

George C. Marshall PTSA Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2020

Members Present: Carolyn Keehan (President), Althea Benjamin (VP), Maria Robles (Treasurer), Elizabeth Keegan (Secretary), Jeff Litz (Principal) -- via Zoom

1. Guest Speakers: Katie Purkert, GCM school social worker, and Amy Stark, GCM school psychologist, spoke to the PTSA about "Suicide and Youth." The CDC reports a 31% increase in mental health visits to the ER this year. Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for teens: 4 times as many males commit suicide but 3 times as many females attempt it. Warning signs include previous suicide attempt, death/illness of someone close, divorce, broken relationship, family stress, loss of job/home/money/self-esteem/personal security, alcohol and drug abuse. Behavioral changes associated with suicide include overwhelming sadness, feelings of hopelessness and loneliness, irritability, more restless or slowed down, withdrawal from family and friends, alterations in sleeping or eating habits. Suicidal behaviors include explicit statements or suicidal thoughts, preoccupation with thoughts of death, writing/drawing with morbid themes, negative self-comments, risk-taking and reckless behaviors, inappropriately saying goodbye, making a will/giving away possessions, and self-inflicted injuries. The staff emphasized a change in behavior is the strongest indicator, when you realize that something seems off. What to do if you notice any of these? The next steps would be to connect with your child in an open-minded, non-judgmental manner. Encourage them to share their feelings and assure them "you'll walk this with them." Ask them about having suicidal thoughts – most kids tend to be honest about suicidality. Make sure your child is supervised at ALL times. Remove access to any lethal means, including guns and medications. Even over-the-counter meds such as Tylenol and Benadryl can be lethal. Arrange for immediate evaluation by a mental health professional. Teachers and staff will notify parents/caregivers if they detect concerning behaviors at school. Cindy Blakely was asked how Marshall kids are doing overall, from a mental health standpoint. She said that they are generally seeing most of the same issues they'd see if kids were in school, that it's hard to know if there is an increase in mental health issues and that they may not know until kids are fully back in in the building. They have seen an increase in club participation this year, which has been one positive outcome of virtual learning.

Available Resources:

Call an emergency mental health center: 703-573-5679 (Fairfax/Falls Church), 703-536-2000 (Dominion Hospital), 703-289-7560 (INOVA emergency services), call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, call 1-800-273-TALK or text NEEDHELP to 85511 for the Crisis Link Hotline.

2. President's Report: Minutes from the October meeting were approved. They are posted on the PTSA website. International Night may be held in February, likely as a video compilation of individual performances. In January we will ask teachers for their Wish Lists. There is one SAT bootcamp left this year. The Marshall Market distributed food packages for the Thanksgiving holiday weekend. Our next meeting in January will include a discussion of kids and technology.

3. Budget: We've incurred few expenses so far this year. We received \$3800 in contributions, \$6100 from dues, and \$1850 from the SAT courses. The full budget is posted on the PTSA website.

4. Principal's Report: Mr. Litz reported that a student tested positive for Covid. They were alerted on Monday and it was determined that the student had not been in the building for 11-12 days. Marshall will continue with their mitigation efforts (temperature checks, sanitizing, etc.) and Mr. Litz will continue to be transparent about the process. The county is training personnel to audit schools' mitigation efforts. First quarter grades are in. There were more A's compared with last year, but also a significant increase in Ds and Fs. This is consistent with what is being seen throughout the county. Counselors are working with students and families to intervene. Marshall will have a couple of "catch up" days to help students with outstanding work. IB exams will take place this year. Faculty continue to evaluate (and adjust) student workloads. Regarding return to school plans, Fairfax is currently in the "red" zone for Covid cases with 7.4% positivity rate. No new cohorts will be brought in at this time, and everyone may go fully virtual if numbers remain high. That decision is made by the county leadership and not the individual schools. Marshall will continue to prepare for the return of students on January 6, in case it does happen. A question was asked whether teachers feel behind this year. Mr. Litz said they will not be covering as much content this year, which is intentional. The requirements for the IB exams have also been decreased. Cindy Blakely asked the PTSA to begin a program whereby students can nominate teachers for a "High Five" for their efforts. Those nominated would then be eligible to win a prize.

5. Committee Reports: None

Upcoming PTSA Meeting Dates: Jan 27, Feb 17, Mar 17, April 21, May 19