



Merrill PTA meeting minutes

Mon, Feb 15, 2021

7:00pm

Zoom online meeting

7 attendees:

Sarah W
Kate P

Holly KO
Sarah OM

Kristen E
Sara A

Kate E

Principal's Update – Mrs. Panek

Merrill staff and teachers have done incredible work implementing plans to **welcome students back SAFELY for 5-days-a-week, in-person instruction**. Approximately 53% of Merrill families opted for in-person and 47% are remaining fully virtual (compared to 65%/34% across all of DMPS). Every room/space is being used to maximize social distancing as much as possible, so standard-sized classrooms have 14-17 students each.

Happily, most teachers/staff who urgently wanted the **Covid vaccine shot** have already received their first dose (some are waiting to ensure highest-risk teachers get theirs first). Mrs. Panek appreciates the parents who have passed along leads for vaccinations.

The DMPS plan to **make up noncompliant school hours** was designed to keep things as seamless as possible while honoring teacher contract requirements. Here's how it impacts Merrill families:

- For in-person students: Merrill doors will open at 8:00am with guided study/teacher availability until 9:15am. While students can still get a lunch break away from screens, they will be offered "lunch lessons" for reading or moderated digital content discussions.
- For virtual students: teachers will be available as-needed via Teams for focused help/instructional time between 8:00am-9:15am
- With the exception of Spring Break (March 15-19), there are no days off until the last day of school (June 3).

Furnace/heat repairs are underway in Merrill's West wing. In the meantime, the approximately 12 classrooms impacted have been using space heaters and other temporary heating units.

[School pictures](#) are scheduled for March 11. Mrs. Swanda has stepped up to put together a [yearbook](#) commemorating an unforgettable 2020-21 school year.

Teachers added needed supplies to the [Merrill teachers' Amazon Wish List](#).

Recent PTA Accomplishments

- Raised \$250 from the Winter apparel sale
- Providing coffee & pastries to teachers/staff on Friday 2/19
- Updated the [Merrill teachers' Amazon Wish List](#)

PTA Discussion Highlights

1. *Could the **non-compliant make-up hours** include more emphasis on math skills?*

Mrs. Panek is flexible and appreciates all suggestions. Students/families should reach out to teachers as needed from 8:00-9:15am.

It was noted that teachers and classes were consistently available (virtually) throughout the non-compliant weeks this Fall. And of course, none of this is ideal for anyone – but the PTA commends Mrs. Panek and the Merrill teachers/staff for their efforts to keep instruction consistent, high-quality, and safe throughout the pandemic.

2. *How will Merrill be impacted by the DMPS leadership’s plan to **replace school resource officers (SROs)** with staff/community members trained in de-escalation and mitigation?*

Merrill shared an SRO with Brody middle school but the officer was usually located at a high school. Because the SRO was rarely onsite and rarely needed, this change will have minimal impact.

Per Mrs. Panek, it’s been very helpful to have a full-time Merrill school psychologist for the first time this year.

3. **Merrill yard signs** are being explored as a way to celebrate our community. In an effort to maximize participation, they may be offered for sale at cost.
4. Planning for **8th grade promotion** is underway but details are still TBD, based on whether in-person events will be feasible by May. PTA will partner with Merrill staff to create the slideshow video.
5. In an effort to support DMPS’s commitment to anti-racism, PTAs from TRHS feeder schools are considering **pooling PTA resourcing** to help make PTA funding and community-building more equitable. Will explore further.

PTA Events & Opportunities to help

Please continue to support teachers by:

- Staying in contact
- Providing feedback – they’re especially interested in improvements and new ideas
- Writing a positive note of encouragement

More ways to help:

- Consider purchasing needed supplies via the [Merrill teachers’ Amazon Wish List](#)
- Box Tops – [Download the mobile app](#) to scan receipts
- No volunteer opportunities at this time

PLEASE ADVOCATE FOR DMPS – This Iowa legislative session is off to an unsettling start with the Republican-controlled legislature pushing through multiple bills that hurt public schools. We urge parents and community members to CALL any/all [Senators](#) and [House Representatives](#) (especially Republican leaders).

As of 2/17/21, the controversial **SF269 school funding bill** was passed and is expected to be signed by the governor. SF269 allows for a paltry 2.4% increase in funding for the 2021-22 school year (vs the 4% minimum needed). This is dangerously insufficient, especially because kindergarten enrollment is expected to be much higher next year. In fact it’s so low, it triggers a budget guarantee – and much of the shortfall must be paid via an increase in property taxes for

DMPS and 136 other districts. However, property taxes cannot be used to help the \$7.4M decrease to preschools, so sadly, fewer kids will be able to attend next year. **Meaningful state funding matters every year, but especially now.**

Your voice matters. Please help advocate for DMPS families by calling Iowa Senators at **(515) 281-3371** and House Representatives at **(515) 281-3221** to urge them to support public schools:

Please [contact Senate Republicans](#) and urge them to:

- **Support equitable distribution of one-time Covid-related funding** – the proposed language distributes one-time funding in an inequitable way by penalizing DMPS, the state’s largest district, for starting the school year with virtual learning to protect our communities during a pandemic. The funding should be distributed across the state based on enrollment.

Please [contact the House Education Committee](#) (especially Republican members) and urge them to:

- **Vote NO on SF159** – this is the “school voucher bill” that moves public funding to charter school programs. Public funds are for public schools who are required to act with accountability and transparency for ANY/ALL students.
- **Vote NO on HF222** which bans the use of *The New York Times’* 1619 Project in public schools, universities, and community colleges.
- **Vote YES on HSB148** to provide more weighting/support to English language learners.
- **Vote NO on HF49** which ends tenure for professors at ISU, U of I, and UNI.

Please [contact the Senate Education Committee](#) (especially Republican members) and urge them to:

- **Vote NO on HF228** – this “open enrollment bill” eliminates voluntary diversity plans which can lead to school segregation (based on outcomes in other states where similar laws were enacted).
- **Vote NO on SF224** which prevents transgender students from accessing appropriate restrooms.

Thank you for your advocacy for DMPS and equitable, high-quality education at public schools. Follow these and other education bills at www.legis.iowa.gov/legislation or call the Legislative services agency at (515) 281-3566.

Also, consider attending the upcoming [CLAT Coffee with Legislators](#) at 9am on March 13.

Housekeeping

The next PTA meeting will be on Mon, March 22, at 7:00pm via Zoom.

The Merrill PTA generally meets on the third or fourth Monday of each month at 7pm. Upcoming 2020-21 schedule:

- Mar 22, 2021
- May 17, 2021

Merrill PTA Board 2020-21

- **President:** Sarah Witt
- **Treasurer:** Theresa Chivers
- **Secretary:** Holly Kilborn O’Neill

Merrill PTA Committee Members 2020-21

Communications: Kristen Erickson, Jessi Goodsell
Membership & Community Relations: Jessi Goodsell
Fundraising: TBD
Apparel: Jessi Goodsell, Sarah Witt

Teacher Appreciation: Katie Carlson, Shawna Boeding
Book Fairs: TBD
School Supply Kits: Kate Evans
Box Tops: TBD

Merrill Matters: TBD

Advocacy: Holly Kilborn O’Neall

Helping Hands: Julie Hahn, Tracy Beck, Sarah Osteroff Melton

All Merrill PTA meetings are open to families and community members interested in helping Merrill Middle School.

Contact Sarah Witt, PTA President, at [switt1509\(at\)gmail\(dot\)com](mailto:switt1509(at)gmail(dot)com)

Find more information at <https://merrillpta.wordpress.com/> including [PTA meeting archives](#)

Connect with us at <https://www.facebook.com/merrillpta/>

Visit [Mrs. Panek’s “Merrill Minute” newsletter archive](#)