

**Notes from PCM town Hall  
January 31, 2024**

*The following are notes and common themes captured during the town hall. The meeting stayed on time, on task, was respectful and productive.*

2/6//2024

Dear Families,

Thank you to the more than 60 parents and community members who attended our Town Hall last Wednesday. We are reaching out to share an update for all families, including those who were unable to attend. This recap is a collaboration between Bev Wolff, current board chair, and two parent volunteers, Heather Hamilton and Shannon Rusca.

After welcomes, at the top of the meeting, Laylah Bewick, Head of School, Emily Klein, Director of Special Services, and Bev Wolff, current chair of the board, shared information regarding recent concerns. Here is a summary of what was shared:

**Student Safety**

Laylah Bewick addressed concerns raised around student safety, specifically having to do with bathroom availability, bathroom protocol, and exposed pipes.

All classrooms with the exception of the Older Elementary classroom have a bathroom inside the classroom. When students need to use the restroom en masse, they use the public restroom on the floor where their classrooms are located. A PCM staff member monitors this to ensure the bathroom is clear and that students enter and come back safely.

Older Elementary (OE grades 3-5) have a different protocol since OE does not currently have a bathroom inside the classroom. A bathroom will be put in this summer. These students use a single use bathroom with a security code located on the first floor. Current protocol for OE classroom: Students go in doubles and must sign out on the bathroom sign out sheet and take the hall pass with them. The next group can't leave until the hall pass comes back. There are cameras in the hallways that monitor all public bathroom entrances.

Hot Pipe Issue: We moved the OE class into room 102 after winter break. The fire marshal and building inspector checked the room to provide occupancy certification and the pipes did not flag as a concern. As a precaution, the furniture was arranged to limit access to these pipes. On 1/17/2024 the HOS was notified by the OE teacher that the three pipes in the classroom were hot and that a student had touched one. The child was examined with no treatment necessary. Signs were used in the classroom and the class was made aware of the hot pipes and not to touch them. Gladish was contacted immediately and requested to wrap the pipes. Pipes were wrapped by a contractor.

**Special Education Services**

Emily Klein shared that PCM is dedicated to ensuring all students with disabilities receive a Free and Appropriate Public Education as required by law. In that vein, PCM adheres to each of its students with disabilities' Individual Education Program (IEP) and/or Section 504 Plan. The school provides the level of support and accommodations set forth for each of its students with disabilities in accordance with such plans.

Currently there are no students with IEPs requiring a 1:1 staff-to-student ratio. As PCM is a full inclusion model, push-in-support is provided rather than students being pulled out of the classroom to receive services. Push-in support is provided by the SPED-Classroom team to ensure service minutes are met and SPED-Classroom Team collaboration takes place weekly to address needs and concerns.

**Accountability and Oversight - addressing the petition**

Bev Wolff, current chair of the board, acknowledged receipt of the petition signed by 30 + individuals, and shared that the petition will be addressed by the full board at an upcoming board meeting. Following school protocol of addressing performance evaluations of personnel in executive sessions, the performance of the Head of School will be assessed during an executive session of the board at our next board meeting. No action will be taken during the executive session. Returning to the regular session following the executive session, a summary of discussion will be presented and any action to be taken will be voted on during the regular session.

Bev shared that as a public school and a nonprofit board, PCM must follow strict laws regarding student privacy, personnel, and nonprofit governance. The board's work in providing oversight and accountability to PCM is in turn held to a high level of oversight by the Washington Charter School Commission, our school's authorizer. Jess Saven Barton, Director of School Quality and Accountability with the Washington Charter School Commission attended the Town Hall as an observer, and was on site at PCM the day following the Town Hall to observe and check on the safety issues mentioned above.

**After the overview, summarized above, the team fielded a number of key questions regarding safety, special education, and school operations, and heard from parents.**

**You can read a summary of the Q and A from the Town Hall below.**

### **Special Education/Student Behaviors**

- A former PCM classroom aide spoke to the lack of staffing to adequately address student needs. They said that full inclusion should be reexamined. This aide shared that these conditions at PCM directly impacted his decision to not accept employment after their trial period.
- Multiple parents spoke of ongoing concerning behaviors that don't seem to get addressed to their satisfaction. (aggression, physical and psychological bullying).
- Emily, Director of Special Services, spoke of support in place for students and staffing in classrooms.
- The Head of School, spoke to the Child Find process and how they handle ongoing disruptive behaviors.
- One parent recounted a situation where they brought a bullying situation to the attention of the classroom teacher and were pleased with the ultimate outcome of the situation, but acknowledged if this many people have concerns it must be a prevalent issue at PCM.

### **Transparency/Accountability**

- Multiple people expressed that their concerns previously brought before the School Board and to the Head of School were being dismissed or brushed under the rug.
- Several people used the phrase “gaslighting” to describe communications from the Head of School and the School Board, as well as to describe what was presented to the community during the Town Hall Meeting.
- Four parents presented a coordinated message and acknowledged they were speaking on behalf of 30+ families to express that the petition and this joint statement represents significant disquiet and discontent. Some of the concerns they shared include transparency/accountability of the PCM Head of School and the PCM School Board, student safety, concerns of high staff turnover (this was mentioned several other times), and school finances/viability. This group of parents proposed that we schedule a series of follow-up meetings to continue this dialogue, that needs to include an agreed upon format to facilitate open communication and understanding on both sides. The parent, Bev Wolff (board chair) and Laylah Bewick (Head of School) made personal pledges to make this happen.
- Several people also asked about parent/student voice and wondered about a parent group to help partner with the school to work on these issues.
- Laylah and Bev committed to working with this newly forming parent group. They both mentioned that they have asked parents in the past to join with little success. It seems there is now quite a bit of interest in getting this going. Amber Panwitz offered to co-chair the group with Karin Biggs. PCM SCC (Support and Coordination Council) will have their first meeting on Thursday February 8, 5:30 PM - 6:30 PM in Room 205.

### **School Finances/Viability**

- Many parents expressed concern about losing enrollment and the school not being viable. They asked how low the enrollment would have to be before the school would close. Laylah didn't have an exact number for them on this but committed to providing this number and updated financial information by the next board meeting. She expressed that the school is financially stable through the end of this school year.
- Laylah told families that if finances warrant it adjustments to the model or other operational aspects would be considered, but they are committed to keeping the community informed and involved in the process of changes.
- The parents want more transparency about the financial situation of the school and Bev informed them that the information is always available to all via the board reports that can be accessed by the public portal on the school's website. Financials are reviewed monthly at finance meetings and board meetings, which are open to the public.

### **Additional Notes**

- One student in the older elementary class spoke of their classroom not being fully ready for them when they moved in January 2024, safety concerns, ongoing bullying, and bathroom security, including a man entering the bathroom that students were using while they were unaccompanied by PCM staff. The student shared that she believed that security cameras are not monitored at all times and that anyone from the public can be in the building or use the bathrooms at any time.
- Safety issues came up – how do parents raise the issue and escalate the complaint if their child is hurt or bullied, building concerns, bathrooms built in OE classroom over summer.
- Founding board chair John Cassleman said he has years of letters/complaints about the leadership and school operations. He told the parents that the school finances are dire. He invited people to contact him.
- Several times the topic of staff turnover (and mid-year dismissals) came up. Post-it notes mentioned the need to hear the staff voice, and ask, “What supports do the staff need? How can we make that happen?”
- Post-it notes were provided for additional comments during the meeting. If parents wanted to receive a response, they could leave contact info, and a board member or admin would respond.
- A parent wanted to know what mechanisms are in place to support the Head of School – in post-it note
- Several parents voiced that they very much want to partner with the school leadership and want the school to remain viable and a healthy place for all. There seemed to be genuine interest in digging in to make things better. Several people mentioned that Pullman needs this school. This was echoed in post-it notes.
- Responses were also received outside of the meeting via email, as this was suggested as another way to make your voice heard. The drafters of this recap are thinking of the best way to share these responses, too, at a later date.
- Staff were applauded for all their hard work and appreciation for attending the meeting.

- Additional town hall meetings were requested for the near future, as a way to hear parents' voices and build community, towards needed changes. A date for the next town hall meeting will be sent out as soon as possible.

Apologies for getting this recap out to you a day later than expected. The work took longer than anticipated, and we erred on the side of thoughtful and thorough, rather than rushed.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Hamilton, Shannon Rusca and Bev Wolff

Parent volunteers and board chair

This document will be included in the board packet materials for the February board meeting for discussion and next steps.