**Amigos de Birchwood PTO**

**All School Meeting Minutes: April 13, 2023 (Birchwood Elementary Library)**

**1.** **School Announcements**

Birchwood’s Principal Nicole Talley announced that Birchwood (along with other Title 1 schools in the district) will again offer free breakfasts and lunches to students next school year. She also spoke about the success of the afterschool clubs, which will continue to be offered next school year as well. Both of these programs are funded by grants.

Birchwood’s Dean of Students Rodolfo Rivier announced that Zumba used to be on Wednesdays but it is now on Tuesdays at 6pm hosted by the Melissa Rivier Vasquez. All are welcome.

**2.**  **Amigos de Birchwood PTO**

**a. PTO Mission, Leadership, & Events**

Katie Luerkens and Cherish Flint introduced themselves in their roles as Co-Chairs. Katie provided an overview of Amigos mission, leadership model, and events, including Amigos’ primary fundraiser, the Birchwood Boogie Fun Run. There’s some ambiguity about who is and isn’t on the board, which Amigos plans to address at the upcoming board meeting in mid-May (date TBD). There is also an “Amigos Board Task Force Meeting” on May 9th from 5:30-7pm at Goods to discuss board structure, voting fundamentals, and best practices. Contact Cherish for more information.

Katie noted that every Amigos event takes a lot of time and planning, and the goal is for all board members to be on only one committee. Amigos is trying to encourage more people to be on the event planning committees to distribute the work load.

Amigos also helps the school find volunteers for their needs, including things like picture day, dental events, and afterschool clubs. Parents who aren’t already on the Amigos volunteer list can sign up through the forms distributed at Amigos’ meetings/events or through the Amigos [website](https://friendsofbirchwood.weebly.com/) which is accessible through the school’s homepage. Amigos usually posts volunteer needs through Parent Square or in some cases by directly emailing the list, such as when we don’t have enough volunteers or when it’s a request from the school.

Amigos is brainstorming ways to create a more inclusive board model reflective of our school’s diversity. We are learning a lot this year, asking for feedback, and taking notes while trying to make our events easier to replicate so that one person’s knowledge isn’t a factor in whether it’s successful or not.

Heritage Night Reflections**:** Kaycee Pang coordinated Heritage Night and shared reflections on the event. Not having experienced Heritage Night in the past herself, she said the planning committee collectively asked “What do we want it to be?” and took some of what was done last time and got classrooms involved through projects. These classroom projects started conversations with teachers and students about heritage, feeding into Birchwood’s IB unit: “Who We Are.” Birchwood students and families have a very rich and diverse heritage. There were lots of wonderful presenters and performers, and the event allowed students to feel proud about who they are and what makes them unique. Kaycee encouraged new families to get involved, reassuring them that there are opportunities for all levels of involvement and a lot of support along the way.

Reflections from additional Heritage night attendees and volunteers:

* “It was my favorite event I’ve ever been to as a school. It made my heart crack open.”
* For best success, Amigos planning committees should be led by one or more individuals who have an established relationship with the school and access to the necessary knowledge/resources.

Clothing Exchange: Joelene Boyd spoke about the success of the second Clothing Exchange of the year, which took place on Heritage Night. The parent who initiated it, Becca Youlin, was new to Birchwood and really passionate about bringing the event to our school. It was a big success once again. Families benefit from it, and kids get excited about shopping.

Bike to School Week**:** A parent asked if Birchwood is participating in Bike to School Week, and Emily Hagerty said she has reached out to the organization who helped last year and will keep us posted.

**b. PTO Financial Overview & Budget**

The Amigos board voted on the budget at the beginning of the school year, which was the first new budget the organization has had since 2018. With the transition from the PTA to PTO model and Amigos leadership change, this is a transition year with a new model for spending, which is to fund the complete budget on all tiers due to our current surplus. We’re using this year to better understand how we spend money, since it’s been difficult to track Amigos’ expenses in the past.

A parent asked ifthe Bellingham Family Partnership Program (BFPP) subsidizes PTOs. Katie said that while middle school PTOs are subsidized by the BFPP, elementary schools have a different program organized by the Bellingham Public Schools Foundation (BPSF) called the [Elementary Equity Project](https://bellinghamschools.org/partners-in-funding/equity-project-faq/) aimed at creating more equity across district. There are schools that have $60,000 in the bank and/or for their one jog-a-thon raise $40,000, while the most Birchwood has ever raised is just over $14,000 in a year. Amigos’ role at Birchwood is not to fundraise throughout the year with wrapping paper, candy, etc.; it’s to build a strong school community, so we’re only trying to raise enough to bring families together. Elementary schools who opt-into the Elementary Equity Project give 10% of the funds from their main fundraiser, and those funds get redistributed to participating schools based on free-and -reduced lunch counts. The last time the project was offered (in 2019), Birchwood got an extra $2,000 this year beyond what we put into the fund, which is really significant based on how much Amigos raises annually. The project is back this year, and Birchwood contributed $1,300 to it from last year’s fundraiser. An upcoming meeting will reveal how much money Birchwood gets back. A parent asked if we found out about how the district was tracking free-and-reduced lunch counts now that Title 1 schools are offering free breakfast and lunch to all students, and Katie said there are other factors – such as certain programs families are affiliated with – that can supply the necessary information.

Nicole shared some highlights from her district meeting with Dr. Baker, who reminded everyone that the point of PTOs is not to fundraise but to build community, and encouraged the one-fundraiser-per-year approach. The district is working to fund all bell-to-bell activities and said we shouldn’t be fundraising for things that happen during the school day. She said the principal’s teams are working to make sure our school-day events are district-funded to create greater equity, so that events like 5th grade celebrations and field trips are more alike than different.

Q: What types of field trips are not supported by the district.   
A: It’s not entirely clear, but 4th grade is taking a Padilla Bay field trip and a Museum field trip that are funded by the district, and the district also covers Mountain School. There’s an ongoing discussion on this topic at the district level and need for more clarity. An Elementary Partners in Funding Meeting hopes to shed more light on this topic and is scheduled for Wednesday, May 17th from 5:30-6:30pm at Parkview Elementary Library.

Q: Can the PTO can apply for grants?   
A: Nicole said that’s a great question and that she will try to find out and report back.

**c. PTO Fundraising & Volunteer Needs**

We have a better accounting system in place now, and there will be budget revisions for next year.

Budget Surplus: We have a budget surplus because we had a fall fundraiser before the pandemic and then all Amigos events ceased for over a year, and because we originally needed to keep $12,000 in reserves which we don’t need to do anymore.

Katie shared a graph that showed the surplus being depleted in five years if Amigos continues to fund all items in the budget. So if you have a kindergartener now, that means by the time they’re in fifth grade, Amigos would have to have the fundraiser in the fall and be tied to the funds of that year with no reserves. This also explains why Amigos can’t say yes to certain asks. Some PTOs raise more money and can fund a lot more, but we give the school a discretionary fund and let school leadership decide on many staff requests, because leadership knows the school’s greatest needs and knows where a grant may be available instead.

Teacher Stipends: Since 2018, Amigos hadn’t given a dollar to teachers, and when you volunteer in a classroom you learn that teachers and support staff spend a lot of money on kids including clothing, school supplies, snacks, and project supplies. Amigos worked with school leadership to determine eligible staff within the budget. We ended up going $200/over the budget to include two extra staff members for a total of 32 teachers/staff who each received $100 classroom stipends from Amigos.

The Birchwood Boogie Fundraiser:

The Birchwood Boogie is our main fundraiser. Behind the school we set up cones, set the timer for 20 minutes, and kids run laps. We shortened the run time by 10 minutes. We encourage kids to run/walk laps and solicit donations from family members, neighbors, and friends. That’s all the money that we ask kids to actively fundraise for.

Every student is entered into the raffle and we generate random winners grade and class. Sarah Bishop is getting donations from local businesses. Katie created a Sign-up Genius for the day of the Boogie. Helping the day-of the Boogie involves setup, cheering on kids, and punching wrist cards. Volunteers are needed after the event to help organize the raffle winner prizes and help collect and count the money. The Bellingham Public School Foundation acts as Amigos’ treasurer and holds all our funds.

Other Fundraisers:

This year Hanna Hulbert also initiated a Launching Success fundraiser at Christmas (10% of sales by Birchwood families), Erica Schupbach initiated a Boundary Bay fundraiser ($1 per pint), and last June Erica also initiated an Elizabeth Station pizza fundraiser ($1 per pizza). There’s also Box Tops! Download the app, it’s free and easy to use. Our Box Tops earnings are more than three times than it’s ever been.

Sarah Bishop mentioned that Office Depot/Office Max has a similar program to BoxTops where you scan your store receipt and a portion of your purchase amount goes back to the school in store credit (5%). [Give Back to Schools | Office Depot® (odc2l.com)](https://www.odc2l.com/give-back-to-schools). Cherish to add this to Amigos’ website.

Joelene Boyd asked if Amigos could get set up for Amazon Smile. Cherish will ask Kathy Doolley.

Staff Appreciation Week: Staff’s favorite week! We show our appreciation with meals in the staff room each day. One attendee noted that food is representative of our whole school and the event could be an opportunity build connections with parents you don’t already know. We also do a gift card raffle every day too, and kids get excited when their teacher wins. Joelene and Celeste offered to lead the planning committee.

Book Fair and Bash**:** The lastevent of the year is our Book Fair the week of June 5th-9th and the Bash on Thursday, June 8th. The Book Fair raises funds for our school, and the Bash is an end-of-year outdoor evening celebration with food and games. Cherish and Erica are leading the planning committee.

**4. Looking Ahead**

As we work to increase diversity and inclusion within Amigos to be more representative of our Birchwood community, we need more ideas and continued feedback. Email [birchwood.elementary.pta@gmail.com](mailto:birchwood.elementary.pta@gmail.com) to get involved or share your ideas.

Amigos Task Force Meeting: Some members from the Amigos board met in January "to come up with a simple and fair framework for maximizing the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of board operations." We touched on the ideal size of a non-profit board, the ideal term limits, potential roles, and voting basics. There will be Part 2 of the Task Force Meeting on Tuesday, May 9th from 5:30-7pm at Goods. Please see [Task Force Pt 1 notes](https://friendsofbirchwood.weebly.com/uploads/9/3/0/2/93028230/amigos_task_force_part_1_1.12.23.docx) for more information, and email Katie or Cherish if you're a board member and you’d like to be involved in the Task Force for Part 2.

Amigos Board Meeting: The next Amigos Board Meeting is tentatively scheduled for late May, after the Task Force Meeting. Cherish will reach out soon with a proposed date. (There was already a date proposed, but Cherish now has a conflict with work that evening.)

**5. Q&A / Wrap-up**

Q: Are we allowed as a PTO to send out a parent survey through Parent Square to get feedback and suggestions on our events?   
A: Nicole said that was asked from the Middle School as well, and she believes it’s possible.

Q: Do the Family Engagement survey results get shared with the PTO?   
A: Nicole said she’s happy to share that with us at our board meeting. Nicole said if you haven’t taken that survey, the school does a lot of goal setting and refining based off the survey at both the district and elementary level.

Q: Some teachers post drives to get books in their own classroom or community—is there a possibility the school could fundraise for books for our community?   
A: Our book fair raises money for books, and there are funds within the Foundation that could also be discretionary for this. Bellingham Public School Foundation does a thing called YES cards that teachers can request funds for certain things. There have been a series of meetings this year with PTA/PTOs/leadership/foundation on who pays for what, the next one being Wednesday, May 17th from 5:30-6:30pm at Parkview Elementary Library.