

Bells Mill Elementary School Parent Teacher Association

PTA General Meeting Minutes – October 6, 2020

Call to Order

The meeting was held via zoom and called to order at 6:05 p.m. Following technical challenges, the meeting was reconnected at 6:21 p.m.

Attendance

A total of 62 individuals from the school community attended the meeting.

Welcome and Introductions – Devin Donaldson, PTA President

Devin Donaldson welcomed the attendees and introduced the [20-21 PTA Board Members](#), who were elected during a socially distanced, in-person vote in September.

PTA is an all-volunteer, non-profit organization of staff and parents that works to provide an enriching experience to students. While much of the work is done through community events and outreach, we also sponsor academic enrichments. During distance learning we are working to support school families and make sure everyone feels connected. We invite all families to join the PTA ([see here](#)), donate if you are able, and volunteer if you have a little time to spare ([see here](#)).

Treasurer's Report – Matthew Barlow, PTA Treasurer

In September the PTA membership approved this year's [PTA budget](#), which includes \$38,000 to support academic improvement, cultural arts, student affairs, events, teacher appreciation and more. The intent is to spend that entirely on the Bells Mill community to ensure that this year is as good as or better than any other year. It is really important that members of the PTA know that the funds that come into the Bells Mill PTA go right back to the school.

The PTA currently has a surplus of \$49,000 largely based on unspent money in previous years, which positions us well to support the school community. Each month the treasurer's report is posted on the website. The PTA is a 501(c)(3) organization and donations are tax deductible.

To ensure our continued support for the school, we need additional members to join, donate, and volunteer with PTA. Last year we had over 225 families sign up for the PTA, and we only have 135 members so far this year. Sign up at bellsmill.org.

Preview of Upcoming Activities -- Devin Donaldson, PTA President

So far this year the PTA has provided distance learning materials and student planners. We also hosted a virtual new family meet and greet. We are currently recruiting volunteers for a

number of committees, including several events that could be moved to a virtual format (see link above).

Upcoming activities include:

- **Mad Science Halloween Spooktacular:** The PTA will be sponsoring an all school virtual science assembly on Wednesday, October 28 at 1:00 p.m. Please look out for the zoom link.
- **Book Fair:** Each year the PTA helps to coordinate a book fair that raises more than \$6,000 for the school to buy books and materials. This year's book fair will be virtual. More information coming soon!
- **Spirit Wear:** Each year the PTA holds a spirit wear sale. This year's sale will be online with delivery to homes. Every Friday is School Spirit Day where students wear spirit wear or school colors (blue/white). More information coming soon!
- **Sister School:** Last year we established a sister school relationship with South Lake Elementary School in Montgomery Village. Activities included a Thanksgiving food drive and a book collection. We will be looking for additional ways to partner and build connection. South Lake is overcrowded and the building is in disrepair, but plans to rebuild the school were delayed. The SLES community is lobbying to reprioritize funding and is asking for our help to write the Montgomery County Council to support their efforts. Please watch for additional information on how you can help support our sister school.

Richard Chang provided a brief delegate update. He attended one Montgomery County Council of PTAs (MCCPTA) meeting in September. At the end of October they will be voting on advocacy priorities for the year.

Principal's Message – Dr. Stacy Smith, Bells Mill ES Principal

Dr. Stacy Smith thanked the PTA for asking her to speak at the meeting. She noted how much she misses seeing students in the school building, but is impressed by how the teachers and students have adapted to the distance learning format. Dr. Smith addressed a series of questions that were submitted by school families before the meeting. A summary of the discussion is provided below.

- What can parents do to support the school and staff this year?
 - Please join the PTA and support their activities.
 - Send an email to staff to let them know you appreciate their work and efforts to support students.
 - Email Dr. Smith or the PTA (info@bellsmill.org) with ideas of how we can better support students and the community.
- What will grades be based on during distance learning?
 - Teachers will be using a variety of inputs throughout the marking period to calculate grades.
- Why was the MAP test that was administered not reflective of what was taught?

- It is a standardized test and staff do not have access to the test. The test is meant to assess where each student is at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. It is okay if students do not know all the information on the test as they will learn some of it as the year progresses.
- What do the MAP test results mean?
 - When testing is complete you will receive additional information (posted in the ParentVue) for all the students who took the test.
 - Dr. Smith wants to make sure that the parents receive an explanation of how to read the progress report.
 - Teachers will provide information before the parent teacher conferences (November) and you will have an opportunity to discuss at the conference.
- The curriculum seems easier and repetitive of what has been taught last year. Why?
 - The school year generally starts with material that is a review because studies show there is some learning loss over summer break and because teachers are collecting data to evaluate each student's proficiency levels.
- Will school will open "in person" instruction before January 2021?
 - Current MCPS plans indicate students would be returning on January 29. As of now, we have not received any other date.
 - We are still trying to figure out the best way for staff to reenter the building in a safe manner and feel comfortable to return to teaching in our building.
 - Nothing has been decided as to when the teachers will be back in the building.
- What are your perceived strengths or areas of improvement for Bells Mill?
 - One area Dr. Smith is working on is communication. She feels it is important to be transparent with the school community. She works to inform parents as soon as she has information that will impact the students. This is why she has been sending out the weekly updates.
- What challenges are you working to address -- how can parents help?
 - Dr. Smith wants to make sure that the entire school community feels connected. She would like all members of the Bells Mill community to join the PTA.
- Could Mrs. Kanter speak at a future meeting about how parents can support kids' psychological health?
 - Dr. Smith would like Mrs. Kanter to be a guest speaker at a future meeting.
 - Mrs. Kanter has provided teachers with some support materials that have been distributed.
 - Please feel free to reach out for support at any time.
- The school community would like to get to know you better. What is the one place you are looking forward to traveling to the most when it's safe to do so again?
 - Dr. Smith has been wanting to go to Italy and Greece for a long time.
- What is one memory from elementary school that inspired your career choice?
 - In sixth grade, my history teacher Ms. Casper made the Roman Empire come alive. She taught with passion that made every student feel important no matter their socioeconomic background or race. She just wanted all students to learn and that spoke volumes to Dr. Smith.

Next Meeting and Adjournment

The PTA holds at least four general meetings per month. Subscribe to the weekly Bear Post emails at www.bellsmill.org to receive announcements. The meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.