

2025.1.014 | General PTSA Meeting - Minutes

Takoma Park Middle School (TPMS)
Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA)
General Membership Meeting
January 14, 2025
7-8:30pm

Minutes

Please read the Summary of the Planned Bell Schedule to better understand the Q&A with Ms. Martin, found here : <https://www.tpmspta.org/2025-january-14-ptsa-meeting/>

Call to order 7:15pm

- 25 in attendance

Election - New Board Members

- Recording Secretary: Becca Jones-Albertus
- VP Membership: Vishal Sinha

Books and Basketball Event: Friday, February 28th and Saturday, March 1

- Basketball Game: Friday, February 28th
 - 8th graders play against staff and teachers 6-8pm
 - Early access to the book fair: 5-7pm
 - Concessions
 - Pre-game and halftime shows: We will rock you bands & TPMS Dance Team!
 - Please donate used books for sale. They can be dropped off in the box at school or during the special drop-off times on Saturday January 25 and Saturday February 15 – 10am-1pm. Book Sale: Saturday, March 1, 10am-1pm
 - All community access book fair
 - Silent Auction
 - Bake Sale
 - Horticulture Club plant sale
 - Games, Activities, & More!
 - Please donate for the silent auction and ask businesses for donations
- Contacts: Celine Allard: celineallard@yahoo.com for books, volunteering
 - For the silent action: Sesyle Moorhead: sesylemoorhead@gmail.com

Treasurer's Update

- We have \$22,069 in the bank as of January 1
- We don't expect to meet our fundraising goals this year, but will assess again after the Books & Basketball major fundraiser

- We have more expenses coming in the spring - the time when we expect to have most of our expenses hit.

CATEGORICAL BUDGET - Status						
January 1, 2025						
TAKOMA PARK MIDDLE SCHOOL PTSA						
	Previous FY 2023-24		2024-25			% Difference between proposed and actual so far...
	Proposed	Actual	Proposed	Actual so far...		
Income						
Member Donations	\$ 7,500.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 3,866.25		193.31%
Grants & Reimbursements	\$ -	\$ 2,991.31	\$ 2,226.00	\$ 226.00		10.15%
Fundraising	\$ 7,100.00	\$ 3,774.37	\$ 24,000.00	\$ 9,363.36		39.01%
Program Generated Revenue	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,406.92	\$ 2,750.00	\$ -		0.00%
	\$ 17,600.00	\$ 12,172.60	\$ 30,976.00	\$ 13,455.61		43.44%
Expenses						
PTA Organizational Expenses	\$ (700.00)	\$ (500.00)	\$ (700.00)	\$ -		0.00%
PTA Operational Expenses	\$ (2,386.00)	\$ (962.99)	\$ (2,026.00)	\$ 555.98		27.44%
PTA Fundraising Expenses	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 21.20		
PTA Objectives	\$ (15,000.00)	\$ (8,339.01)	\$ (15,726.60)	\$ 2,960.99		18.83%
PTA Event Expenses	\$ (16,925.00)	\$ (10,319.17)	\$ (12,498.70)	\$ 1,953.45		15.63%
	\$ (35,011.00)	\$ (20,121.17)	\$ (30,951.30)	\$ 5,491.62		17.74%

Bell Schedule Q&A with Ms. Martin

Please read the Summary of the Planned Bell Schedule to better understand the Q&A with Ms. Martin, found here : <https://www.tpspta.org/2025-january-14-ptsa-meeting/>

Q: This is a major change from 8 periods to 7, and it hasn't been communicated clearly. This has resulted in a lot of anger, unnecessary independent research and lost sleep because we've been trying to make sense of what is happening. Why hasn't this been better communicated?

A: I am very committed to this school community. Communication has been primarily through the newsletter but I acknowledge that has not worked for all families through this process. I

commit to ongoing communication that has enough specificity to allow parents to stay informed and engage in the process.

Q: Are you aware many families are contacting the superintendent and board about this process? Any comments?

A: Parents have the right to reach out any time they feel their concerns are not being addressed sufficiently at the school level. This is why we have multiple levels in the county to reach out to. I've been in contact throughout this whole process with the central office and I have shared parent communication I've received with them as well so they have a full understanding of what is going on. I share this with them also so I can collaborate with them, receive guidance and come up with an outcome that acknowledges the needs of all of our stakeholder groups and looks for ways to address those concerns.

Q: This is a really big change. What triggered it?

A: This was triggered by the teachers and their decision to change the number of classes they teach. We all acknowledge that an 8 period day is the ideal. Traditionally, we have been able to make that happen because the teachers have taught one more class than they are required to teach at MCPS which is 5. This current teaching arrangement of teaching 6 classes in an 8 period day has been hard on the teachers. All of these other changes to the bell schedule are a ripple effect from the change to a teaching load of 5 classes.

Q: Can you describe the timeline you've operated on?

A: Last fall (2023), the teachers made the formal request for me to change the bell schedule. We agreed it was too quick to implement for this year (2024-25), but started the process of forming a bell schedule committee representing each of the departments, the master scheduler and parent volunteers.

We put out a call for volunteers for this committee and it began meeting in March 2024. The goal was to solicit feedback from different stakeholders on the bell schedule, including length of class periods. The Committee spent the spring learning from that feedback and connecting with other schools (magnet and non-magnet) for input on how their schedules worked.

This fall (2024) we began recruiting parents to serve and we got 10 responses with 3 deciding to serve. They were added to the ongoing monthly meetings with the committee. Meanwhile, the Committee started to look at considering moving to a 7 period day vs an 8 period day as a means of supporting a 5 class teaching load, and the considered how different bell schedule options would be built to support it.

With all of this research and information, the teachers voted this fall to move to a 7 period schedule. This is when the Bell Committee made their first presentation to families sharing their findings and what they had voted on. At this time there were requests for better communication from families, especially for magnet families, and I held a meeting with magnet families in December.

The next step in this process was to determine the specific bell schedule that would implement the 5 of 7 schedule.

To create a bell schedule, we needed to look at the logistics of a bell schedule and other constraints (e.g., how to make all of the lunches happen within the time block that lunch workers are here in the building). The length of classes have to fit mathematically within the 8:15-3:00 school day. From a master scheduling standpoint, we need to balance out class sizes within the school day (so class sizes aren't wildly different). They also have to manage for teachers to have 1 planning period per day, while managing for their overall class sizes.

The Bell Committee shared the same presentation on the 3 bell schedule layout options with teachers, parents and students.

Teachers had the opportunity to look at all 3 schedules and prioritize the one that they felt would be most beneficial.

Q: Did I hear correctly in your timeline, that when you started this process last year, you didn't anticipate moving to a 7 period schedule, is that right?

A: The reason that triggered this process was the desire to move from teaching 6 classes to 5 classes. The staff strongly considered keeping an 8 period schedule, but when we began to dig into how it would work, we found we would need more staff to maintain the 8 periods.

Ms. Soriano adds: I am the master scheduler. This process started with a lot of research in the Spring - looking at different options and feedback from students, parents/caregivers and staff. It became clear that the committee was moving toward a 5 of 7 or 5 of 8 model. In the fall of 2024, the focus was on developing a proposal for the 2025-26 school year based on all of the research from the 2023-24 school year. Parent involvement was needed for Oct-Dec to be ready to submit the proposal in January. It feels rushed from the sense of the parent engagement starting in October, but this process really began a year prior and we didn't know what we would learn during our research phase. Once the vote took place this fall, we tried to ensure the engagements with all stakeholder groups were at the same time - staff, students and parents/caregivers. We wanted to ensure staff had the feedback from students and parents/caregivers within this timeline.

Q: How did you come up with this process?

A: The teaching union. The teachers' contract outlines the parameters of the process and then MCPS also provided guidance. We aren't the first school to go through this process, but outside of Eastern (which went through this about 15 years ago) most schools aren't looking to change the number of periods when they change their bell schedule.

Q: This feels pretty rushed. Can we roll this out in 2026 instead of next year, or phase it in?

A: I'm not going to answer that question yet. As I communicated in my last meeting, this is a 2-step decision-making process. One step lies with the teachers (to choose to move to a 5 to 7 schedule and choose the specific bell schedule). I am not the decision maker. The final decision maker is the MCPS central office. Once the teachers have a decision, I will send that decision to the central office along with all the emails and a summary of the stakeholder feedback. So this is part of how all the stakeholder feedback is being used. When it's in the hands of Central office, they will take into account all feedback. There are many possible outcomes - process could be paused, or the proposal could be honored, or there could be a requirement to put mitigations in place to address some of the issues outlined. It's possible there could be additional staffing. I advocate for additional staffing every year.

Q: What is the pattern of input you've been getting from families? Can you highlight maybe 5 from parents, teachers and students?

A: It runs the gamut. For some, 8 periods feel very heavy, for them the 8th period is too much. There are some concerns of shifting to having 7 periods every day and how that will impact homework load. That was also a theme among students - would there be more homework in the shift to a 7 period day? We need to mitigate the homework concerns.

There are some patterns/trends in terms of particular groups.

From magnet families, primarily hearing a desire to maintain 8 classes and the extra elective. The majority of concerns that are still ongoing are with magnet students and students with IEPs. There are students that like shorter class periods because they feel they will be able to engage better, and they like the idea of more breaks. There are 4-5 minute transitions in the existing schedule and there would be more transitions in a 7 period schedule giving more movement breaks.

Students feel the ideal length of a class time is 50-70 minutes. Our students agree that 90 minutes is a long time. There should be a brain break.

Ms. Soriano adds: A common theme from student feedback is linked to executive functioning. Students consistently expressed a challenge in having different schedules from day to day; there would be benefits in having the same schedule every day.

Q: The 8 period schedule has worked for so long. Can't we just keep it?

A: Believe me, I'd like to keep 8 periods. Our schedule has served many over the years, but it should also be known that it has underserved some students. And it's not been working for teachers for a while.

The conditions over the years have changed. I've asked for the enrollment of TPMS over the last several years. We were well under 1000 students when I came to TPMS four years ago, and budgets were previously higher for staffing. There were many years when MCPS magnet programs were funded by a grant. Over the years, that grant has gone away. Our enrollment continues to climb - 1172 this year, and I just received projections this week that we are projected for 1231 next year. We've been trending +60 students per year for the past few years. At the same time, the financial landscape of the county has changed. In the absence of resources, we have to do what will work for this school.

Q: Have you tried creative solutions here, like raising money or bonus pay for teachers who teach extra classes?

A: When we have change, part of my job is to find creative solutions. Through our collaboration and advocacy, we should be able to get somewhere. There may be a give and take for everyone. Over the course of our engagement, there have been suggestions based on how other schools handle these challenges (like the extra period at Blair) and I'm working with MCPS to explore the viability of these models. I will always try to put staffing on the table and advocate for additional staffing to help offset these impacts. Some have suggested we reevaluate our afterschool activities so students can regain access to a lost elective. There have also been suggestions to reevaluate the requirements of the magnet program. This is obviously less ideal. I've taken those suggestions and engaged Central Office. They are interested in working with us to find acceptable solutions.

Q: Parents have found that four other MCPS schools run an 8 period schedule (with 3 electives) including Parkland, Argyle, Loiderman, and Silver Spring International. What can you tell us about that?

A: When I talked to other schools about how they have done this, they have all made different choices. Some are choosing to run classes with 36-38 students. But in talking with all of the principals at those schools, they have questioned how sustainable the 8 period model is for them.

Q: A parent asks about Blair and their 9-period schedule.

A - Ms. Soriano answers, since she comes from Blair and is the Master Scheduler at TPMS: Blair's lunch hour happens for all students at the same time, so that helps with scheduling logistics, but also should not be included in the schedule as an academic period. The 9th period is not available to the entire school population, it is only available to CAPP 9th graders, and Magnet students. Their day is really a 7 period day for most students.

Q: Can you tell us about class size averages at TPMS? Some parents found materials saying English classes averaged 24.4 and all other courses at 23 last year. What are averages this year?

A: Taking the English class as an example, these are averages based on the regular sections of English, the self-contained sections of English (including autism resource program classes, special education classes and English as a second language classes). This year our averages are up about 4 students per section due to enrollment going up. But we do have individual classes with numbers higher or lower than those averages. Even if we had stayed at a 6 of 8 schedule, class sizes would have gone up to 30 or 32 with enrollment increases. When you change from teaching 6 or 8 classes to teaching 5 of 8, the class sizes need to increase because you now need to place those students that would have been in the teacher's '6th class' that is no longer available, this brings the class sizes up to 36-37 students.

Q: What do you predict will be the average sizes of the 5 of 7 schedule?

A: 30 to 32 for general education classes. The website will still show lower numbers because those averages include the smaller self-contained classes. The county overall is also showing class size increases.

Q: Is there enough time for you to incorporate the feedback you're getting this week on Bell Schedule layouts, if your proposal is due this week?

A: We are seeing consistent patterns in feedback. The feedback also helps us identify what we will need to plan for to mitigate the effects of a bell schedule change.

Q: Some parents have noted that when these choices were presented to their student by the teachers, teachers informed them that they were working outside of contract. It feels unfair to put the pressure of a labor dispute on students. Can you comment?

A: We believe our children are old enough to be provided with the opportunity for input. It's not our intent to put a labor dispute on students. One of the reasons we focused on creating those videos was to ensure that all stakeholder groups got the same communication and to try to control the specific communication they receive. We wanted to empower students to provide their feedback. In one instance, we did hear from a parent and followed up with the teacher about what was appropriate. Our understanding was that the situation resulted from the students asking the teacher questions about how this started and the teacher answered honestly. But please let us know if you have concerns about what your child heard in class and we'll address it.

Q: What are your next steps and what are our options as a parent community? How can we engage to help mitigate these impacts?

A: Next steps in the process: we are at the doorstep of class registration for the next school year. The next step is to send a proposal that includes everything that has occurred in this process, including every piece of stakeholder feedback and the teacher vote. Central office will review everything and they may ask for more information. Then they will communicate their decision to the school community. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I will work with it to mitigate concerns.

What can parents do? Our conditions in the school and in the county are changing and I'd like parents to engage on what our creative solutions are. I shared 3 tonight that I have also shared with central office (ie. Additional staffing to help offset these impacts. Some afterschool activities to minimize the lost elective. Reevaluating requirements of the magnet program). Another parent shared that reexamining our afterschool activities is another way to work forward together. And if you are at budget meetings at the county level, advocate for more staffing for TPMS.

The community asks questions of Ms. Martin

Q: How much more staffing do we need if we want to keep the 6 of 8 schedule?

A: This is a system issue. The county staffs us for a 5 of 7 schedule, not the 8 period schedule we have been running. I estimate between 9-10 full time teaching positions would be needed to mitigate the enrollment increases and the schedule shift.

A parent adds: This is the time of year for budget hearings and our part of the county doesn't have a representative in these budget meetings. We need to be testifying to get on the record that we need more budget. Consider being part of this.

Q: What has changed since the last time the teachers voted on scheduling and chose to keep the 6 of 8 schedule?

A: Staff at TPMS has changed, student learning and mental health have been impacted due to COVID, COVID impacted staff as well. Budget cuts. Increasing school population.

Q: What more can parents do?

A: You can continue to advocate to MCPS, Board of Education, etc. ***NOTE: Ms. Martin followed up after this meeting to clarify that her intent was to say that the best way to advocate is to MCPS through the budget process. This is the most important way to channel your interests as all options flow through the budget***

Q: How will staffing change as a result of this (e.g., elective teachers)?

A: It's too soon to tell, but I'm not anticipating any drastic changes in our electives. We will need some teachers who currently teach an elective to teach additional content-based class (and therefore no longer teach the elective). This can be an opportunity for an after-school club.

Q: Who is the decision-maker here?

A: MCPS central office. They can accept the proposal, not accept it, or accept with changes or caveats.

Q: Have you looked at test scores in other schools doing 6 of 8 compared to other schools with 5 of 8 or 5 of 7 schedules?

A: We are the only middle school in the county with a 6 of 8 schedule.

Q: How will elective selection change?

A: Students will continue to rank their elective choices like they have been doing.

Q: Will we have an answer on the bell schedule before electives need to be chosen?

A: I don't know, but I have emphasized to MCPS that we start selecting electives at the end of January.

Q - *this question came in after the meeting had ended*: Has an effort been made to talk with ELD parents? Their voices should be heard as well.

A: We have provided opportunities for all to engage.

Question for the PTSA: Why can't these meetings be hybrid? It is hard for families to get here.

A: A hybrid meeting was very hard to manage with only two PTSA board members. Also, hybrid meetings seemed to have lower attendance than in-person. We also wanted to have an in person discussion on the bell schedule since all other meetings on the bell schedule to date had been virtual. We saw this as a way for deeper engagement. We are taking notes and will post them for those who could not attend. <<An added note for these minutes: if someone is willing to step up to run hybrid meetings, please contact us TPMS.PTA.president@gmail.com .>>

Meeting adjourned 8:42pm.