

Lamar University Staff Council Meeting
December 10, 2019
John Gray Center- Mason Room

Minutes

The meeting was called to order by Bert Wagner, President, at 10:02 a.m.
Roll sheet was passed around by Diann Brodnax, Secretary. A quorum was present.

Members present: Bert Wagner, Stacie Granger, Diann Brodnax, Albertine Ambers, Mandy Arceneaux, Blaire Brevell, Greg Dowell, Hector Flores, Madison Franco, Christina Gengo, Ashley Glenn, Alicia Hargreaves, Sharlene Hatch, Charlotte Holliman, Margo Hymer, Johnny Jarrell, Yinka Jenmy, Gavin Jones, Karen Kessinger, Cynthia Ksiazek, Angie Laudig, Sherika King-Lowe, Sharon Mistrot, Alex Monceaux, Yolanda Monroe, J.T. Robertson, Ashley Sheehan, Tina Siau, Ciera Vaidya, and Julie Walker

Guest Speakers

Dr. Teresa Simpson, Chair, LU and BISD Business Partnership – NEST Program

Dr. Simpson wanted to thank Staff Council members for their efforts and support collecting book donations for the NEST project. Former First Lady Nancy Evans was passionate about providing a safe learning environment. Mrs. Evans partnered with the Greater South Park area schools to design and provide a safe haven for reading and learning.

Pietzsch-MacArthur Elementary School was the initial target school to offer the Nest. The space was designed and painted to replicate Lamar University's Quad. An innovated learning lab was placed in the Nest to provide students the opportunity to learn through virtual reality. Students can dissect a frog or connect with other cultures through the learning lab.

Media coverage opened the doors for more Nest projects at other campuses. The community came together, and donations were collected to provide Nests for three more area schools. Blanchette Elementary School received a Nest that replicated their area, pear orchards. Charlton-Pollard Elementary School replicated the community surroundings with a clock tower, port, and rich history of the area.

Staff Council will meet with each Nest campus to present books collected during the book drive, December 18, 2019 from 1-3 pm.

Please see the attachment for more information about Pietzsch-MacArthur Elementary School's Nest opening.

Committee Reports:

Executive Committee: Staff Council Officers did not meet with LU Executives in November.

Community Service: No report.

Staff Awards Ceremony: No report.

Staff Social Events: No report.

Student Success: No report.

Communications: No report.

Staff Relations: No report.

Nominations: No report.

Bylaws Committee: No report.

Unfinished Business:

- Books for the Nest Book Drive will be collected until December 13, 2019. Please reach out to one of the officers if you have books to donate.
- Yolanda Monroe, Council member – reminded the Council that Meals on Wheels is collecting new blankets for seniors. Please collect and deliver blankets to Yolanda before December 18, 2019.

New Business: None

Good of the Order:

- This week – December 11-13, 2019 – campus forums will be held for final candidates to fill the position of Vice President of Finance and Operations. Everyone is encouraged to attend the forums and provide feedback.
 - Wednesday, December 11 – 2:30 pm – CICE Building, RM 113
Cornelius Wooten
 - Thursday, December 12 – 10:30 am – CICE Building, RM 113
Jeremy Alltop
 - Friday, December 13 – 2:30 pm – CICE Building, RM 113
Richard Sears
- Upcoming campus events –
 - Thursday, January 23, 2020 – MLK Celebration/ Speaker Dr. Levine
 - Sunday, February 9, 2020 – Event Center –Chinese New Year Celebration
 - Wednesday, March 11, 2020 – Developmental Disabilities Month
 - Thursday, March 26, 2020 – Inspirational Women’s Award
 - Thursday, April 16, 2020 – Campus Pride Excellence Reception
 - Friday, April 17, 2020 – Campus Pride Day of Silence

The next Staff Council meeting will be February 11, 2020 in Mary and John Gray library, 8th floor.

Tina Siau moved to adjourn the meeting and Hector Flores seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 10:32 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Diann Brodnax

Diann Brodnax, Staff Council Secretary

“The Nest,” dedicated to Nancy Evans opens at Pietzsch-MacArthur Elementary School

Lamar University’s former First Lady Nancy Evans envisioned a special reading and tutorial space for the students of Pietzsch-MacArthur Elementary School. Since Evans’ passing in June 2018, community partners and Lamar University leadership have made her vision a reality.



“The Nest,” an innovative, high-tech, welcoming space designed to entice struggling students to read and high achieving students to engage and explore, could serve as a model for similar innovative learning labs to be built throughout BISD.

Stemming from the relationship between Lamar University and the neighborhood surrounding the campus, Evans shared her passion for reading with the students at the elementary school. Audrey Collins, Pietzsch MacArthur’s principal says initially Evans came on campus promoting Reading Wednesdays. All students were encouraged to wear Lamar University t-shirts, set accelerated reading goals and participate in contests every Wednesday.

“Nancy wanted every kid to have goals, post and write goals,” said Audrey Collins. “She knew one of the biggest challenges we have at a campus with disadvantaged children is reading and getting students excited about reading.”

During their time working together Evans and Collins began to dream of a space in the school where Lamar University education majors could better tutor the elementary students. Over time, Evans and Collins dreamed of the “The Nest.” At the end of 2018, Norman Bellard, assistant to the president for community relations and founding member of the South Park Neighborhood Partnership, asked Collins to give he and Nancy a proposal to create the special space.

“My battle cry has always been, your toughest kids deserve the best of everything so I asked for the best,” said Collins.

Collins inked the dream of the Innovative Learning Lab, The Nest. She asked that it be a place where fourth and fifth grade students, who read at a low-grade level, could practice reading without being embarrassed. She wanted bean bags and wobble chairs, lap desks and book cases filled with books. She also wanted it to serve as a space for a group of kids who are oftentimes overlooked.

“We’re a high-risk, high-poverty campus so we are kings and queens of intervention,” said Collins. “We know how to work with kids who struggle, but the high achievers get forgotten sometimes. We wanted them to have a space where they can wear virtual reality headsets and use a Starboard and do research while reading and writing at the same time.”

Bellard and Teresa Simpson, took the “vision,” and teamed up with various community partners like Entergy, the Rotary Club of Beaumont, Texas Community Bank, The National Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi, LU Chapter 95. Teresa Simpson is the Special Assistant to the Dean for Student Success and Clinical Instructor for Educational Leadership in the COEHD. When asked to chair this initiative on behalf of the South Park Neighborhood Partnership, Simpson embraced the project, worked side by side with both Bellard and Collins to establish a student council chairperson, Melissa Ehrlich, EC-6th grade teacher education student. Simpson, coordinated the partners, volunteers and commissioned Suzette Broussard to replicate one of Evans’ favorite places on the Lamar University campus, the quadrangle. Broussard, who most recently painted a brightly colored mural on Calder Avenue between Lucas Drive and Thomas Road, took pictures of LU’s quad and painted its Oak trees and James Surls’ sculpture. She also added pairs of cardinals “Big Red and LU”, throughout the innovative learning lab to corroborate the theme.



As part of Lamar University’s partnership with Pietzsch-MacArthur, Simpson has worked with faculty and staff from cross-disciplinary backgrounds to support The Nest’s Mission this past year:

- The student groups and academic programs have supported the PMac/LU Collaboration by attending campus: reading to assemblies and conducting a school supply drive.
- Alpha Omega Epsilon, the women engineering Greek society has adopted The Nest as their philanthropy.
- They will work with the students in “maker space” provided by The Nest with STEM kits. The society raised funds to purchase the kits for the lab.
- The Lamar University Veterans Association took part in the campus’ Veterans Day Program. Sara Gubala, political science faculty and her service dog, Kennedy and pals, taught PMac students the importance of service animals by reading to them a book on the topic.

The Department of Nursing adopted The Nest and launched their support of the collaboration this year by conducting their annual Pediatric Teaching Day at PMac with 38 students and four faculty members on campus for a full week of observations and service projects.

- LU students majoring in education tutored students, helped in the classroom, and completed requirements of their educational course work including 15 ours each of observations.

“I love that the project was a collaboration between Nancy and Audrey,” said Simpson. “And really the completion is a testament to Collins’ leadership. We want her and this project to be that beacon for BISD. Not only does PMac students and faculty benefit from this Innovative Learning Lab, but so does our Lamar University students and faculty who collaborate throughout the year on various service areas and student and leadership development programs.”



Painted at the entry of the room is a dedication to Evans:

In grateful appreciation and memory to Nancy Evans for your unwavering dedication to the students of Pietzsch-MacArthur Elementary. Thank you for sharing your love of reading and kindness. Your legacy will be remembered by many students to come. Time will never erase the work you have accomplished here and the lives you have positively affected. We will forever be grateful.

“What I love about this collaboration is that the teachers feel as if someone recognizes the hard work that they put in educating students,” said Collins. “Education is difficult, a lot goes on within these walls. For teachers to be recognized for their accomplishments and for our students to know “that somebody cares about them” it is a big deal and a true blessing.

Bellard and Simpson are proud that the Innovative Learning Lab, is “a very unique learning environment in BISD” costing approximately \$20,000 and was sponsored by LU and community partners. “We are grateful to Audrey Collin and BISD for providing the dedicated space for this joint initiative”, this Innovative Learning Lab will serve as a model for future spaces within other BISD schools. “I’m excited about securing funding for four or five more of these in BISD elementary schools,” said Bellard.

News at Lamar

Posted on Tue, April 30, 2019 by Shelly Vitanza