

Midvale-Lincoln PTO Board Meeting

November 2, 2021, 6:30-8:30 via Zoom

Add to your calendar:

- Tuesday, November 2 - PTO Board meeting, 6:30pm
- Wednesday November 3 - Dining night at Panera (University Ave), 4pm-8pm
- Tuesday December 7 - Dining night at Chipotle (University Ave), 4pm-8pm
- Wednesday January 5 - Dining night at Mod Pizza (Sligo Dr), 10:30am-10:00pm
- Saturday, April 23: Rummage sale at Midvale

Meeting Dates for Midvale Lincoln PTO 2021-22

November 2 (Zoom)	January 11 (2nd Tuesday) Lincoln/Zoom	April 5 (Midvale/Zoom)
December 7 (Zoom)	February 1 (Midvale/Zoom)	May 3 (Lincoln/Zoom)
	March 1 (Lincoln/Zoom)	June 7 (Midvale/Zoom)

Welcome/Introductions

- Beto Orellana, one of Susan's brilliant PhD students, attended the meeting to provide translation support.
- Cris Carusi, MMSD representative, speaking today.

Principal Updates (Midvale and Lincoln updates provided together):

- Teachers have been preparing for conferences and beginning conferences. Goal is to find times to meet with all families.
- Showed appreciation for clothing driving planning.
- Thanked social workers at both schools running Second Harvest Food Bank. It has been successful, beginning with 36 family servings during the first week in October and up to 48 family servings for subsequent Mondays. Will also have Thanksgiving baskets available to families, supported by SSM and Second Harvest.
- Enjoying new Lincoln playground, working on thanking our sponsors and on a joint use agreement with City of Madison. Phase 2 scheduled to be installed during spring break.
- Lincoln COVID relief money will be used to pave wellness walking path at Lincoln to allow winter plowing for year-round use.
- Midvale COVID relief money will be used for books, furniture, a shelter for outdoor learning, and whiteboards.
- The Midvale specials team has taken a hit.
 - Meri Lau had an accident at school and Grace Hawkins has stepped in. Happy to have her on board. She was supporting Meri through the last couple weeks.
 - Ms. Mac resigned effective last Friday. They were able to hire a veteran PE teacher who has worked in Madison Public Schools. He and Ms. Mo have already started collaborating.
- Midvale – We will be hiring another SEA. Thanks to the Midvale/Lincoln PTO, we've talked to a lot of people about substitute teaching. Keep spreading that word! It's great to see people supporting the schools in that way.
- At Lincoln, parents are helping substitute teach.

Teacher Updates

Angie Hall (Lincoln):

- Teachers need additional snack donations. The food situation and the lunches have been hard; there are hungry kids. We need parents to donate snacks. We want to push for a snack pile. Please send us goldfish, fruit, etc. We

are trying to give two snacks a day in case they are not well received. We are also talking about reaching out to St. Mary's for snack donations. Parents can take any snack donations to the front door at Lincoln, and they will be picked up.

- Teachers are really pulling together and helping outside of our usual roles. We love the feel of everyone coming together to do the best they can for our students.
- Conference sign-ups are going well. Most will be done Thursday and Friday.
- Asked: can parents come in the building to help/volunteer? Becky, the "no" decision from the district on this is thru Q1. We haven't heard anything about it yet about it changing. If it does change, volunteers will need to be vaccinated.

Flor Mitchell (Midvale):

- Midvale just concluded a great celebration for Hispanic heritage with an all-school Zoom assembly and outdoor butterfly release.
- Some teachers have started conferences.
- November focus is Native American Heritage month. Ms. Shay at Midvale has been able to visit classrooms and talk about her heritage, showing videos, making maple syrup, crafts, etc. It has been a great experience for the kids.
- Lots of kids are doing outdoor learning with someone from the Audubon society.
- Thank you for the Woot Woot Wagon donations.

Nick Welton (Midvale)

- Reminder: If you have clothes in your kids' locker, have them bring them home and send cold weather clothes.

New PTO Newsletter/PTO email list spam

- Lately some of our PTO email messages have been filtered to spam folders - check your email spam folder for messages from the PTO and mark them as "Not Spam". Our PTO email messages include [MidvaleLincolnPTO] in the subject line.
- Another way to stop the PTO emails and PTO newsletter from hitting your Spam is to try adding a Google group as an address in email contacts.

Winter clothing drive

- Started a sign-up genius for specific needs, and it has been very helpful. This is where you can check out our specific needs and either donate specific items or buy specific items:
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0f48aca62baafec70-midvalelincoln>
- This is where you can donate money for the winter outerwear campaign:
https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=CSWKBJR8GUFA&fbclid=IwAR0EQeGlzt_qVRI-0SEwkkcb7gM9rp61sXLQVv7HowB9WNXIJm3jTxaLJQY
- So far, we have 73 kids with specific needs – this is a lot, so if you can support, please do. There's clearly a very large need here – please give if you can, and/or spread the word to your networks. Talk about it as much as possible.
- We are also pursuing Lands' End and Sierra to see if they have what we need.
- PayPal account has gathered \$1,700 in donations so far, but we need about \$6,300 for the specific needs determined so far. Spread the word to your networks.

Fundraising

- We raised \$264.08 from Ian's pizza dining night.

- Direct Appeal flyers are forthcoming. We will share via email and print flyers that can be sent home in classroom folders. The goal is to do a push for giving Tuesday.
- Bucky books for sale thru mid-November. This year there's a free Dunkin Donuts coffee and Kwik Trip coupons worth \$35. You can pay via Midvale-Lincoln PTO site, and we will deliver it to you.

Dining nights: add to your calendar

Takeout:
Ian's Pizza (Francis St): Wednesday 6-Oct-21
Panera (University Ave): Wednesday 3-Nov-21, 4pm-8pm
Chipotle (University Ave): Tuesday 7-Dec-21, 4pm-8pm
Mod Pizza (Sligo Dr): Wednesday 5-Jan-22, 10:30am-10:00pm
Noodles (University Ave): Wednesday 9-Feb-22, 4pm-8pm
TBD: Wednesday 2-Mar-22
TBD: Wednesday 6-Apr-22

Guest Speaker Cris Carusi, MMSD School Board

Background:

- Cris was grateful for invitation.
- PTOs are important. "Parents have power"
- Third year on school board.
- Day job is Events and Communications Manager at the American Family Insurance Data Science Institute.
- She has two kids – one a sophomore in college and one at Memorial High School.
- She got involved by helping bring 4K to Madison. In between, she did a lot of advocacy.
- "I've spent a lot more time as an MMSD engaged parent than as a school board member."
- She encourages parents to reach out to her anytime. "It may take time, but you are a priority."

School Board 101: What do they do?

- They are all elected officials.
- Their role is to make major decisions on three topics:
 - District policy
 - Budget
 - Hire and evaluate one employee: The Superintendent.
- The Board also approves resignations, terminations and retirements in the district.
- The Board meetings are open to the public. While the Board has been meeting in person, the public is still not meeting with them in person. You can fill out a form and join the Zoom meeting. Not sure about the timeline for bringing in the public in person.

Cris is on two workgroups that meet once a month, plus special meetings (about 4 meetings a month):

- Instruction Workgroup
- Operations Workgroup (budget, meals, etc.)

Please note: At this meeting she is speaking as an individual, not as the Board. She is giving her opinions; she is not speaking on behalf of the entire board.

- This school year had a rocky start.
- Some of the issues stemmed from COVID, some of the issues were on us, and we need to own it.
- Transportation was very challenging.
- The last-minute elementary option was very disruptive; it impacted Midvale and many other schools.
- We have ongoing staffing shortages.
- We are seeing supply chain issues that are impacting school lunches.

Last winter: decisionmaking authority regarding COVID was given to the Superintendent.

- Dr. Jenkins has pulled together strong team of medical advisors (e.g., pediatricians, epidemiologist).
- As a result, we have returned to school in a reasonably safe way.
- Though COVID cases do exist in Madison schools, no schools had to shut down and school buildings are relatively safe.

Cris discussed four main issues during her talk:

1. Class size:

MMSD has a [class size policy](#). Midvale-Lincoln was instrumental many years ago in establishing that policy. The policy does not provide hard caps on class sizes, but it does specify optimal class minimum and maximum numbers. Back in 2017, we saw class sizes going up. Grassroots data collection shows that high class sizes are particularly concerning at schools with high poverty rates. Cris takes this issue very seriously especially in high-poverty elementary schools. The Board will be getting better data in November and will use it for the 2022 and 2023 budget. Hearing from parents about class sizes is important. Please reach out to Cris with your perspective about how class size is affecting your child.

2. Staff retention and recruitment.

It's very difficult to be a teacher right now, and staffing is particularly challenging. Thank you to the teachers here. Wellness efforts are not enough: we need to look at how we are running our schools. If teachers are overly stressed, we need to make real changes. There is a teacher shortage nationally. It's hard to match inflation when the legislature is not responding. Regarding staff working conditions, we need to respect the professionalism of our principals and teachers. We need to allow teachers to make decisions about curriculum and be wary of pre-packaged programs. Cris would like to see MMSD get to a better balance of decisionmaking between administrators and schools. The district has added mental health days for staff that used to be professional development days. However, the LETRS training initiative has been conflicting with planning and prep time.

One of MMSD's top priorities is to recruit more teachers of color. Dr. Jenkins has been working to establish partnerships with HCBU and create pipelines.

3. Screen time

Last year during COVID, we had to do a lot of screen time. "I don't want it to be the new normal." MMSD is working on this through their wellness policy. The policy is required by the USDA as part of the lunch program. Screen time is one issue they are looking at, and an outdoor education policy. This will culminate into a Board vote. Parents should reach out to Cris if they want to be part of this.

4. Outdoor learning

Cris' kids went to Crestwood and they had great outdoor experiences because of very engaged parents. Some schools have great outdoor education and others have zero. Some of this is about resources: engaged parents and the school's resources. That's an equity issue. "I'd love to see every school offer outdoor education." It helps with learning math, and important for reading comprehension (it's about experiences). And kids just need to play outside. Also, it's healthy with COVID going on. Would love to see MMSD support this across the district, but how we fund it is another story. We are looking at how to use our 3rd round of COVID funding. It's possible it could be used for outdoor education related to COVID mitigation.

If you are interested in getting involved: go to school board meetings. They are broadcasted live on YouTube. If you want to provide public comment, there are instructions on how to submit public comments. They are entered into public record. If you wish to speak, you get three minutes. At workgroup meetings, public comments are limited to what's on the agenda. At our regular meetings, it can be any topic. The Board cannot respond to speakers directly due to laws in

place. They listen, take notes, and what she hears from the public impacts her decisions. Cris strongly encourages everyone to get involved.

Cris addressed questions submitted by parents:

- 1. Concerns regarding teacher retention – There have been an unusually large number of resignations this year. What is being done to address these concerns and fill positions quickly?**

Cris is deeply disturbed by the number of teachers leaving; she keeps track of them. “We are losing really great people.” We don’t do exit interviews. “I would love to see the district do these routinely, but they are an administrative function” (Superintendent and HR, not the Board). HR staffing is not in the purview of the Board, but this is an issue, and the Board has asked for change. The HR department is changing to increase the pace of hiring.

- 2. How are school resource officers funded?**

These positions have been redirected to restorative justice positions. Cris sees this as a positive thing, but it is a long-term culture change. They are partnering with YMCA and others to promote this in schools.

Cris would like to hire more school psychologists, social workers, etc., but funds are too limited. These positions also get called on to help with staffing shortage issues (i.e., they can't serve kids well if they must do playground duty).

- 3. Sub teachers – what else is being done to increase sub staffing? Staff are being pulled in to help with subbing, which eats into prep time, etc.**

The Board is not getting clear answers from administration. People are applying, but we don’t have enough subs. There are hoops that retired teachers must jump through to sub. We need to make it easy for these people to get the job.

- 4. Are staff surveys conducted to uncover the cultural issues that might be causing the exodus?**

Principal Galvan: The district has done culture/climate interviews in the past. Last year they instituted “flash polls.”

Cris: The surveys are completed by the superintendent and his staff. Cris is not aware of any in the pipeline. These are done at the Doyle level administration and not the Board.

- 5. Is MMSD planning on organization vaccinations to be distributed to those children with permission on school premises? Other local communities and even school districts in Texas are organizing COVID vaccinations at school, and it would absolutely speed up the children’s ability to be protected from COVID ASAP.**

MMSD is working with SSM Health, hoping to organize vaccine clinics at schools.

- 6. Masking – Currently there are no mask breaks. Some kids must have a break from masks inside and miss recess. How can MMSD policy be more science and sensory friendly?**

It’s concerning they are missing recess. She’s going to take that back. With the change to the county rules, it’s possible MMSD may change rules.

7. There has been a shift in how things are communicated and there have been a lot of last-minute changes this year. How will the district build cohesiveness so that students and families aren't getting mixed messages? How can messages be unified and consistent?

The school board does not hold the communications policy – it's an administrative function. However, good communication is critical to a well-functioning district and is important to Cris.

Good example of poor communication were the Halloween celebrations communicated in the district. We should think about how frequently parents are contacted and whether communications are sent to schools before families.

Cris will take this feedback back to administration. Communications around the start of the school year were part of the reason things were difficult at the start of the year.

8. We have had a lot of issues with lack of communication and activities at MSCR after school. How is MSCR managed? Is that ultimately an MMSD issue/ Who should I talk to about concerns?

School board does not get involved, but they do have an MSCR representative. Nicky Vandermuellen.

9. Class sizes: is there more we can do?

There's a role that PTOs and teachers can play. Cris has not received data yet, but the annual budget cycle is in January and they are talking staffing in February – the board needs to hear from us on how class size is impacting our kids' ability to learn. Parents speaking and sharing their experiences is the most powerful way to make change. Strong research shows positive outcomes from smaller class sizes. Tell us your stories, share your challenges; this will help us make better decisions. Our next operations workgroup meeting is Monday – send emails, submit public comments, speak at meetings. Cris suggested including information about class sizes in the PTO newsletter for parent awareness: here are the class sizes this year.

From Principals: The average class sizes at Midvale/Lincoln is a hard question because of how we must deliver services and room spaces. Financially we are staffed at 25:1 at 4th and 5th, 23:1 at 2nd and 18-21 for K-1. Many virtual classes have students from 6-8 schools. With creativity of staffing, many of the Midvale/Lincoln students have coteaching models that reduce class sizes to 16-24.

Deb is a huge advocate for small class sizes. It's a K-12 issue. Deb gave an example of Dayton Ohio, which added 90 elementary teachers and got their class size 10/1. In an [NPR article](#): Dayton Public Schools hired nearly 90 teachers over the summer to put two teachers in each first-, second- and third-grade classroom. Superintendent Elizabeth Lolli said it gives kids more individual attention after more than a year of being out of the classroom.

With COVID, even more displacement occurred in terms of segregation. The virtual option further complicated class size. Schools were told that specific teachers would be hired for virtual learning and they were not hired. We also need a plan for when kids move out of virtual.

10. What are the guidelines/standards for screen time?

There are no guidelines at district level. At Midvale/Lincoln, we have a diversity in experience. There is no one size fits all. Deb Hoffman indicated that Lincoln students are not on screens any more than 3.5 hours of a 7-hour day (50% of the time).

11. How do we focus on positive press – so much focus on negative.

Board has done some pushes in the past to highlight positive stories; maybe should consider this again.

12. Teacher prep time – are there things the Board can do to reallocate prep time or support in other ways? What professional development is happening? How is it being assessed?

Collaborative planning time is in the employee handbook – it's a point of contention between teachers and the district. Teacher planning time is increasingly being dedicated to top-down professional development. Efforts has been made to reduce this. LETRS training is a good professional development program but it is very time intensive. There's a concern that teachers often must do LETRS training instead of planning time, and professional development. Though it's a good program, it also certainly won't be effective if teachers leave the district.

Cris is not aware of evaluation of professional development programs. She would love to see data because money goes into this every year.

From a teacher perspective, LETRS can be stressful to include in work weeks on top of other obligations to kids and families. For example, teachers were supposed to get through a textbook in one week during back-to-school time. There are 8 sessions in one unit of LETRS. Teachers want to be collaborative partners. Communication with parents and ensuring mental health of kids is more important than LETRS training.

13. Standardized tests – are there plans for more or fewer? Holistic approach? Can kids opt out?

Cris is unsure of the full testing schedule. She is trying to get better answers about this. She doesn't have a good grasp of the tests given at different grade levels and where we are headed with our strategy. There is an acknowledgement that kids are over tested, but there does not seem to be a plan to do anything to change it.

Principals: Some tests are large-scale standardized exams, but many are assessments that allow teachers to monitor learning.

- Local standard assessments
- Federal – Forward exams

If too many kids opt out, there may be implications for federal funding. MMSD gets scored every year on tests; kids opting out does negatively impact the district. The Forward test is required if Wisconsin wants certain Title 1 money. K-2 does not require the Forward exam. 3rd-5th do. The tests are one size fits all, and if they are given out of context, they are not instructive. We sometimes get students who just won't answer – and that's a zero. Deb leans very heavily toward teacher knowledge-based assessments. You can opt your child out of any of the tests. However, Deb does not encourage parents to opt out unless they are anxiety producing for the child.

14. When does the Board evaluate the Superintendent?

The Board is coming up with plan right now; they are meeting in two weeks. Feel free to contact Cris; she's up for a conversation about this.

Other Discussions

- Discretionary grants deadline is Sunday. Jen has gotten five applications. We can fund 10 projects with the budget. We decided to extend the deadline one week. Teachers will email a notification out. Link to request form:
https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1PVt1SF87gS8WumpSpV9MWjXxKcHfrgz9j_gD73aRSc/viewform?edit_request=true.
- T-shirt orders – this fall. We will get an order form out this month.
- BINGO night – Jesse will try to schedule by next meeting.
- Directory – Jesse putting this together, approved by the school for the printing.