

The Swanson Anchor

April 2014



From the Principal's Desk

“Why should we commit to learning for all?”

- Students who fail school are three times more likely to be unemployed. (Breslow, 2012).
- These students are more likely to live in poverty (earn an annual salary of \$20,241 or less). (Breslow, 2012).
- Female high school dropouts will live an average of 10.5 fewer years than females who graduate from high school. Male dropouts will live an average of 13 fewer years than males who graduate from high school. And the gap for both sexes is widening. (Tavernise, 2012)
- On average, each high school dropout costs taxpayers \$292,000 over his or her lifetime. (Breslow, 2012).”

-DuFour and DuFour, 2014

While these statistics speak largely to the experiences of high school dropouts, research shows that indicators as early as preschool point to a child's readiness to learn. By the time students reach 4th grade, their reading scores will "...correlate closely with high levels of school engagement and success in other subjects such as social studies and science. Children who do not read well by the end of 3rd grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers." In 8th grade, students' "Math and

From the PTA

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April is upon us, marking the last 12 weeks of school, Spring Break and planning for the next school year. With that in mind, the Swanson PTA needs your support as we seek new officers and chairpersons for the 2014-15 school year. If you can share your time and talents through PTA board service, or know of a person who will be new to Swanson next year who would be a good candidate, please email me at 3jernigans@verizon.net. There's much to be done, and we need fresh ideas to join a solid PTA team! A list of open officer and chair positions follow:

President	Educational Grants	Science Fair Dinner
Vice President	First-Day Packets	Social Activities
Secretary	Grocery Receipts	Spirit Sales
8th Gr. Promotion Dance Party	In-Service Breakfasts	Sports Banquets
8th Gr. Promotion Reception	Nominating Comm.	Staff Appreciation
Anchor Editor	Odyssey of the Mind	Teacher Lounge Restock.
Anchor Distribution	Reflections	Volunteer Coordinator
Community Service	Science Fair	Welcome Reception
County Council PTA Liaison		

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April 2014

April

3	School Board Meeting 7:30 pm
8	PTA Meeting 7:00 pm
9	Report Cards Issues
14-18	Spring Break: No class for Students
23	Spring picture Day
23	National History Bee Regional Final 5:00 - 8:00pm
24	School Board Meeting 7:30 pm

PTA Board

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From the Principal's Desk *(Continued from page 1)*

science skills are important not only for preparing students for an increasingly technological workplace – they also develop their ability to solve problems and make decisions. These scores are associated with both higher probabilities of graduation and greater future earnings.” (<http://www.americaspromise.org/grad-nation-indicators>)

These facts and many others have driven the faculty and staff at Swanson to reexamine how best to engage our students in learning to ensure that they are prepared to live productive, meaningful lives once they graduate from high school. In August, we began the process of becoming a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Our teachers and counselors meet weekly as Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT's) to engage in the process of collective inquiry and action research with the focus on achieving better results for the students they serve. CLTs make instructional decisions based on the following questions:

- What do we expect our students to learn?
- How will we know when they have learned it?
- How will we respond when they don't learn?
- How will we respond when they already know it?

Working with their CLT colleagues, teachers have developed and facilitated common assessments to better determine whether students have learned key concepts and skills. They use the results to make decisions about necessary interventions and enrichment activities. They then implement these strategies and the learning cycle begins anew.

While we are still in the learning stage of our work as a PLC, we are finding that, by working collaboratively, we have been able to unpack areas of concern that before may have gone undetected by individual teachers. We are also able to more immediately and effectively support students who show a need for intervention as well as challenge students who demonstrate that they have already mastered these concepts. In short, our students have been better served by our willingness to work with one another to support them.

We will continue our evolution as a PLC in coming school years with the goal of becoming what Likona and Davidson define as a great school, “Great schools row as one; they are quite clearly in the same boat pulling in the same direction in unison. The best schools we visited were tightly aligned communities marked by a palpable sense of ‘we.’” (2005)

— *Bridget Loft, Principal*

From the PTA *(Continued from page 1)*

Please give serious consideration to supporting the Swanson community by volunteering for one of these positions – there are both large and small PTA tasks that require parental support, and the PTA is a great way to stay connected to your children during the middle school years. Information on our Swanson committees include:

8th Grade Promotion Reception: This committee plans and puts on a reception for the 8th grade students and parents immediately following the 8th grade promotion, typically held on the second to last day of school.

8th Grade Promotion Party: This Committee plans and put on a party for the 8th grade class. The dance is usually held during the last week of school at Swanson.

Advisory Council on Instruction (ACI): Swanson has two representatives on the APS Advisory Council on Instruction. They attend monthly ACI meetings and report back to the PTA on issues of interest.

The Anchor: This committee produces the PTA newsletter. The newsletter is produced monthly.

Book Fair: The Spring Book Fair is held at the school and coordinated with the reading teacher.

Community Service: This committee works with the Activities Coordinator when community service opportunities arise, such as making sandwiches for the homeless or other relief efforts.

County Council of PTAs (CCPTA) Liaison: Swanson has a representative at the monthly CCPTA meetings. They report back to the PTA on matters of interest.

Directory: This committee produces the Swanson student/parent directory in the fall.

Educational Grants: This committee distributes grants applications to teachers in early September; reviews submitted applications in October; provides recommendations for proposals to fund; and notifies teachers of awards in November.

Family Network: This committee coordinates two to three Family Network programs for the Swanson community. They work with a larger group to publicize programs.

First-Day Packets: This committee coordinates the production of the First Day Packets with the school secretary and PTA. Over 800 packets need stuffing prior to the first day of school.

Fundraising Chair: This committee helps promote and publicize our Dollars for Scholars fundraiser as well as assisting in other fundraising activities.

Grocery Receipts: This committee publicizes Swanson's participation in the grocery receipts program. They collect and enter grocery card information from forms filled out in the First Day Packets.

In-Service Breakfasts: This committee coordinates breakfast for the teachers during each teacher In Service days, typically three a year.

Keep Swanson Beautiful: This committee coordinates grounds cleanup efforts around the school twice a year.

Odyssey of the Mind: This committee coordinates participation in this international education program that provides creative problem-solving opportunities for students.

Reflections Contest: This committee coordinates Swanson's participation in the PTA sponsored Reflections Contest, which includes distributing information to students about the theme and rules; arranging the judges; collecting and distributing the entries to the judges; planning the awards ceremony; lining up the awards; and submitting Swanson's winning entries to the county competition.

Science Fair: This committee works with Swanson Science teachers to plan the annual Science Fair.

Science Fair Dinner: This committee arranges dinner for the Science Fair judges, funded through PTA dollars.

Spirit Sales: This committee creates and sells various items with the Swanson name and logo on them.

Sports Banquets: This committee coordinates the fall and spring Sports Banquets with the Activities Coordinator.

Swanson Listserve: The chair manages the various Swanson listserves.

Staff Appreciation: This committee plans fun events and treats for the teachers during Staff Appreciation Week, which is the first week in May.

Teacher Lounge Restocking: This committee purchases supplies, such as popcorn, hot chocolate, and soups for the teacher lounges.

PLEASE NOTE: if we do not have volunteers for these tasks, these programs will not be included in our planning for upcoming school year activities. It really is up to us as parents to make it happen.

We'll hold our next PTA meeting Tuesday, April 8, in the Swanson library at 7 PM. Swanson Assistant Principal Scott McKeown will speak on academic planning. In the interim, please consider chairing a committee – it is vital to our ability to support our children, our teachers and our school during the next few months and in the coming school year.

— Julie R. Jernigan, 2013–14 Swanson PTA President

2014 Spring Conference Reflections

On March 6 and 7, Swanson held our spring session of student-led conferences.

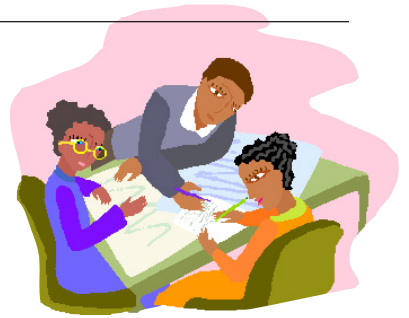
The halls were bustling with students and parents as conversations were had regarding students' academic progress, current perceptions about school, and their transition

to the next grade level or high school next year! During this conference session, some teachers offered drop-in session times, in addition to holding student-led conferences, to provide parents an opportunity to briefly chat about questions or concerns.

We invited parents to provide feedback after their conference. This feedback is invaluable as we work to enhance the student-led conference experience. We heard from 147 parents; below is a sample of what they had to say.

How was the student-led conference beneficial to you?

- Getting organized feedback from both our students and the teacher is very helpful in supporting our students' success at Swanson
- Enjoyed having my son reflect on his school year.
- Not too much. Would prefer to sit down with teacher and honestly assess student performance.
- Very helpful to hear my son focus on what his strengths and weaknesses are and to interact with the STAR teacher who is engaged and helpful.
- It wasn't really. Bring back the arena conferences with the teachers.
- It was nice meeting with the teacher and my daughter at the same time.



- It was good for my child to be in a position of leading a meeting and providing insight into her strengths and challenges.
- Good. Nicely organized.

Did you participate in drop-in sessions with any of the following teachers?

- Did not meet with a teacher: 93.9%

Do you have any suggestions for improvement or other comments?

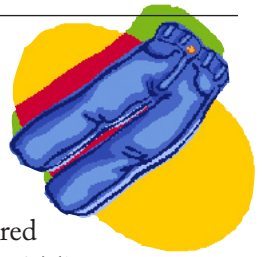
- Maybe use the time to have the student prepare and give/role play a persuasive summary of their accomplishments – this would be taking self-advocacy to the next level, as practice for the occasions when they will have to use an interview to “sell” themselves.
- Have parents bring in gifts for the teachers!
- Would like the STAR teacher or student to have comments from classroom teachers rather than everything from my student, as my child and I already communicate well about school.
- It works the way it is structured. Student led is great,
- I do not have any suggestions for improvements. I think all went very well, and I was impressed with the entire process.
- Thank you for inviting the parents to the school.
- I preferred the way Swanson used to hold conferences, where teachers were set up in the lunchroom and you could go and meet with the teacher or teachers of choice.
- No. But would validate the approach of having the student run the meeting. It’s an important skill to begin to get comfortable with.
- No comments. Thanks for your good work at Swanson.
- I’d like to hear more specific feedback from teachers.
- We did not know about the drop-in option. The current format makes it more difficult to know other teachers.

We thank the Swanson community for their time and support of the student-led conference process!

—Renee Harber, Assistant Principal

Dress Code Tips

As the warm weather approaches, it’s a good time to review appropriate dress for school. While most Swanson students dress and behave in a respectful manner, it is important to remember that any clothing considered inappropriate or disruptive is not allowed. This includes hats, tops that expose undergarments, spaghetti strap tops, halter or short crop tops and any clothing that suggests or advertises alcohol, smoking, drugs, inappropriate behavior, language or innuendoes. **Backpacks and tote bags** of any kind are not allowed in classrooms.



Here is a list of guidelines to clarify the rules for parents and students:

- Avoid clothing, including shorts and skirts, that is too tight, revealing or too baggy.
- Skirts should be longer than where students’ fingertips fall to their thighs when standing and can fully cover the rear of the individual.
- While girls may wear leggings under their shorts, the shorts should still be longer than where students’ fingertips fall to their thighs when standing.
- Avoid tops that expose too much skin.
- Boxer shorts or undergarments should not be visible.
- Bra or spaghetti straps should not be exposed.
- Midriffs should not be exposed at any time while standing or sitting.
- Hats or bandanas are not to be worn inside the school building.

Teachers and administrators will continue to remind students that they are not permitted to wear hats and coats in school. In addition, backpacks and tote bags are to be stored in lockers and not carried from class to class. Thanks for your support!

—Shannan Ellis, Renee Harber and Scott McKeown,
Assistant Principals

Keeping Swanson Safe and Secure

Now that spring is finally here, our students will be outdoors more often and even more exciting activities will take place here at Swanson. Hopefully we'll be seeing even more parents and families in the building. With all of that excitement in the air, please help us keep Swanson a safe place by remembering a few basic guidelines.

When visiting Swanson:

- Make use of the main entrance (or the cafeteria door when picking up students from Check-In). This helps us keep track of any visitors to the building.
- We ask that teachers, students, families and our visitors never prop open exterior doors. This poses a security risk and could allow unauthorized people access to Swanson.
- Report any suspicious individuals to the front office staff. We welcome our families and community members in the building and we all want to do our part to keep any suspicious behavior out.
- Do not park in reserved spaces.

Outside of Swanson, you can help us keep our Swanson students safe by:

- Keeping tabs on student behavior when they are walking to or from school or the bus stop. With the onset of warmer weather, students tend to want to be outside longer, so be aware of the areas where your child is most likely to socialize with friends.
- Knowing your child's friends and their parents.
- Being aware of your child's use of social media and texting. Know which sites they use and who their online "friends" are.

Thanks to everyone for helping us. As always if you have any questions or concerns about the safety and security of your child, do not hesitate to contact a Swanson administrator or our School Resource Officer.

—Scott McKeown, Assistant Principal

Special Education Corner

Special Education Cycle



The Eligibility Process for Your Child to Become Eligible to Receive Special Education Services

“Before your child can become eligible to receive special education services, the school is required by law to determine your child's specific needs. The school determines these needs through a process consisting of many steps, often termed the “Special Education Cycle.” When viewed as an ongoing cycle with several steps along the way, the special education process is easier to understand.”

The first step of the cycle: Referral to Student Study

What — Referral to a Student Study Committee (SSC) is made to the principal of a child's school by anyone (including parent, teacher, friend, etc.) who has concerns about a child's learning or feels that a child may have special learning needs. In some cases, referral is made to a Special Education Coordinator (in the case of preschool age children or private school enrollees).

How — Complete a form called “Referral to a Student Study Committee.” This form is available in every school office and at the Arlington Public Schools Education Center located at 1426 North Quincy Street, Arlington, Virginia 22207. Certain information is required in writing.

PLEASE, If you have concerns about your child's learning, remember to contact your child's teacher and/or the principal first. They can work with you to decide whether your child should be referred to the SSC.

When — Anytime.

What happens next — Once school personnel receive a completed written referral, they have 10 administrative working days to convene the SSC, which you are invited to participate in.

Documents I should keep — A copy of the “Referral to a Student Study Committee.”

Please look for highlights of topics related to special education services in future issues. You can also view this information on the APS Special Education website: <http://www.apsva.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=2865>

—Shannan Ellis, Assistant Principal

SOL News

Swanson's 8th grade students took the Writing Standards of Learning (SOL) on March 27 and 28. All Swanson students will take the non-Writing Virginia SOLs from May 27 through June 12.

On testing day, please:

- See that your child is rested and eats breakfast.
- See that your child arrives at school on time and is relaxed.
- Encourage your child to do the best work possible.
- Do not send your child to school if illness is apparent.
- Do not remove your child from school on test days for appointments.

The SOLs establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course in reading, mathematics, science, and history/social science. The Virginia Department of Education website offers information and resources regarding the SOLs. It can be found at <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/index.shtml>.

For additional information specific to Swanson and the SOLs please e-mail or call John Barnes at john.barnes@apsva.us, (703-228-5535) or Swanson's Testing Coordinator, Sara Daidy, at sara.daidy@apsva.us, (703-228-5521).

—Sara Daidy, Testing Coordinator

Specific tests and days are as follows:

Tues 5/27	Wed 5/28	Thurs 5/29	Fri 5/30	Mon 6/2	Tue 6/3	Wed 6/4
8 th Geography	8 th Reading	8 th Math Geometry Algebra	8 th Science	6 th History	6 th Math (Including 7 th Grade Math)	6 th Reading
Thurs 6/5	Fri 6/6	Mon 6/9	Tue 6/10	Wed 6/11	Thurs 6/12	
7 th Math	7 th Graders Taking 8 th Grade Math/ Algebra	7 th Reading	7 th Reading	7 th Reading	7 th History	

Spring Fling Arts and Crafts Show Recap

The March 15 Swanson Spring Fling Arts and Crafts show was a huge success! Over 16 juried artisans displayed their arts and crafts as Swanson students, parents, staff and community members enjoyed all of the artwork in the large gym. Parents, students and friends all helped make this second annual event a wonderful experience.

This PTA-sponsored fundraiser will benefit the Swanson community. Money raised from the event will be used to fulfill grant requests made by teachers and faculty at Swanson as well as to fund other PTA work.

Special thanks to our student volunteers who came out and supported the event by helping with set up, break down and vendor support. In addition, the CEA hosted a bake sale that raised \$266.56 for World Vision. It was nice to see Principal Loft and a number of teachers and faculty members come out to support the event.

We hope to see you all at next year's Spring Fling!

—Becky O'Neil

