

Chief Cook and Bottlesher's Report

Aloha!

I hope y'all had a good December and January. Have been busier than ever with advocacy, outreach and office work. Especially the office work. :-)

Was writing the following as a winter break note, however my family had some unexpected losses and I just did not have my heart into it. Hope you will find this note, although belated, still as relevant as ever...

Was reading an interesting article in The New York Times about genetics a few weeks ago and came across this pearl of a quote, "We should exalt the outliers among us. But all too often we treat them shabbily." I think all of us can relate to that sentiment at one time or another in our lives.

My life has been enriched by befriending many such "outliers among us." My best friends growing up all fit that description as do many of my friends today. All are unique individuals which makes each and every one of them special to me. And that is why I am grateful to you. Yes, you!!!

If everyone were the same, the world would be a bland place. No new foods to try, no interesting places to visit, all the cars would look the same...uh...skip that last one since it actually seems to be the case these days. You know what I mean. Variety is the spice of life.

One of the best parts of this gig is getting to meet and talk with awesome PTA folks countywide. I literally bump into folks everywhere, enjoy talking to them and listening to why they volunteer in PTA. Some do it because no one else stepped up. Others do it because they love volunteering and community engagement. Your reasons are as unique as you are. And that is why I love working with you and all 49,999 of our other members. You each have a story, a passion and desire to share your dedication with others.

That is the spirit that makes PTA great. And, dare I say it, that is the spirit that makes this country great. And that is my challenge to you. Embrace our differences and move forward!

Over the past four and a half years of active involvement with MCCPTA I have seen incredible successes and some heartbreaking failures. The successes are many. Seeing colleagues who loathe public speaking swallow their fear and advocate for their schools. The record budget we advocated for and received from the County Council earlier this year. Seeing a school get what it needed because their supporters advocated the right way. Folks pitching in for training. And so much more. The failures invariably fall into one category – civility.

I keep hearing Rodney King's voice in my head saying, "Why can't we all just get along?" There is no answer to this rhetorical question. Yet I will attempt one – we need to work together for the sake of the kids.

Yes everyone, PTA exists to benefit the kids.

As one of the folks who probably puts about 60 to 80 hours plus a week into PTA (as do others) for several years now, who has advocated in every venue imaginable and has a proven track record of making things happen, I am aware of those who help get things done and those who simply do the opposite. Decision makers sadly say to me all too frequently, you get it. That is why I was approached by elected officials to start the ball rolling on securing funding last year for our Operating Budget. Rhetoric is worthless without the desire and good faith effort to make things happen. This is about human relations, pure and simple.

Today I'm making a personal appeal to everyone in the MCCPTA family. Show civility toward one another. Expect that everyone else's intentions are good and if you happen to disagree with someone, maybe they simply have a different way in which to get the job done. Expect the best from everyone. And no this is not some sort of idealism borne out of watching Sesame Street as a child. It is about practicality. We are stronger as a group than we are as individuals.

Over the next several weeks you are going to be hearing from me about a big mission – to secure funding statewide for our school construction projects. This funding is beyond overdue from our state officials in Annapolis and they must do better for all the children of Maryland. As someone who has testified many times in Annapolis over the last few years, I am disappointed by the blasé response we receive from a few of our elected officials to our requests for help. This needs to change. And it can, with your help.

We need to go full bore after casino gambling revenue from table games! The current split of 80% for the casinos and a mere 20% for the Education Trust Fund is wholly unacceptable. It should be a solid 50/50 split...roughly similar to that of the video slot machines we were told would yield such great benefits for our schools. We also need to go after more GCEI (Geographic Cost of Education Index) funding. And, to be candid, ANY FUNDING, from Annapolis for our schools. And we will succeed.

The last year has been incredible. After being a key participant in several successes, we went **BIG** and pursued the \$100,000,000 over Maintenance of Effort. Everyone won! \$87,000,000 more each year from now on is going into our schools. 600+ new teachers were hired. Lives were changed for the better along with our schools. This was vital to our children's success.

Look, I would be feigning naïveté if I told you I didn't take this awesome job without knowing the heat would be on every now and then. I like the heat! That said, sometimes the light of truth needs to shine.

For the past several months, I have been working mightily to strengthen MCCPTA. When I took the helm, and completely unknown to me, we were facing a \$22,500 deficit from our Presidents and Principals Dinner alone. This was something only a couple of people were aware of. And, since we were without a Treasurer for the better part of two years, no one was there to tell us of this urgent problem. Now we are trying to fix it. The best and easiest way has been to forgo the hiring of an Office Manager. Lisa Betts, our Treasurer, and myself have been pinch hitting in this role. And our former Office Manager stayed on for a while to help as well.

The biggest challenge we have faced lacking an Office Manager has been with the directory or Blue Book. It needed plenty of attention. Over the last two months I have spent dozens of hours updating and correcting this guide. Many MCPS and telephone numbers were duplicated, a deceased Principal was still listed, and other items needed updating and formatting. In the end, it will be a great Blue Book. In short, we are burning the midnight oil. We are all volunteers. I certainly have the best of intentions to do everything I can, as a full-time volunteer, to further our PTA goals. Perfect? Nope. Well intentioned? Absolutely.

Finally, I want to thank you for your service. As a member of the Delegates Assembly you take on a responsibility that is, in many ways, over and above the call of your typical volunteer work. Much of what you do may not directly and immediately benefit your biological child(ren) or school. That said, if you do your job right, work together with your colleagues, the folks at MCPS and beyond, your efforts will bear tremendous fruit. And that is the goal: to work together for the betterment of our students and schools.

Thank you for your time and sharing your talent with us all.

MCCPTA-ly yours,

Paul

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