Bitney Parent Council Meeting

December 6, 2017

Present: Valerie Goulding, Dian Schaffhauser, Suzanne Doyle, Celine Negrete, Shannen Keppler, Daniel Elkin, Russ Jones, Louise Pryor

GENERAL FUNDRAISING

We have raised $6175 through the annual giving campaign (AGC) and wine-tasting fundraiser. Some parents may be waiting for money to be available before they pledge... Suggested this kind of text be used in the next annual giving campaign (AGC) letter:

"Please give us a pledge now, then pay later, after the holidays; when you have your tax rebate."

Or

"Make your holiday gift to Bitney and pay after the holidays."

Russ just put up a banner that was created for last year's campaign: "Imagine the possibilities." Now we also need a board in front of the school that shows progress. The thermometer is in the works.

We've had continuing problems with the website reverting to old AGC goals and old links. Abby has reported that it's a problem with widgets; she'll update those and see if the problems go away. (That's been done. Now to monitor that it stays current!)

Longer term, said Russ, we need to look at how to tell the story of Bitney -- our wonderful kids, our wonderful program -- and develop "points of entry," where people see what we're all about.

That includes follow-up, in which we continue to check in: "Are you interested in knowing more?" There are multiple stages until we have them in our back pocket. The has worked at Sierra Harvest. Russ' Buddha center uses that model. It's proven. You get a lot more depth and human contact and more authenticity.

His idea: that everyone at the table invites somebody to come learn about Bitney. We set a one-hour event at school. You get a cup of coffee, Russ speaks, a student speaks, you get a tour of the school: "This is what we do. These are our successes." Then it's over. And there's follow-up. We should be holding a meeting a month where 10 new people hear the story, and 3 of them say, "Yeah, I'd like to know more." The power is in the story.

Sierra Harvest does an amazing job of follow-up. Their message is consistent and warm and inviting. Who wouldn’t want to contribute to a school that is breaking ground in an innovative model of education that's engaging kids in ways they've never been engaged?

The group felt like the parent council should focus on the latest fundraiser and let the finance committee on the governance board look forward over the next year or two and get the "benevon" fundraising effort going

We also have 80 kids out in the community every week that we need to capitalize on. One person suggested we ask the mentors for a donation. Others expressed mixed feelings: They're already doing a lot. We're asking them a day to spend with our kids every week. Valerie will draft a letter and distribute it to the parent council members: "Maybe you didn't know we had a giving campaign..."

Di spoke about the video project. Daniel said if there was somebody to do the shooting, the teachers could line up the students with good stories to tell. Di will follow up with John Boyer, a videographer, and Daniel to set a schedule for this, to take place after the holiday break.

Celine said maybe we should reconsider the spring fundraiser. Could the videos be done by the spring as a big fundraising push -- a new, fresh online campaign. It could be a "tech way" to do the points of entry.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Russ said that Kathy told him that based on her forecast, if we can raise $24,000 this year, we could cover the teacher salary increase, and if we generated five more students in enrollment, it would be more sustainable.

We get $8600 per student. We have four new students starting at the new semester. The funding for that increased enrollment will show up in the 2018-2019 school year.

Celine asked what the motivation was for the transfer. Russ talked to three of the four and it was word of mouth: "My friend goes here."

Jonathan sent a group of kids to recruit at Seven Hills School.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Valerie said she is updating the Facebook page: "What you need to know about Bitney this week." That's linked to on Nevada County Peeps and Nevada City Parents.

She wants our help in getting the messages out: Using a Harry Potter analogy, every time we see a Bitney post, we need to "flick and swish" -- like and share.

Di will retweet Daniel's tweets. (See if this can be done automatically.)

ACTION ITEMS FROM NOVEMBER MEETING

Suzanne has approval to speak with the district about reclaiming funds. She'll pose her query in hypothetical terms. Her concern is that if our bank balance for the Parent Council doesn't go into the bank balance maintained by the Superintendent of Schools, that may be a problem. We need to come up with a solution that keeps the records accurate and gives the school a way to access funding as the need arises without having to work through the bureaucratic overlay imposed the by county operations.

WINE-TASTING EVENT

Valerie the event tickets covered all expenses, except for a service fee from EventBrite for about $70-$80. Valerie also purchased -- with Russ' permission -- a case of wine for gifts to the teachers.

Funds go to Louise. Expenses go to Louise. Gift expenses go to Louise.

BISTRO

Shannen had questions. It's a stand-alone business. She was supposed to open a banking account. She hasn't done that yet. She's wondering how it should be managed financially. The previous Bistro operator would go out and shop and he would be reimbursed by the school. Shannen goes out and shops and is never reimbursed. She's reinvesting the money that's coming in. Having no bank account is working for her, so that will stay in place.

Briar Patch money is coming in. $300 to begin and then a monthly amount. She would like help or feedback from people regarding how to use that funding. Some of it could be diverted to providing breakfast foods that Julie could hand out. (Perhaps Shannen could ask Julie what would help her?)

There was a question regarding selling bottles of water. Russ said they have 5-gallon bottles of water available, and he'll make sure one of those is made available to the bistro. So, no more buying plastic bottles of water!

Should teachers be handing out money to students? Russ suggested creating a sunshine fund that can be made available to students as the need arises.

Escript donations? They're not being promoted anymore. Valerie suggested holding a party to get parents signed up for those.

Shannen would like to submit a thank-you to The Union for donations from the Food Bank. Di will write a letter if Shannen provides a sample to her.

LUNCHEON FOR BITNEY STAFF

Angelina sent a message to Valerie about the faculty appreciation lunch. The parent council staff will put a luncheon on for Bitney Staff on Dec. 15. It's a potluck. Because the luncheon includes a bonus to teachers ($75 to $100), it should be the week before. Dec 15 at 11:15.

Staff: 11 people...

Louise said she hasn't got permission to cut checks. That will have to be sorted out.

Parents will take this discussion into email to work out the details.

Requires gift buying, potluck solicitations, etc.

ATTENDANCE TO THE PLAY, SCROOGE

We have plenty of drivers and $670. We needed $1,000. Russ is feeling pretty good about response from parents, which came after he threatened to cancel the event.

ACCREDITATION

WASC -- Western Association of Schools and Colleges -- is awaiting our accreditation report. This process takes place every six years. It's required to obtain state and federal funding. Our accreditation has always been good. We have to evaluate our progress from our last report. We're in good shape, says Russ. But given the many changes in the school program, this latest self-study will help set up goals for the next six years. We can only do a legitimate job of that with feedback from all stakeholders, including the parent council members. We will read drafts of the report that he will send to us.

He'll send a survey out. Our help in getting parent response to the survey would be valuable.

A visiting team of educators with like-minds and experience in alternative ed come and provide feedback as well.

The report is due at the end of January.

He'll let us know what we need to do when it needs to be done.

TEACHER PERSPECTIVE

Daniel said he came tonight to see what the situation is. We've taken on a lot. We have new teachers in, which makes the job tougher. He notes that the teachers have "heard good intentions for the last six or seven years. But we've maintained the status quo and kept taking things on." Now that he's 50, he was truly disheartened by examining his retirement. He's encouraged by the energy, but he wants to see what happens on the ground -- whether we will follow through on our hopes and dreams.

MISCELLANY

Big Picture Learning: Schools involved in this hold an annual conference. The average age of the 600 people at the annual event was in the mid-40s. Low salaries don’t help in recruiting them.

Celine suggested setting up a "Guilt Jar" fund -- $45 per day -- to cover days when they take their kids out of school or they're sick. That replaces what the school loses when that child is absent for the day. The money would be folded into the parent council funds for future work.

NEXT MEETING

When and where??????