Amigos de Birchwood / Friends of Birchwood

March 22, 2022 | 6:00 pm – 7:00 pm | Cafeteria

Meeting Minutes

**Attendees:**

* Birchwood staff and Bellingham Public Schools staff:
  + Nicole Talley (Principal)
  + Rodolfo Riviere (Dean of Students)
  + Steve Schupbach (Paraeducator, Student Supervision)
  + Jami Pitman (Past Amigos Chair and current Bellingham Public School employee)
* Amigos Executive Team:
  + Katie Luerkens (Amigos Volunteer Coordinator)
  + Cherish Flint (Amigos Secretary)
* Birchwood families:
  + Approximately 20 Birchwood families were in attendance

1. **Introductions:**

Nicole Talley:

Nicole welcomed everyone back to in-person school gatherings and encouraged all attendees to get inspired and involved in the Amigos event or role that interests them most.

1. **School Announcements:**

Kelly Morgan:

Kelly invited everyone to the Garden Work Party on Sunday, March 27, from 10am – 1pm and shared how our school garden is one of the largest in the school district and provides many opportunities for enrichment, education, and nourishment for students and families.

Kelly also shared information about the International Market: an event to celebrate our diverse community within and beyond Birchwood. The International Market dates are the evenings of Friday June 17, Friday July 15, and Friday August 19, in the Big Lots / WECU parking lot. A lot of the performers and vendors are Birchwood neighbors!

Kelly also mentioned that free Zumba classes take place every Wednesday at 6pm in the Birchwood Elementary School gym. Classes are free, and are suitable for all ages, genders, and participant levels. Come sweat, feel good, and build community by moving together.

Rodolfo:

Rodolfo announced a new enrichment program called Buenvenidos Birchwood which will take place before school on Fridays from 7:30 – 7:55am, to help Birchwood students be ready / focused for school while also interacting with high school students as healthy role models. Buenvenidos Birchwood will include reading clubs, sports, Zumba, and board games, all at different stations, and it is made possible with the help of high school students and parent volunteers. The first date will be Friday April 15, and parent volunteers are welcome to [contact Rodolfo](mailto:Rodolfo.Riviere@BellinghamSchools.org) if they’re interested!

1. **Amigos Items:**
2. **What is Amigos?**

Katie introduced Amigos de Birchwood’s mission, which is strengthening Birchwood family engagement and building a resilient Birchwood community. Katie shared her role / history with the PTO organization as Volunteer Coordinator since 2019.

Cherish shared her role / history with the organization as Secretary since 2019.

1. **Structure**:

Katie shared the overall structure of Amigos leadership, which has historically included a Chair, Co-Chair, Volunteer Coordinator, and Secretary, as well as ongoing support from school leadership (Nicole Talley, Rodolfo Riviere, and others). Nicole Talley clarified the reason don’t need a Treasurer, since our PTO finances are managed through the Bellingham Public School Foundation. Katie noted current vacancies in the Chair and Co-Chair department, and thanked Jami Pitman for her amazing leadership as Amigos Chair the last few years. Based on these vacancies and the low attendance of 2019-2021 Amigos meetings which resulted in only a few attendees making key decisions, Katie shared the idea of shifting toward more of a robust (possibly 10-person) board-style leadership. From this larger board structure, the budget and other items could be voted on quarterly, semi-annually, or annually; planning committees could be formed for the Birchwood Boogie and for each of Amigos’ main community events; and the committees could then plan and mobilize volunteers for each event. This would distribute the Amigos tasks more evenly across more individuals, thereby reducing the weight of responsibility on any particular individual or family. Katie, Cherish and others expressed the goal of making the Amigos’ structure more sustainable and manageable year-after-year by creating a broader structure which relies less on any one particular individual or family.

1. **Events**:

Katie provided an overview of the events and projects Amigos typically funds each year, including class field trips, 3+ community nights/events, 5th grade end-of-year celebrations, kindergarten t-shirts, yearbooks, teacher stipends, student-enrichment projects, staff appreciation, and miscellaneous school- and student-focused items. Amigos’ upcoming spring events were listed with tentative dates, including the Birchwood Boogie (May 13), Staff Appreciation Week (May 2-6), and the Birchwood Bash (June 9) and Book Fair (June 8 - 10).

1. **Event Funding:**

Katie explained how Amigos funds the above events, which is almost exclusively through its annual fundraiser called the Birchwood Boogie. It is a fun-run / jog-a-thon-style event where students request and receive monetary pledges and donations from neighbors, family, and friends. A tentative date was set for the Birchwood Boogie: Friday, May 13, 2022, during the school day. Birchwood leadership will discuss and finalize the Boogie date at their upcoming meeting on Monday, March 28. If the final date is confirmed as May 13, this provides a full 7 weeks for planning purposes leading up to the Boogie. Katie mentioned that the last Boogie held in October of 2019 raised over $14,000, which was the most it’s ever raised. Holding the Boogie in the spring this year vs. the traditional fall has been an ongoing discussion for a few years, and it was decided at a prior meeting to hold the Boogie this spring for a variety of reason, including the unknown status of pandemic levels next fall, the need to host one this school year since the pandemic prevented one in the 2020-2021 school year, and giving incoming Birchwood families more time to get acquainted with Amigos’ work throughout the school year before being asked to join in the fundraiser.

In terms of fundraising, Kelly Morgan also mentioned that our school partakes in the [Equity Fund Project](https://bellinghamschools.org/partners-in-funding/equity-project-faq/), which is a one schoolhouse-style program through the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation and Bellingham School District that helps balance out disparities across schools’ fundraising outcomes by sharing a percentage of each school’s annual fundraising with other schools, based on need. Schools participate by donating 10% of their schools’ annual fundraising to the project, and those funds are then redispersed according to free and reduced lunch counts to participating schools. Birchwood Elementary School netted over $2,000 during the last annual disbursement.

Additional fundraising options were also briefly discussed, including Box Tops and fundraising through local businesses such as MOD Pizza and Panda Express, where percentages of sales are donated back to the school. While these are very welcome ideas, raising most funds primarily through our Boogie fundraiser also helps Amigos to consolidate volunteer efforts and to reduce the number of times families are asked to contribute financially throughout the year. Additional fundraising options will be on the next meeting’s agenda to discuss in more detail.

1. **Budget**:

Katie provided an overview of the budget and acknowledged the last time it was voted on was 2019. She addressed some items that have been crossed out since they are no longer relevant, such as the 4th grade field trip and the Common Threads expense, the latter of which is now funded by the district. Katie expressed the importance of scheduling a meeting after our next event (Boogie) to go over the budget line-by-line and vote on a revised budget for the upcoming 2022-2023 school year.

1. **Questions, Feedback/Suggestions, and Takeaways:**

Katie opened the floor for questions and feedback/suggestions.

Many important questions and suggestions were shared, which we will do our best to capture here. Specific participants will not be named, to prevent any inaccuracies.

* Suggestions were provided on the possible benefits of other leadership structures including:
  + Two Co-Chairs vs. one Chair and one Co-Chair.
  + The formation of a broader executive board that meets annually, semi-annually, or quarterly to vote on budget, events dates, and other administrative items.
  + Forming planning committees for each large Amigos event, at the beginning of the year during our kick-off event.
  + A mentorship-style system where an established family helps guide an incoming family in school events/participation.
* Questions were raised about how to ensure Amigos remains inclusive of our diverse school community.
* Questions were asked about what has and hasn’t worked in the past regarding engagement, event organization, communication, and inclusion.
* Clarifications were requested on how many annual Amigos events a family or individual should sign up to support.
* Details were requested/provided about Boogie organization and volunteer involvement in the past.
* Clarifying questions were raised about the theme, purpose and typical attendance of various Amigos events.
* Suggestions/feedback were provided regarding digital platforms of communication including Seesaw, Google Forms, email, and Facebook.

Some general takeaways from the above questions and discussions were:

* There seemed to be widespread vocal support for steering Amigos toward a larger board and committee style of leadership in order to broaden the mission’s reach, diversify decision making, and make participation more manageable for families and individuals.
* Digital forms of communication (Seesaw, Google Forms, email, Facebook) have been effective when utilized, though historically under-utilized by Amigos. Increasing digital communications could result in many positive outcomes, especially for involving families that miss in-person meetings.
* It’s important to continually reflect upon, discuss, and improve how well and how inclusively Amigos de Birchwood is fulfilling its mission of strengthening engagement and resiliency within our diverse community.

1. **Sign-Ups:**

A sign-up sheet was distributed to attendees with options to volunteer or become a committee member for a spring Amigos event, and/or to join the Amigos leadership team. The spring events on the form were the Birchwood Boogie (May 13), Staff Appreciation Week (May 2-6), and the Birchwood Bash and Book Fair (June 9).

Before passing around the sign-up sheet, Katie, Cherish and other attendees expressed the importance of families signing up for only one or possibly two events/roles, with the goal of creating a broader Amigos structure that is respective of each family’s time and prevents burnout. :)

1. Meeting Adjournment

Katie and Cherish thanked everyone for their attendance and participation, and let everyone know they’d receive an email from Amigos soon regarding the role/event they signed up for.