portraits through a fundraiser with Glimmer Images on Wednesday 4 November. Siblings welcome!
- We're getting close to the Dash! It's going to be a fun way to build our community while raising funds for our school.
- We still need volunteers to coordinate the Reflections and Arts Residency programs. The Auction team could also use some help.

Teacher Perspectives--What they Wish Parents Knew About Distance Learning

Clara Shniderman, 2nd grade teacher and teacher PTA liaison, and Jeremy Tomasulo, 5th grade teacher, shared their perspectives on distance learning and what they wished parents knew--the challenges, the silver linings, and advice. Kindness, patience, positivity, and communication were identified as important elements to support our children this year.

- Although there were challenges, some positive silver linings included increased instructional time thanks to fewer distractions and increased participation--instead of one kid being able to answer a question, now all kids are able to answer. Ms. Shniderman also highlighted that the kids have been able to build a culture and connect among themselves and with their teachers.
- While some kids have been able to be more engaged during distance learning, Ms. Shniderman shared that some kids have struggled to connect and that some kids were trying to balance their own learning while helping take care of younger siblings.

- Other challenges include technology, which distance learning depends on. Teachers aren't IT professionals and are learning these new platforms with the kids. In addition to it being sometimes time-consuming and confusing, teachers have had to learn how to balance moving a lesson forward while troubleshooting technology for a student struggling. Parent intervention is really helpful when it comes to IT.
- It's felt like everyone's first year of teaching again no matter the classroom experience. Teachers have had to reconfigure lesson plans, find new classroom management techniques, convert worksheets and other resources to a digital format.
- Teachers ask that parents be positive (this is really important for the kids), be patient, and communicate with the teachers.
- Teachers are super invested and committed to do everything they can to support kids and their mental health.
- **Be kind, be patient, and give grace.**
- Teachers are always happy to hear from parents. Hearing our perspectives is helpful and not overwhelming.

Principal's Perspective (Mr. Jackson)

Mr. Jackson highlighted the resiliency of the kids and asked us to be mindful of our conversations to ensure we aren't unintentionally projecting our stresses onto our children. He acknowledged the challenges and struggles and reminded us that we have no choice but to focus on our kids' education. Mr. Jackson stressed the need to talk to our teachers, guidance counselor Ms. Dobres, or him and Ms. Scott if we have any questions. We need to let them know if there are any challenges so we can find a way to support kids (both academically and social/emotionally). Mr. Jackson encouraged parents to reach out to classroom teachers first. He and Ms. Scott are happy to help, but his guess is that in about 90% of cases, the teacher is the best resource for helping children.

Mr. Jackson also assured us that we aren't penalizing any students over their engagement and participation. The school is building a distance learning FAQ page and is considering setting up focus groups to dive deeper into understanding how things are going for students.

Parents' Perspective

Three moms also shared their perspective:

- Danielle Dae, a kindergarten mom, shared her perspective. Largely positive, Danielle shared that a lot of things were working like song breaks to get the kids moving, small reading groups, and having an awesome teacher. She reported challenges of kids interrupting, the specials off-week being hard to manage, and the demands of tracking assignments for their specials. She also asked for clarification about the roles and preparedness of paraeducators.
- Joanna Snyder, another kindergarten mom and a former teacher, echoed a lot of Danielle's experiences. She added that rituals have been helpful. She noted the challenge of some unique social isolation in kindergarten, but parents in her class have created a google document with contact information to facilitate connections for the kids. She raved about their experience with teachers and also acknowledged the unique challenge for teachers to now have parents watching. Joanna asked about the feasibility of more pre-recorded lessons.
- Elisse Lassiter, a mom of a 1st and a 4th grader, shared how she and her family has been working to overcome the challenges of this year. The Lassiters, a happy and proud Woodlin family, have had a tough transition compounded by their unique needs. Since her outreach on the PTA listserv a few weeks ago, her fourth grader is doing a lot better after discussions with her teachers. Her first grader struggles as the week goes on and they are taking a break with specials. Another thing that has helped their family was hiring a live-in nanny/tutor. Elise stressed that you need to work with the teacher to address overcoming any issues--all teachers have been extremely helpful in addressing her children's needs. Elisse also explained she was feeling frustrated and burdened by MCPS but realized that the district can't meet the needs of every child and that it's up to her to do what's best for her kids. Things got easier even if it's still really challenging. She makes a decision every day about the lesson she's trying to teach her kids: do they try to rise and overcome or do they find a new path? She's not the only one asking this question every day.

Alison asked whether more of these conversations were wanted, and it seemed like there was some receptiveness on it. Send Alison your thoughts at president@woodlinpta.org.

Parents also asked how the school and PTA can work on things and how parents can engage with MCPS, something difficult in such a large and complex district. Mr. Jackson believed there was more work to be done to identify how the PTA can help, and Ms. Shniderman complimented Heather Collick for her well-received work on teacher appreciation.