Memorandum

TO: Packer Parent Association

FROM: Ann Harrell, Recording Secretary

SUBJECT: Minutes of the PA Meeting, November 29, 2012

DATE: December 10, 2012

Present: PA Board Members and Approximately 50-60 Packer Parents

President Ann Aurigemma called the meeting to order and welcomed all present. She shared that there would be a presentation by the heads of the Middle and Upper School Math and Science Programs, handed out copies of a report on the PA’s activities to date, and reminded the group that the Spring Gala would be taking place on March 8th. Ann then introduced PA Board member Melissa Glass to start the evening’s program.

Melissa thanked everyone for coming and introduced Lizabeth Joseph – head of Packer’s Middle and Upper School Math Department, Chris Natale – Math Specialist for grades K-6, and Chris Williams – head of the school’s Science Department. Melissa invited the speakers to share the activities of their departments as well as how this work ties into Packer’s strategic plan.

Lizabeth Joseph shared a Power Point presentation with the group and invited all to contact her if they had any questions. Her key points were as follows:
The Middle and Upper School Math Curriculum is available at: https://fc.packer.edu/~ljoseph/
Packer’s philosophy about math is not just the teaching of content, but what you choose to do with it. The math curriculum is designed to help kids learn problem solving and perseverance. Liz also works with the faculty to ensure that all students are challenged to their highest potential, and the kids continue to like math.
Over the past four years, Packer has rewritten its grades 5-12 math curriculum and welcomed 6 new Upper school math faculty members, out of a staff of 7; and 3 new faculty members out of a staff of 6 in the Middle School.
Students are not tracked in math until the 7th grade, and even at that point, both tracks cover the same material over the course of the year – the advanced track just covers it more deeply and at a faster pace. This system allows Packer to have all 8th graders learning Algebra together, as well as the ability for students to move between tracks at different stages in Middle and Upper School.
Math is taught in the following stages: 8th grade – Algebra; 9th grade – Geometry; 10th Grade – Algebra II; 11th Grade – PreCalculus/Trigonometry; 12th Grade – Calculus or Advanced Math Applications.
All Packer students graduate with a mastery of college preparatory math – or greater.
Packer has put an increased focused on the study of statistics and probability, as there is an increasing use for these skills across various disciplines.
Packer ensures that all SAT materials are covered and reviewed at the appropriate stage.
For students who want to be more involved with math, there are middle and upper school math clubs, a Packer math & science journal, and some upper school students work as math teaching assistants in middle school classes.

Liz then introduced math specialist Chris Natale to speak about his work with students in grades K-6. Chris told the group that students at this level work with concepts in geometry, fractions and decimals, algebraic thinking, patterns/predictions, and probability and statistics. His goal is to ensure that students develop good number sense, problem solving skills, and are able to communicate mathematically.

Next, Chris Williams – head of Packer’s Science Department – spoke about his work and the changes that have taken place during his six-year tenure which include: doubling the number of Lower School science teachers, and building a dedicated lab for their work; unifying the entire Packer science faculty into one office so they can share ideas and coordinate curricula, and building new labs for the middle and upper school. The Science Department has also added new electives in Nuclear Physics and Astronomy/Geophysics. Chemistry, Biology, and Physics are all available at the AP level. There are two tracked levels in 9th and 10th grade for Chemistry and Physics because of the math involved, but there is no tracking in Biology. There is a multi-year elective in scientific research, and it is possible that two Packer students may co-publish papers this year, which is nearly unheard of at the high school level. There are many exciting projects for students to become involved in, including travelling to Costa Rica to help endangered leatherback turtles, and working with NYC’s Urban Bar Code Project to collect and analyze DNA samples from animals local to our area. Next year, the Science Department will also collaborate with the History Department, by combing a biological genetics class with a history course on genocide, as well as a forensics class with one on constitutional law. Chris led those present in a science experiment to demonstrate how students learn to apply information to learn and solve problems.

Bruce Dennis then spoke to say that when he arrived at Packer, the math and science departments were the weakest in school. He now feels that ability to attract and retain high quality teachers has transformed these departments, and he acknowledged the staff for their great work.

Ann thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting.