

PLEASE NOTE: THE FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF THE MEETING.
OFFICIAL MINUTES WILL BE POSTED ONCE APPROVED
BY THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP AT THE NEXT MEETING.

MIAMI PALMETTO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL PTSA
GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
OCTOBER 17, 2007

The meeting was called to order by President Andrea Shosfy at 9:13 a.m.

Guest Speaker: President Shosfy introduced District 9 School Board Member, Evelyn Langlieb Greer, who represents our district (from Pinecrest down to Homestead). Our district is large and, as a result, quite diverse. She brought a visual of the Miami-Dade County high school feeder patterns. The districts in the southern part of the County are huge because these areas were developed later than the central and northeast areas of the County. We know that struggling schools need resources, but high performing schools need resources as well.

Today, Ms. Greer will address two issues; the first being facilities. Three years ago, overcrowding was the single largest educational issue in the State. Florida has the largest high schools in the USA in terms of the number of students per school. When voters approved legislation limiting the number of students in classrooms, the law contained a six year phase in plan. At this time for high schools, no more that 25 students are allowed in any classroom.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools currently have a declining enrollment. In the last 4 years, approximately 25,000 students were lost. In part, she feels it is due to the rising costs of housing, insurance, etc., driving people out of the County. Older people can't afford to move out and younger families can't afford to move in. It is a grid-lock situation. Even though the number of students is declining, our schools are still overcrowded.

In the summer of 2000, Superintendent Rudy Crew ordered a feeder pattern study to determine in which areas student populations were growing, declining, or staying stable (in anticipation of placing schools where they were needed). In south Miami-Dade, many schools were overcrowded but were not necessarily growing schools. A 5-year plan was developed to reduce overcrowding. Under the plan, 80,000 new seats should have been added by the year 2010. Right now, 34,000 new seats are in the system. If we spread them out among facilities, we receive the same amount of money per student but we have to provide more teachers, support staff, and buildings all without an increase in per student funding from the State. As of August 2008, we will have added 60,000 seats. In our district, 20,000 seats were added.

In our Palmetto feeder pattern, we have 2 overcrowded schools – Palmetto High School and Palmetto Middle School. She supported the construction of a new middle school at the 'Paint Plant Site.' It was a prototype school planned to house 1,200 students. With that number of students, there would have been enough funding to provide a high quality education. The area neighbors objected to the school being built and the plan was eventually abandoned. The solution to the overcrowding issue was to make Vineland and Leewood Elementary Schools into K through 8 Centers starting in August 2008. Two-story modular structures are in the process of being added at those sites. The principals at both schools are committed to offering high quality programs. Children at those schools will not be allowed to transfer to Palmetto Middle using

overcrowding as justification. She estimates it will take 2 years to reduce the number of students at the middle school.

The high school is overcrowded, too. Since we receive funds based upon the number of students attending, overcrowding gets more money into the school. The extra money helps to support a richer educational program. Palmetto High School will eventually be relieved by a new high school to be built on SW 86th Street and 107th Avenue near Indian Hammock Park. The money to build it is still in the budget but, as always, there is a fight for funds. It will take 2 years to build. Palmetto High School continues to decline in enrollment, so that has helped with overcrowding.

The School Board is in negotiations with the University of Miami to build a high quality magnet high school west of Metrozoo in conjunction with UM's urbanization project. Four acres will be allotted for the school magnet special program. In addition, we have a contract with Baptist Health Systems to open a medical arts high school as an integrated program to recruit and train students. The school, in partnership with Baptist, will expose students to medical arts careers, i.e. nursing, medical technician, etc. The trend is to orient kids more towards choosing careers. Finally, there are preliminary talks with the County to open a New World School of the Arts-type magnet high school at the new performing arts center which is being built on SW 216th Street in south Miami-Dade.

The second issue she addressed is programming, which Principal Weiner will talk about later. All high schools are going to be offering academies. Research shows that smaller environments and smaller classes are more conducive to learning. It is the "Coral Reef Model." You go to an academy and you stay in that academy so kids are more associated with a smaller group. Everyone is not going to college and we have started to counsel kids in the 8th grade to consider vocational training. We ask, "What is your career track?" We want them to start thinking about productive work in the future. There is a big push for career counseling along work expectations, but we still want to maintain gifted, honors, and AP programs. She tries to keep these programs from being shortchanged. Our school district has been recognized as one of the top 5 in the USA. This is impressive when you realize that 50% our kids don't speak English at home.

Ms. Greer says she is a fan of Doctor Crew and supports him. She describes him as a real tough task master. Sometimes, he is shocked at the ethnic warfare in this community. It is so distracting in a community where we have critical issues in the field of education. Unfortunately, it is self-destructive. Behind the scenes, however, there is a lot going on that is positive. She has an excellent reputation with Doctor Crew. She asked for questions and encouraged us to send her an email if there is an issue we are concerned about or need help on (her email address is evelyngreer@greerco.com).

In response to a question, Ms. Greer advised that Palmetto High School is currently 134% over capacity. A parent was concerned about students using requirements of the Federal "No Child Left Behind" Act to transfer to PHS. Ms. Greer explained that one part of the Federal law requires that "adequate yearly progress" be made in all subgroups within a school. If just one subgroup in a school doesn't make "adequate yearly progress," the school is considered to have failed. Thus, a child in the 'failing' school is given the right to transfer to any school in their area that did make "adequate yearly progress."

Our State laws, however, say we cannot be overcrowded by 2010. We can't go over 100% of capacity. The 2 laws are in conflict with each other. Our local school board has adopted a rule setting maximum capacities. A parent asked if anything can be done about kids using false addresses or using someone else's address to attend Palmetto High. At any time, if an address is found to be fraudulent, the student will be asked to transfer out. If you are aware of someone's use of an address, you are free to report it to be investigated.

Claudia Glasson thanked Ms. Greer and Mr. Weiner for the new auditorium and bathrooms. She wondered if we can expect more funding for remodeling or improvements in the next few years. Ms. Greer advised that not much money is in the offing. Once the overcrowding condition is met, however, we should be able to remove the portables. She suggested that maybe the City Council will decide to renovate the basket ball courts. Nancy Harter stated she is working on that as a Council member.

A parent asked if there were any plans for block scheduling at Palmetto in the future. Ms. Greer deferred to Mr. Weiner to answer the question. He stated that block scheduling is part of secondary school reform. Basically, high schools would have an 8 period day. Students would have a double period every day with a total of four classes per day. It gives kids a chance to take additional courses, especially electives. Studies have showed that electives are the courses that motivate many students to attend and stay in school.

The decision to switch to block scheduling is made by the faculty. Sixty percent of the high school faculty must vote in favor of an 8 period day; but, we are far from that at our school. The faculty and staff will be voting on it this year. Everyone involved with secondary school reform supports the benefits of the block scheduling system. Ms. Greer encouraged the PTSA to convince the staff that it is a good thing while she acknowledges that changes are a challenge. We need to reassure the professional staff that it is a positive thing to have more electives available.

A parent wanted more information about the joint program with the University of Miami. Ms. Greer advised it is being planned with a math and science curriculum. The University sees it as a feeder to them. Seniors will have the ability to take classes at the high school and at UM. Like the Baptist Hospital model, it allows for intensive training and learning. A parent mentioned she had heard an interview with Doctor Greenberg on NPR saying grants were received to improve sports programs. Ms. Greer hadn't heard about it, but will check on it. She asked the parent to send her an email and she will find out what it is.

Sima Miska asked for an explanation of what the Parent Academy does. Ms. Greer said it was established when Doctor Crew came to involve parents in the school education system. Initially, it was started with private grant money with a series of courses to educate parents and integrate them more into the system. Classes are given at schools or places of business to get parents more involved in the school system. She believes it has helped to change the mindset of parents to push their kids, encourage them to get good grades, find out what is happening at their child's school, etc.

Ms. Greer donates \$500 per year from her salary to each elementary school PTA in her district. A portion is used to pay for the PTA insurance (\$125) and the balance of \$375 is used for an outreach program at the school to bring the parents in. The programs usually include a Parent Academy presentation.

A parent asked, "What if we extend the regular school day instead of switching to block scheduling?" Ms. Greer felt the faculty might not support a longer school day and stated we do not have the money to support it. We have block scheduling now in a number of high schools and it works. It is good for the teachers and staff. Teachers have a longer class; but, they have more down time, too. Mr. Weiner said that for the high performing student, he or she can go from a 24 credit model to a 30 credit model. So each year, they can add 2 additional AP courses if they wished. Ms. Greer thinks that block scheduling would be a huge benefit for Palmetto High School. She encourages the PTSA to support it.

Principal's Report: Principal Howard Weiner reports he has received several phone calls regarding the status of the marquee which the PTSA purchased for the school a number

of years ago. We are waiting for a part on order to be installed. We haven't shut it off because when we leave the school at night there are no street lights and the only light source when it is dark is the marquee lights. Although it does look foolish now, for safety issues, it benefits us to keep it on.

Last week, we had a very successful College Fair and he thanked the PTSA for purchasing the new gym floor protective covering. It allowed the better set up of tables and made the area less crowded. Over 85 colleges were represented and we had the largest group ever in attendance. Homecoming was last week and we had a successful football game. The Panther Prowl was outstanding and the kids did a great job. The PTSA is in the process of upgrading our showcases in the lobby, including new lighting and painting. He offered many thanks to the PTSA for its efforts.

On October 9th, a program was held for all current 10th grade students explaining how the academies and majors curriculum works. Each academy has a strand of courses that a student can select. They choose an area of concentration, as far as electives and content areas are concerned. Students will pick an academy and then, select a strand. As the selections come in, the availability of courses will increase.

On October 25th, the 9th grade program will be presented. Students were given handouts explaining that 10th graders must pick an academy for 11th grade and 9th graders must select an academy and a major. Majors can be changed at will at any time without penalty. Incoming 8th graders will select a major and an academy for 9th grade.

For example, debate is a major that students can take. Mr. Weiner has been told that the middle school is thinking about dropping the debate and public speaking programs due to financing and a lack of kids wanting to enter the program. He encourages it, though, as one of the best programs to lay a foundation for public speaking. The program now at the high school is small.

Regardless of the strand they are in, kids can take classes in another strand within their academy. You are not restricted to taking courses only within an academy. A major is an area of concentration – that's all. The student is not forced to take the courses under the particular major. The selection is just to identify an area of interest. If you have questions, send him an email at hweiner@dadeschools.net.

Finally, Mr. Weiner said if you go to only one school event this year with your child, go to the Underage Drinking/Substance Abuse and Driving program sponsored by the PTSA next month.

Kaplan SAT Testing: Claudia Glasson advised that on Saturday, December 8th, Kaplan Testing will be offering a practice SAT for all students (especially juniors). Registration starts at 7:30 a.m. in the Media Center. We can register up to 115 students. Email her at Glasson@bellsouth.net to register. Students must bring a calculator and two #2 pencils. Also, she suggests a jacket or sweater because the Media Center can get cold. The test is administered under the same conditions as if it was a 'real' test with dividers between the students. Cost is \$5 per student and they will get the test back before the holiday break. The test booklet will show them the questions that they missed. This information will be on the website and she plans to send flyers home with the students.

Treasurer's Report: Isabel McBrayer handed out a copy of the current budget.

Board/Committee Reports:

Book Sale: Becky Herget thanked Lynne Schaefer for working so incredibly hard meeting with the teachers and book dealers. Because of her extra effort, books were sold ahead of the sale. We had \$8,000 more in revenue this year and we probably

made about \$15,000. She also thanked Jennifer Wollmann, Barbara Berg, and many other volunteers that gave up a week of their life to help make the sale a success.

College Fair: Ms. Shosfy said it turned out great and the new gym floor covering that the PTSA paid for helped make the event as successful as it was. If we happen to see Athletic Director Yvette McKinney, we should thank her and her kids for helping set up and take down the floor covering.

Membership/Donations: Mercedes Sorensen said we are at 975 members, but we want more. So far, 108 teachers have joined. Ms. Shosfy thinks a lot of people have neglected to turn in their membership forms. Please remind your friends to turn them in.

We have received approximately \$2,000 in donations for teacher appreciation and \$3,000 in general donations. Becky Herget felt we still need to get the word out about the donation program (this is the first year we have done it). More information will come out again in the newsletter. Remember that anyone can donate; i.e. businesses, grandparents, etc. Lastly, the PTSA has implemented a new "Project Proposal Form" for teachers to request funds for special projects. The request has to go through the teacher's Department Chair, Mr. Weiner, EESAC, and, finally, to PTSA for consideration.

Volunteers/Holiday Luncheon: Debbie Rosenthal announced that the Holiday Luncheon is scheduled for Tuesday, December 18th, during both lunches. Robin Laidlaw is her co-chair. All school staff is invited – not just the teachers. The school orchestra plans to provide music during the event. We will need volunteers to donate food, desserts, drinks, and provide help setting up, serving, and cleaning up. Ms. Laidlaw is the parent of a senior, so if anyone is interested in co-chairing the event with her next year, please contact her at 305-255-6100 or debralrose@aol.com.

Nancy Harter said general volunteers are needed for special projects in the office or with certain teachers. These jobs involve short term commitments – not a regular weekly arrangement. Some faculty do not have a planning period, so they need errands run within the school or Media Center, photocopying help, etc. If you are interested, email Mary Steele at Mes6841@hotmail.com or contact her at N9harter@aol.com

Newsletter: Jill Bloom told us that the newsletter comes out the end of November. The deadline to get information to her is November 7th (email her at Bloomsie@gmail.com).

Health Programs: Sima Miska distributed flyers about the "Underage Drinking, Substance Abuse and Driving" program scheduled in the Auditorium on Wednesday, November 14th, at 7 p.m. (immediately after the 6:30 p.m. General PTSA meeting). She would appreciate our help in bringing family, friends, and students to the program. Jennifer Wollmann said she has heard Danny Smith before and he is a great speaker. She said anyone who has children who drive should come and hear him.

Ms. Miska said the entire panel is comprised of good, experienced speakers. This program is not going to be a lecture; but rather, will be an interactive event. Ms. Shosfy will ask the faculty if they will give credits to the students who attend and said that Claudia Glasson told her that last year students received community service hours and credit.

Ms. Miska also asked for suggestions as to other health programs we might be interested in learning about. Some suggestions were eating disorders and other nutritional issues, physical exercise, and dating violence. Send her your ideas via email and she will be happy to look for and bring a speaker in (SHMiska@aol.com).

Legislative: Jennifer Wollmann acknowledges that the majority of people think tax reform is a huge issue. But, she feels there is no way the Legislature can accomplish tax reform without impacting education. She said that 40% of our real estate tax bill goes to educational funding. She encourages us to communicate with our legislators and keep informed so we can make an educated decision. At the January 2008 meeting, Ms. Wollmann will present a program on the proposed legislation if, in fact, there will be a vote on it on the January 29th ballot.

EESAC: Ms. Harter said EESAC met yesterday and approved funding for 3 items: (1) Pay the registration for some students to attend a TV Production Conference in January 2008; (2) Pay the registration for 2 teachers to go to a Science Teacher Convention (professional development); and (3) Pay for a leadership program called "8 Habits of the Heart." In other EESAC news, she advised that one EESAC member has resigned and a second parent representative has left. One alternate, Claudia Glasson, has become a member. We need to hold an election today for a new EESAC alternate. Jennifer Wollmann nominated Pat Bucciero which was seconded by Sima Miska. All voted in favor of the nomination. Ms. Harter reminded us that meetings are open to everyone. Meetings are held in Room 1005 on the 3rd Tuesday of the month at 2:45 p.m.

Old Business: The minutes of the September 19, 2007, General Membership Meeting were presented. A motion was made by Sima Miska to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Ellen Genet and approved without corrections.

New Business: Ms. Shosfy advised parents of senior students that the Florida PTA/PTSA offers 4 scholarships that students can apply for: (1) Fine Arts; (2) Community/Junior College; (3) Vocational/Technical; and (4) Annual Scholarship. The application deadline is February 1, 2008. CAP representative, Sally Coords, will be posting the information at YourClassPage.com on the school's website. The PTSA will post it to our website soon.

She stated that the United Way Campaign ends on October 31st. You can make checks payable to the United Way. Homerooms are competing for a breakfast, lunch, or possible field trip to visit a United Way agency.

Orders are still being taken for class rings and make up picture day is Wednesday, November 14th, in the auditorium during both lunches. The Junior Class Magazine sale starts the first week of November and ends on November 21st. Since this sale is their main fundraiser, they ask parents to hold off purchasing new subscriptions or renewing old subscriptions until their sale starts. Junior Parent Night is Thursday, November 1st, at 7 p.m. in the auditorium.

Ellen Genet thanked everyone for attending the Drama Club production of "The Diary of Anne Frank." They had a great turn out and show. The club is selling discount cards at a cost of \$10 each and has a Garage Sale planned for November 10th (at a private home near Coral Reef Park). If you have items to donate or wish to buy a discount card, contact her at Efg929@aol.com.

Ms. Shosfy announced that our next General Membership Meeting will be held on Wednesday, November 14th, at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted by
Roxy Lancelli, Recording Secretary

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