Lower School Parents Association Meeting Minutes
Date: 9/10/2026
8:30-9:30am

I. Meeting Details & Welcome

- **A. Lower School PA Chair:** Jen Greenberg
- **B. Lower School PA Vice Chair**: Kristen Handy

II. Lower School Administration Update

A. Kara Zimmerman (Head of the Lower School)

1. **Background**: Musician father, science teacher mother; undergrad in theater & dance. Career path spans musical theater and teaching, with roles in Pennsylvania and Maryland (PF associate, homeroom, science, admin, fine & performing arts, admissions). Earned her Masters of Science in Education in Neuroeducation from Johns Hopkins University.
2. **Approach**: Relationship-forward, welcomes conversations, and brings a deep understanding of youth and the McDonogh community, helping to set up a lot of new opportunities for growth while building on our amazing history.

B. Ben Thompson (Associate Head of the Lower School, Grades 2-4)

1. **Math:** Dimensions Math program used through grade 2; Envisions Math Program used in grades 3 and 4 to match Middle School math for a fluid transition. Teams in grades 3 and 4 have collaborated with experts.
2. **Literacy:** We use the CKLA literacy program with a focus on units of inquiry and cross-curriculum connections.
3. **Handwriting:** Maintaining an intentional focus on building strong foundational skills.
4. **Technology:** Thoughtful utilization—we replaced the daily use of Chromebook carts to focus more on digital citizenship and literacy.

C. Katie McGrain (Associate Head of the Lower School, Grades PK-1)

1. **Renovations:** Integrating science and engineering classrooms into the building with an emphasis on flexibility in every room (spaces adjust to tasks rather than kids adjusting to spaces).
2. **Design Aesthetic:** Leaving certain areas open and undecorated so students can add to them as they grow. Utilizing earth tones and nature-inspired palettes to help students feel grounded and support self-regulation.
3. **Campus Resources:** Dr. Josh Jones (Director of 800 Acres Lab & US Science Faculty) and Rob Owen (US Science faculty) are collaborating with teachers to utilize the entire campus, encouraging outdoor exploration

and experimentation. Initiatives include trail packs for teachers and Upper School Environmental Science students will be paired with LS students to act as naturalists for their trail experiences this year.

III. **Guest Speakers:** Sara Rosiak (Director of Learning Services) and Caitlin Sullivan (Lower School Learning Specialist)

- **A. Presentation: Overview of Learning Services in the Lower School**
- **B. Purpose**
  1. PK-12 learning services program to build a support system for all students & create conditions that allow students to access the curriculum
  2. Support homeroom teachers with evaluations and best practices
  3. Help families support their children
- **C. Specialists**
  1. Lower School Learning Specialist: **Caitlin Sullivan** - guides the whole learning journey, gives parents tools, works with admin to provide wrap-around support, fosters a safe learning environment in the LS
  2. Literacy Specialists: **Julie Erb, Claire Rosenberg, Cathy Madison** - handle literacy intervention within LS classrooms
  3. Math Specialist: **Jess Winner** - handles math intervention within LS classrooms
- **D. Intervention Structure**
  1. Evaluations conducted 3 times each year, based on formal and informal assessments, used to create intervention groups
     a) Benchmark Goals: focused on overarching grade-level goals
     b) Curriculum Scope & Sequence Goals: these are specific and structured benchmarks
     c) Observation: subjective teacher evaluations based on day-to-day homeroom interactions
  2. Parents are always notified when interventions are needed
- **E. Literacy & Math Intervention Groups**
  1. **Size:** 3-5 students
  2. **Meetings:** 3 out of 7 days during WIN (What I Need) Time (30 minutes)
  3. **Focus**
     a) engaging, multi-sensory instruction that is in addition to grade-level core instruction, targets foundational skills
     b) aligns with skills needed in homeroom literacy/math instruction and in future grades, but may appear more basic as they work to solidify foundational skills that will support the more complex work that will come in a whole-group setting
  4. **Progress Monitoring:** 1–2 times per month against benchmark goals;

groups are re-evaluated twice each year

F. **Additional Support:** Includes outside support (Speech-Language Pathology and Occupational Therapy), academic interventions, and formal accommodation services. Parents are always encouraged to share observations from home.

G. **Contacts**
   1. Sara Rosiak - broader questions about the process
   2. Caitlin Sullivan - student-specific questions

IV. **Guest Speaker:** Enaye Engleton (Director of Equity & Inclusion and Parent Engagement)

A. **Presentation: Overview of Bias Framework**

B. **Core Philosophy:** Safety precedes learning; emotional safety enables students to engage more fully.

C. **Goal:** Cultivate a culture of belonging
   1. Responsive Classroom practices in the LS
   2. Link in the school handbook that discusses incident reporting
   3. Data-driven perspectives

D. **Student Feedback**
   1. Indicated that students feel safe and connected in the Lower School
   2. They still hesitate to speak up because they don't want to get their friends in trouble
   3. Social pressure prevents upstanders

E. **Reporting System**
   1. Students - New system addresses social concerns, shifts the focus from "tattling" to community care
   2. Parents & Teachers - Online reporting system via the DASH page (Conduct Report & Bias Incident Report)
   3. Reports go to a response team (Enaye and LS administration, with Associate Heads replying within 2 days)
   4. Used to help identify patterns, evaluate blind spots, implement earlier intervention, and allocate resources where needed

V. **Committee Updates**

A. **Used Uniform Exchanges** (Claire Gilpin, Rachel Cohn, Jessie Weintraub)
   1. Three successful exchanges completed; future dates are TBD
   2. Uniform donations can currently be dropped off with Edith, and a more streamlined system will be shared via room parents and Parent News soon.

B. **Community Engagement** (Tiffany Schwartzberg, Heidi Topaz)
   1. Goal is to bring parents and families together
   2. Plan a variety of on- and off-campus events spanning different times of

day and scales

C. **Trunk or Treat** (Tricia Arend Radford, Steph Slover)
    1. Scheduled for Sunday, October 25, 2026 (3:00–4:45 pm)
    2. Volunteers and more trunks are needed!
D. **Faculty Free Friday** (Stephanie Canington, Kristina Carr) - Four dates planned across the year, beginning November 13 for all grades
E. **Teacher Appreciation Lunches** (Leslie Schubert, Meghan Leonard) - Two lunches scheduled, one in November and one in May
F. **Box Tops** (Blaire Miller)
    1. We have raised $14 of our $500 goal
    2. Daily snacks can help families contribute to this fundraiser
    3. Download the **Box Tops for Education app**, select McDonogh Lower School as your designated school, and scan eligible receipts after shopping.
G. **New to You Book Sale** (Kathy Loden) - Planned for the spring; a donation box will be available soon
H. **Square One Art** (Elena Holford) - Scheduled for the spring with more details to follow
I. **Charleston Wrap**
    1. Annual fundraiser featuring personalized gifts and wrapping paper
    2. Brochures will be sent home with students early next week
    3. More info can be found **here**.

VI. Upcoming Key Dates

A. **Thursday, September 10, 2026 (6:15 pm):** Back to School Night
B. **Friday, October 16, 2026 (3:30–5:30 pm):** Honey of a Jam Fest (All-school event at Roots Farm with food, games, and activities) - volunteer opportunities and more info to come!
C. **Sunday, October 25, 2026 (3:00–4:45 pm):** Lower School Trunk or Treat
D. **Thursday, November 5, 2026 (8:30–9:30 am):** LSPA Meeting
E. **Friday, November 13, 2026 (11:00 am–1:00 pm):** Faculty Free Friday & Teacher Appreciation Lunch