President’s Pen

“Where does Fairfax County end and the PTA begin?”

This question from one of the participants in the recent CRS PTA Long-Range Planning Survey was only one of many questions relating to how the PTA budget works. We have heard so much about the FCPS budget over the past several months that now seemed like a good time to try and answer some of our community’s questions.

- The answer to the first question is “it depends” – we are fortunate that our PTA has historically been able to help CRS bridge some of the gap between funds available under the FCPS budget and the cost of the education we want our children to have. As funding from Fairfax County shrinks, the PTA budget shifts to help cover more of the basics. Of course, this leaves less available for the PTA to help Churchill Road go above and beyond.

- “Why is the PTA making decisions about spending on educational programs?” – Actually, the PTA budget is developed in partnership with the CRS faculty and staff. Annual funding requests are submitted to the PTA budget committee by teachers. Unfortunately, the PTA does have to make hard decisions, together with input from Mr. Hutzel, on how to fairly allocate the funds among those requests.

- “Shouldn’t Fairfax County be paying for that?” – Possibly...but the PTA does not want our children to bear the burden of this larger issue. That is the job of the CRS PTA’s Advocacy Committee. In the meantime, we do our best to make sure that our children receive the educational opportunities that might otherwise go unfunded, such as field trips, assemblies, software, books, etc. And, by picking up the tab for certain expenses that the PTA is permitted to fund under FCPS and PTA rules, we can give CRS faculty and staff more flexibility to pay for things that the PTA might be prohibited from funding.

- “If we have a staff appreciation budget, why are donations requested?” – The success of the PTA is dependent upon financial and volunteer support from the CRS community. Over the past few years, as the PTA has worked in partnership with the CRS faculty and staff to help support educational efforts, the funding available to fund many of the PTA’s other programs has decreased. Surprisingly, we have also seen a concurrent decrease in the level of participation in our “armchair” (or direct donation) fundraiser leaving the PTA with lower levels of projected income to fund an increasing bucket of expenses. Reaching out to the community for voluntary donations for staff appreciation events and other activities allows the PTA to stretch each dollar just a little bit further, while giving interested parents additional opportunities to be involved.

- “Why do we fund this and not that?” – Given the answer to the prior question, you might wonder why doesn’t the PTA focus its funding solely on educational programs, or why don’t we let FCPS cover the educational expenses while the PTA focuses on everything else. The mission of the PTA is to make every child’s potential a reality...to promote children’s health, well-being and educational success through strong parent, family and community involvement. Every individual’s view of how best to fulfill this purpose is going to differ, but the CRS PTA does its best to take into account the varying views of our community and to provide a well-rounded experience for CRS students and their families.

- “It would be helpful to have more specifics about how funds are being spent.” – Information is available about how PTA funds are being spent. However, due to the enormity of the budget and the need for flexibility within individual line items, it is not feasible to distribute reporting with this level of granularity. That being said, any of the PTA officers would be happy to answer any questions that you might have, and if they don’t know the answer, find out.

I hope this answered some of your questions. If you are interested in learning more, please join us at our next CRS PTA meeting on Wednesday, April 13th, at 8:45 a.m. in the Exploratory Arts Room.

Melissa Schwartz, CRS PTA President

THE TRUTH IS IN THE BUDGET FACTS

Virginia is in the top 10 states nationally in both per capita and median household income but in the bottom 10 for public education funding.

Source - Fairfax County Executive FY 2017 Budget Presentation

This is part of a weekly series from the CRS PTA Advocacy Committee to share facts related to the FCPS budget.
5th Grade Leprechauns Treat Staff to Potato Bar

CRS staff enjoyed a delicious St. Patrick’s Day-themed baked potato bar the week before spring break. Thank you to all the fifth grade parents who contributed baked potatoes and fixings for this delicious – and healthy – luncheon. Thank you to the CRS PTA Staff Appreciation Committee; and a special thank you to Sheila Nash, Kristi West, Thuy Moore and Luz Panduro for decorating the staff lounge complete with shamrocks and a pot o’ gold, and ensuring that the potato bar was well stocked throughout the day.

Long Range Planning Follow Up

Thank you to everyone who took the time to respond to our Long Range Planning survey. This is a great opportunity to gather input and feedback from our community and really shape the direction of the PTA.

We had 163 responses and the link below will take you to a folder with the summary report, including comments:
(https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BxazjkV5_mFlaUY5TXBjb2xpM&usp=sharing).

Additionally, we have provided a spreadsheet with all responses, as well as a tab for “Parent” responses, a tab for “Teacher” responses, and a tab comparing responses related to our budget and planning questions. Currently, the committee is finalizing our report and recommendations which are scheduled to be delivered at the April 13 PTA meeting. In the interim, we wanted to share this summary with the community and have a forum to add additional comments or observations on the survey.

Please send any comments/questions to CRSLongRangePlanning@gmail.com.

CRS Rocks with Reverse Order

Churchill students and teachers danced and sang along with the rock band Reverse Order at March 17th’s Integrated Arts Assembly. Reverse Order performed their highly popular “Reverse the Trend” concert that promoted awareness about the harms of bullying. All three members of the band shared their own personal stories of being bullied as well as tips on how to handle bullying situations; stressing the importance of speaking out to a parent, teacher, or friend if they are being bullied or see someone else being bullied. The band educated the students about a serious topic while performing fun music that had everyone dancing along. Thank you to the PTA for sponsoring this event and to Integrated Arts Committee Chair Jennifer Yellen for organizing this highly popular event.

Fairfax County FY 2017 Budget Hearings

Even with a 3% transfer increase (as currently proposed in Fairfax County’s advertised budget plan), FCPS still faces a $50 million budget gap. Our county supervisors need to do better! Importantly, FCPS’s FY 2017 budget includes $40 million to bring our teachers’ salaries closer to the market rate in our region and $11 million to keep elementary class sizes down, which is important to many of us at CRS. Fairfax County’s Proposed FY 2017 Budget Hearings start Tuesday, April 5th, at 4:00 PM in the Board Auditorium, Fairfax County Government Center (and continue on April 6th and 7th). Please go and show your support for FCPS. If you want to speak, sign up online for the speakers list or contact the Office of the Clerk to the Board, 703-324-3151. (Information provided by the PTA Advocacy Committee.)
And The Halls Were Alive With The Sounds Of Music...

First grade students performed their annual spring musical “How Does Your Garden Grow?” with much enthusiasm and preparation. The students spent several weeks practicing and perfecting the songs, dances and lines working as a team to present a successful and well received performance.

The afternoon and evening musical performances were thoroughly enjoyed by students, friends and family. Thank you to the first grade team – Mrs. Diffie, Ms. Isom, Mr. Suchoski and Mrs. Williams – and music teachers Ms. Judkins and Mrs. Menard Mazurowski for working with the students to get them ready for this much loved performance!

Under the direction of our orchestra conductors, Jacqueline Robertson and Melissa Mioni, Young Composers’ Nights were a success. Our 6th grade strings students performed their original music…..and the music sounded really good! The performances were highlighted by the colorful names of the pieces like “Hunt of the Grizzly Bear, “Extremophile Elite in Blue”, and “Sonata #1: The Death of the Earth”.

Cheers of the Week...!

Congratulations to our Churchill Cheer winners for the week of March 14. Cheers are given to students who follow the four R’s. Winners are: Adam Villaruz (Kindergarten); Dylan Davis (1st); Gabriela Cid (2nd); Christian Cunningham (3rd); and Davy Holmes (4th). Our good citizenship winners are Ella Abend (5th grade) and Veda Kalidindi (6th grade). Our whole class winner is Mrs. Diffie’s first grade. Keep up the good work.

Remember, at CRS we follow the five R’s. We Respect ourselves, we Respect others, we Respect property, we Respect the Earth, and we are Responsible.
WELLNESS CORNER

Little changes make a big difference

Benefits of Spending Time in Nature

Churchill Road students enjoy an impromptu game of basketball during recess.

Spring is here! The sun is shining longer, flowers are blooming, and kids are swapping their heavy winter coats for shorts and t-shirts. Spring encourages us to spend more time outside which can be beneficial for our mental and physical health. Research has demonstrated that spending time in nature can increase energy, reduce stress, and improve an individual’s sense of wellbeing. A University of Michigan study found that a nature break, such as a walk through an arboretum, improved performance on memory and attention tests. Time in nature is also linked to enhanced creativity and researchers have found that being among plants boosts immunity because the phytoncides (airborne chemicals plants release to protect themselves from insects and rotting) also enhance humans’ immune function. Just by being outside one increases physical activity, as well. Sunny spring days with a cool breeze make it so inviting to ride bikes, work in the garden, fly a kite, run, start an impromptu game of tag or basketball on the playground, or to take a leisurely walk with a friend.

Churchill Challenge 5K: It's officially Spring! Time to get out and enjoy the warmer weather, beautiful flowers and training for the Churchill Challenge! The race is April 16th. Register before Friday, April 1st and you'll be guaranteed your t-shirt size. You can register to run, walk or volunteer at www.churchillchallenge.com. Questions? Contact Claudette Kim, claudette_kim@yahoo.com

Collaboration at CRS

Our PBIS theme for the third quarter is collaboration. Collaboration is the action of working together to produce or create something. Collaboration is one of the five elements that makes up "Portrait of a Graduate," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Karen Garza's road map of five essential skills all students of FCPS should possess at graduation. Collaboration is an important skill for young people to practice to become successful and productive community and global citizens.

As you walk the halls of CRS, you will see many opportunities for even the youngest students to practice collaboration. Our first graders experienced a wonderful lesson in collaboration as they recently practiced and performed their spring musical, "How Does Your Garden Grow?" In the fall, second grade students took special care to collaborate with classmates on the best way to support a caterpillar’s transformation into a monarch butterfly. Even the youngest kindergarten student is familiar with the phrase “teamwork” as they work collaboratively with their classmates to complete classroom tasks throughout their busy day.

Older students have been spending much of the third quarter working collaboratively on their inquiry projects. Through these projects students practice many aspects of collaboration, including the ability to listen to the ideas of others, problem solving and creating together a finished product all students can be proud of.

Collaboration between students at CRS does not stop at 3:20 p.m. This month, students utilized their collaboration skills as they made sandwiches for Martha’s Table, an organization that aids community members in need. After-school activities are also a great place for students to practice collaboration, whether it be mixing a recipe together during Tiny Chefs, scoring a goal in soccer, or rehearsing for the production of “Shrek Jr.” in Musical Theater Club.

Students are not the only members of the CRS community who practice collaboration on a regular basis. Every week administrators and teachers meet in collaborative learning teams (CLT’s) where they work together to meet the ever-changing needs of their students.

Parents can support children of all ages to be collaborative learners and thinkers. Talk with your child about ways they can be a team player, whether it be at home, school or in the community. Team sports and clubs are a great way to give children the experience of working together toward a greater goal.

Working collaboratively with others is a skill all young people should be given many opportunities to practice. As Helen Keller said, “Alone, we can do so little, together we can do so much.”

Barbara Lewis, Kindergarten teacher
On behalf of the CRS Positive Behavior Intervention Support Committee

On behalf of the CRS Positive Behavior Intervention Support Committee
The Week Before Spring Break...

CRS alum Katie Wiseman, a teacher with Teach for America, visited Churchill Road before Spring Break. Who knows, maybe one of the kindergarteners pictured in the photo with Ms. Wiseman will be a teacher someday!

Sixth graders celebrated Pi Day (3.14), complete with recitations of Pi-kus, Pi games and, of course, a smorgasboard of delicious pies. Congratulations to Isabel G. (above), who was able to correctly write out the value of Pi to 496 decimal points! Later in the week, sixth graders shared the “molecules” they built out of various items as part of their science unit (below).

In LTC (Spanish), our third graders planned and created pieces of jewelry that represented a pattern we learned by using beads of different colors and shapes. They also gave an oral presentation of their jewelry in Spanish. ¡Muy bien hecho tercer grado!

The second graders learned Spanish vocabulary related to Storms, following their science unit, then planned and created a model storage unit that would keep boxes (crumpled paper) dry after a flood.

Also College and Career Readiness Week, Friday was College Day Spirit Day, where teachers and students wore t-shirts and sweatshirts from their favorite school. Ask your student to tell you about his or her teacher’s college experiences.
McLean High School’s TheatreMcLean Performances Begin April 8

McLean High School’s award-winning theatre company, “TheatreMcLean,” would like to invite Churchill Road families to its production of the beloved Rodgers and Hammerstein musical—featuring the Prince, his fancy ball, and that lovely maiden with a midnight deadline! TheatreMcLean’s rendition of this Broadway fairytale (by permission of R&H Theatricals) offers a new twist: as Prince Topher searches for the one woman who can wear the glass slipper, he also finds his purpose in life. As for Ella, her magical journey proves that with a little magic, anything is possible. Can a servant girl attend the ball? How does a pumpkin transform into a carriage? Will Ella find love with the Prince of her dreams? Come find out what’s possible at TheatreMcLean!

This family-friendly show runs April 9 at 2:00 p.m., and April 8, 14, 15, 16 at 7:00 p.m. at McLean High School, 1633 Davidson Road, McLean, VA 22101. Tickets are $12; to purchase tickets or for more information, go to theatremclean.org. Total run time is approximately 2.5 hours with intermission.