

**Mark Twain Middle School PTA General Membership Meeting Tuesday, April 27, 2021**

**Virtual Platform: Zoom**

President, Cori Bitterman, called the meeting to order at 7:03 P.M. A quorum was established (11 PTA members in attendance).

**Attendees:** Cori Bitterman, Nicol Lee, Chris Reese, Tali Burress, Samantha Mulvaney, Shelby Workman, Chuck Miller, Lisa Staresina, Mollee Hansen, Jacqui Mckinney, Karl Tamai

Maria Miller, Alfred and Abena Hewton, Corea Smith.

*(Sign in sheet via SurveyMonkey was completed by the above respondents; however, Zoom participation numbers showed 17 attendees/devices).*

PRESIDENT, Cori Bitterman:

Motion to approve the minutes from the March meeting. The minutes were approved. Passed with 16 votes.

GUEST SPEAKER, Paul Rivas

Paul Rivas is the author of [*This Book Will Not Be on the Test*](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/1475845596/ref%3Ddbs_a_def_rwt_hsch_vapi_taft_p1_i0) and the founder of [SMITH RIVAS](http://smithrivas.com/) [Study Skills & Academic Coaching](http://smithrivas.com/). He's personally taught study skills to students from 130 schools in the DC area, and his online course [*Better Grades in Less Time*](https://smithrivasonlinecourses.com/) is appropriate for students in middle school all the way through grad school.

Teaching people how to learn their stuff. Everybody is at the right school for them and teachers bend over backwards to give good grades. Teachers want students to get A’s. Students need to prioritize to learn their stuff and make it easy for the teachers to give them the grade they want to give. Study skill system is based on Mr. Rivas’s experiences and available on Amazon.

Planners should go from Monday to Sunday. The week does not start on Sunday when you are a student. All calendars should go from Monday to Sunday so weekend is at the end of the week and they can see a block of time. Need to review at the weekend. Students are at their smartest on Saturday and Sunday morning when they are well rested and have not been at school all day. Secret of learning efficiently is to review each subject every weekend. Identity what will be on the test and write it on a study guide of your own design and learn it.

Use quarter calendar. Biggest assignment is second to last week and test is every 1 to 3 weeks. 9/10 week calendar to rule them all. Tests, quizzes, essays, competitions, trips, holidays, school events, etc. should be tracked on the big calendar. Write what is coming up and afterwards, write what your score was for the test. Write review on the weekend and keep track of what subjects you review on the weekend.

Think a half step ahead. If kid has B+ and wants an A, the only want to get there is to review, create study guide, and quiz themselves. Tutoring is only as effective as the kids’ study skills. Need to learn how to learn on their own. Tutoring should follow study skills as should ACT and SAT prep.

Weekly schedule- every kid has small number of hours each day when they do not have somewhere to be and their brains are working well. Online school takes less time so even the busiest students have time. Kids need sufficient sleep. Plan the best time for each activity that is 15 minutes or more. Chores, sports, music, arts/crafts, playing, church, reading, hanging out with friends, etc. Homework is last because it is moveable. Every kid wakes up smart and lose brain power all day long (why everything after dinner is painful). Need to get schoolwork done as early in the day as possible. Try to avoid after dinner homework. Start work as soon as possible after school snack and start with the hard stuff. After dinner should be for fun stuff.

Weekends are for review. An hour after waking up on the weekend, they should be doing 5 and 30 minutes per class of review. Quizzing yourself is covering up portions and see if you can remember the corresponding pieces.

Cure for procrastination. Anything that has to be done needs to be listed and take a guess for how long it’ll take. Take 30 seconds to work out why it took you longer or less time than you thought. Some things will take longer than you’d expected (such as errands with parents). Need to get good at estimating how long things will take. Can print from the website, sign up for a course, videos on study skills, and sign up for study skills emails.

[www.SmithRivas.com/motivation](http://www.smithrivas.com/motivation) and [www.SmithRivasOnlineCourses.com](http://www.smithrivasonlinecourses.com/) Sign up for email distribution list:

[https://smithrivas.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=70bbc21a02563f466ad4690cd&id=aed19f](https://smithrivas.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=70bbc21a02563f466ad4690cd&id=aed19fc5d6) [c5d6](https://smithrivas.us18.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=70bbc21a02563f466ad4690cd&id=aed19fc5d6)

Attendees were encouraged to submit questions in the chat.

*Q: How do you keep virtual students accountable to time reporting and what would you recommend is the appropriate level of parental involvement?*

A: Parents can help as much as the kids want to be helped and then help as much as you think your family finances warrant. For example, if you have $0 for college, need a scholarship and need As. If the college is paid for and the kid knows what they want and getting into college is not a problem then maybe there are more important things than grades. Parents sometimes ask, when do I start letting my kid fail and the answer is when you can afford it.

*Q: Do you have a recommendation if a child has a subject they feel lost in or overwhelmed by?* A: If there’s a subject the kid feels lost, first make sure the kid knows how to learn. Make them stick to it for a few weeks. If still struggling, can look into a tutor for subjects such as math, reading, writing, chemistry or physics. Kids needs to be able to make good use of the tutor. No reason why students should not be getting straight A’s. It is actually less stressful to have a whole bunch of A’s than some A’s and some B’s. A- can easily slip into B+.

*Q: How do you handle perfectionist kids who are not happy unless it is an A?*

A: Grades are arbitrary and inconsistent. Grades might get you scholarship money but it doesn’t mean you learn anything- you can get A in Spanish or French but not be able to speak it. Make it about mastery of the material and learning. Grades is about keeping teachers happy and predicting what the teachers want. You pay rent with skills and knowledge, not grades. It might take 2 hours or 6 hours but once you learn it, you get to use it forever. 11th grade is the busiest year of any Americans’ life.

Kids learn more from meaningful feedback. Keep trying to do things better.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT, Mr. Miller:

School is teaching executive functioning skills for kids (time management, take notes, soft skills, etc.) to be successful. As parents we struggle to find the right tool that will work for our kid. One child might repeatedly lose their agenda and that tool does not work for him but electronic calendar might be fantastic tool. Another one might color code their agenda and it is a great tool for her.

Spirit Week kicked off today. Today was dress up as a tourist and tomorrow is dress up as a rock star, actor, or musician. Kids are taking ownership and coming together- they developed a Kahoot game.

Staff Appreciation Week is coming up and Mr. Miller thanks the community for the support. It is going to be great and Mr. Miller is looking forward to it.

Now have over 400 students coming in 4 days a week. Looks a little different to have 100 kids in cafeteria instead of 30. Feels more normal. 478 students were invited to come 4x week and parents had option to accept or opt out and stay 2x week or go virtual. About a dozen chose to stay virtual and about 60 who wanted to do 2x week in person and 2x virtual.

A lot of May is taken up with testing. In a normal year, all the kids are in the building and the school sets it up with as few disruptions as possible. This year, the school has four different sets of kids who have to be scheduled (those who are virtual, those in attendance on Tuesday/Wednesday, those in attendance on Thursday/Friday, and those who are in attendance 4x week). There will be 4 periods that are asynchronous if they are not testing.

May 3- first SOL test- reading test for 7th and 8th grade virtual students. May 10- 8th grade virtual students taking science exams.

May 11- 7th and 8th grade reading SOL 4x week students

May 12- 8th grade science test in the morning (no SOL for 7th graders that day) May 13- Reading test for Thursday-Friday students

May 14- Science test for Thursday-Friday students

Whether the kids are virtual or in person, they will for the most part follow their regular schedule. School will send out communication and teachers will speak to the students.

*Q: Will 7th graders have an opportunity to see the school?*

A: Typically there is an orientation day in August. There will be two sessions- one for 7th grade and one for 8th grade so they can be in the building before school starts.

*Q: How many people typically attend PTA?*

A: Recommend to the incoming board to stream the meetings as attendance has increased. The exception to that was the guest who presented in a live meeting about vaping. It was a timely topic that parents were really interested in.

TREASURER REPORT, Chris Reese:

*The links were placed in the chat so attendees could view the files in the dropbox.*

We have little over $13,000 in the bank due to the spirit nights Teacher appreciation gift cards $1,200 to date.

Reminder- MemberHub is a central place to make a donation to the PTA or buy gift cards for personal use. The PTA receives a couple dollars from each gift card sold.

MemberHubplatform: <https://mtms.new.memberhub.store/>

SpiritWear, ongoing sales and discounts: <https://1stplacespiritwear.com/partner/97166>

NEW BUSINESS:

**Nomination committee to find new PTA Board for next school year-** vote was put forth for Samantha Mulvaney, Jonathan Heisey-Grove and Tali Burress. Confirmed and approved with 12 votes.

**Teacher Appreciation Week-** getting ramped up. Thank you for the donations on the MemberHub link for the gift cards. Tomorrow is the last day to donate through the MemberHub website so that the PTA can purchase the gift cards. On Wednesday and Thursday morning, two committee members will be at the drop off line at school to collect food items that people have signed up for on the Sign Up Genius. Teachers are being provided lunch as a thank you.

**8th Grade Soiree Red Carpet Event-** June 4th from 6 to 8:30 PM. Sign Up Genius will be going out to ask for donations for gift bags or food items. Dress in their finest red carpet dress with parent paparazzi taking photos. This is an alternative to a dance. There are approximately 520 8th graders. Swag bag gifts with high school survival kit. PTA will put together list of items that we would like to put in there. Please stay tuned and the PTA will appreciate any help.

Current plan- students enter through cafeteria with some activities there. They can have 30 minutes in there. They’ll work their way to the front door. There will be a red carpet with parent paparazzi. They’ll receive a swag bag. It’ll be a walk through for their last hurrah. One idea is having them write thank you to teachers and writing words of wisdom to the incoming 7th graders or rising 8th graders. Other ideas are welcome. Thank you to those who have already volunteered to help.

**Staff member of the month-** Mr. Garfield Levine, orchestra teacher. He came up with innovative ideas and started a Monday Orchestra Club which started yesterday.

**Spirit Night-** May is at La Fiamma on Franconia Road (used to be Paradiso), across the road from the government center. Seating is available indoors, outdoors, and carry out. May 11th (second Tuesday of the month). June is back at Chipotle as it was popular and provided a

generous earning. Mark your calendar for June 8th. These will be the last two spirit nights of the year. Even with covid, there has been good support from families for the spirit nights.

**Next Meeting:**

Tuesday, May 25, 7:00 PM virtual.

June: Nomination committee will need to get new PTA board voted on and details will be released.

**Meeting is adjourned at 8:10 PM.**