



MORRIS BRANDON

PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION



Morris Brandon General Meeting + Principal Coffee Talk
Friday, April 18, 2025
10:00 AM via Zoom

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Presenters: Dana Giacone and Ashlee Portis

Called to Order: 10:02 AM

II. PTO Treasurer Report

Presenter: Joanna Clauss

Discussion: The PTO continues to have a great school year and has surpassed fundraising goals. Moms Mahjong and Readathon have occurred, and Dads Golf will occur next week. All things collectively, the PTO has earned \$163K revenue, surpassing the goal of \$155K. The year started with about \$62K cash and the PTO currently has a cash balance of \$126K. We anticipate ending the year with a surplus of approximately \$35K funds and will discuss usage in the upcoming weeks with the Board. Last year we were able to give approximately \$20K excess funds to Principal Bland for school usage and \$15K to the Foundation. The PTO is still awaiting approval from the IRS for its tax-exempt status. Status of application is being monitored and IRS confirmed the file is under review; anticipating we will have the determination letter soon despite the process being long. This concluded the Treasurer's Report.

III. Approval of PTO General Meeting Minutes: January 24, 2025

Presenter: Dana Giacone

Discussion: The next order of business was to approve the January 24, 2025 meeting minutes.

Motion to Approve: Lane Kurban

Second: Fran Cowart

Members Approving: All

Members Opposing: None

Minutes Approved: Yes

IV. President's Report

Presenters: Ashlee Portis and Dana Giacone

Discussion: A review was given of recent and upcoming events, thank you to 2024-25 PTO Leaders and presentation of 2025-26 PTO slate by incoming PTO Co-Presidents.

Review of Recent and Upcoming Events (Ashlee Portis)

Recent events included the Parent/Son Scavenger Hunt, Chick-fil-A Spirit Night, Brandon's Got Talent, Night of the Arts and Monthly Teacher/Staff Appreciation Meals. Remaining events to close out the year include April events for the Tall and Small BEEch Ball (pre-register), Dad's Golf Tournament, and May events for World Cultures Night (pre-register; replaced International Travelers Week), Teacher/Staff Appreciation Week, Walk to School Day, Rising Kindergarten Popsicle Social, Field Days, Kindergarten Splashdown and 5th Grade Graduation. Reminder for 5th grade parents to submit slide show photos and purchase yard signs, and all parents to remember to purchase year books.

Thank You: 2024-25 PTO Leaders (Dana Giacone)

Huge thank you to the 2024-25 Board Members and Committee Co-Chairs (approximately 90 volunteers) who made this year a success. The PTO was able to host incredible events, raise funds, and shower teachers with love from the PTO with their help.

Presentation of 2025-26 Slate (Fran Cowart and Meg Watts, Incoming PTO Co-Presidents)

The Nominating Committee's recommendation of PTO Board Members and Officers for the 2025-26 school year, term of July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026, was presented for review and approval by the General Members.

Motion to Approve:	Shannon Konn
Second:	Brittany Goepp
Members Approving:	All
Members Opposing:	None
Minutes Approved:	Yes

V. 2024-25 Georgia Milestones Parent Information Session

Presenter: Felicia Topper, Assistant Principal

Discussion: The Georgia Milestones is an assessment to measure student mastery of Georgia grade level standards and instructional practice. Morris Brandon looks at data weekly, including historical data to understand trends and how to inform instruction moving forward. The assessment takes place at the end of the year, and for this year will occur between April 28th and May 9th. Grades 3rd – 5th test ELA and Math, and 5th grade additionally tests Science. Reminder to mark calendars as it is important that students are in class to test. If student is out, send Ms. Topper an email so that make-up tests can be performed. There will be limited access to the school for parents coming and going during testing periods; reminder to parents to limit building access until 11:30 or after.

Next, test design and time allotment were discussed. There is a constructed and extended response section for ELA. Students have been preparing all year for this type of testing along with the technology-enhanced sections, which include multiple-select, multiple-part, evidence-based selected-response, drag-and-drop, graphing, drop-down menu/input, and keypad-input across all subject matters. In regard to allotted time, maximum time ranges from 90 to 35 minutes, with ELA allowing the most time, and science the least. Please remind students to take their time and review their answers if they finish quickly.

Lastly, there was a reminder to parents to help students by ensuring they get a good night's sleep on their normal sleep time/routine, have students present at school around or by 7:30 AM, wish student good luck, remind student that testing is important and to stay

focused during the test. If more assessment resources are needed, parents can visit the [Experience Online Testing Georgia page](#) for test practice and online guides.

VI. Introduction of School Psychologist and School Preparation Strategies

Presenter: Rosemary Glean, Ed.S., L.P.C., School Psychologist

Discussion: Most parents may know R. Glean as she does testing to understand if students qualify for different support services, but also engages students with a level of counseling, however, not to the extent of therapeutic individual services. R. Glean discussed test anxiety during the presentation. Test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety and affects 10%-40% of students. Symptoms can include physical symptoms such as excessive sweating, nausea, diarrhea, headaches, etc. Emotional symptoms can include feelings of doubt, fear, stress, anger, etc. When symptoms are severe, please visit child's pediatrician. There are also personnel at school that can assist with coordinating additional support that your child may need.

To help children, please ensure your student gets uninterrupted sleep, reduce or limit screen time, make good food choices (foods rich in vitamin B, omega-3 fats, etc.) and stay hydrated. CDC states 34% of children fail to get adequate sleep. Guidelines were given for sleep hours for preschoolers (10-13 hours), school age (9-11 hours), teenagers (8-10 hours), and adults (7-9 hours).

It was stated that as humans we have mirror neurons, which are complex neuronal circuits in the brain causing one to respond to actions performed by others. When you are young, what you see (body language, tone, etc.) is what you respond to versus what you are hearing. Reminder to be cognizant and monitor yourself as children will pick up on your nervousness if you are nervous about their testing.

Preparation by mental rehearsal is great to do in the evening or a relaxing time with input from your child. It was suggested to have your child think of an ideal outcome such as after they finish the test, they strive to feel confident and good (not looking for perfection). Walk them through this, such as how they will breathe after leaving the test. Breathing exercises are also helpful if your child is feeling overly excited; monitor inhaling (associated with fight and flight response) and exhaling (associated with rest and digest) if feeling overly excited. Lastly, a list of items that parents can do to provide their student with support was provided as a resource.

VII. State of the School

Presenter: Jay Bland, Principal

Discussion: Updates were provided by Principal Bland on the below topics.

- **Spring MAP Results and Current Performance** – Spring MAP data historically closely aligns with Georgia Milestones. Math growth from fall to winter is a little lower than anticipated, but not surprising as we typically make a great second semester push. Overall, we are in the 70th percentile for growth in math (fall to spring) with over 857 students taking the exam; 40-60% is typical growth. Achievement increased from 81% to 84% from winter to spring. Literacy growth from fall to winter showed great growth and a little slower growth from winter to spring. Literacy does not include writing which is included in Georgia Milestones. Kindergarten has high growth and achievement which is typical historically. Overall, we are in 58th for growth in literacy (fall to spring) and achievement increased from 82% to 83% from winter to spring. For math, Morris Brandon is the

3rd highest school in the district for growth. 70% of students exceeded their growth target, 2-3% met their growth target and 25% did not meet their growth target. On average, typically a school will have 40-50% of school which does not meet their growth target. For literacy, Morris Brandon is also the 3rd highest school in the district for growth. 59% of students exceeded their growth target, 5% met their growth target and 36% did not meet their growth target.

- **Review of Strategic Plan** – Morris Brandon needs to be at 80% proficiency in both reading and math by the end of the year. Considering Morris Brandon ended at 75% last year, a 5% increase is achievable. Based on prior year data of MAP to Georgia Milestones (GMAS) for grades 3 – 5, we gained 5% growth year over year for MAP and gained 5% and 12% in literacy and math, respectively, from Spring MAP to GMAS. With consideration of this data, it is achievable to end the year at 80% proficiency.
- **Needs Assessment** – During the Needs Assessment, two to three potential needs are identified for 2025-26 based on data from Spring MAPS testing. Based on discussions about the school data, areas identified as opportunities were: 1) moving gifted students to 100% proficiency, closing the gap between special education and general education students (approximately 35%), increasing math proficiency in African American students (approximately 30% behind peers), and increasing reading proficiency gains in Hispanic students (only subgroup that did not make proficiency gains from Spring to Spring in MAP reading). To address these opportunities from a staffing perspective, there is 1) a need to add more supports for high need subgroup students through the MTSS process, 2) add special education teachers to support a growing special education population and 3) add an additional gifted resource teacher to continue to push gifted students to 100% proficiency.
- **Hiring Updates** – Morris Brandon is in a healthy space for budget next year and as a result were able to make key hiring moves including addressing those identified in the above needs assessment, an additional counselor and more.
- **Good News** – Gallup results improved from 3.85 in 2022 to 4.35 in 2025. Results reflect who is engaged, not just who is a good teacher. Morris Brandon scored 81% more than those in the same industry of education. Highest results were related to if teachers have materials and equipment needed and opportunity to do their best. Lowest results are in recognition and cares about me categories. Recognition was also one of the lowest categories two years ago and Morris Brandon implemented recognition with a traveling trophy. However, the traveling trophy was not continued this year and Morris Brandon received lower results; this gives action plans for next year.

Family engagement results had 90 responses for Morris Brandon. Out of 76 schools in APS, Morris Brandon was the sixth school and is leading the way for similarly designed schools.

Morris Brandon is a Beating the Odds Schools; spread the word. Only two schools in the North Atlanta Cluster (Morris Brandon and Bolton Academy) received this award and only 16 in the entire district. This means, as compared to like schools

across the state, our vulnerable populations outperformed every school like them. Morris Brandon received a letter from the Governor and received a Gold Award for greatest gains, meaning there were great gains from our students two years ago as compared to this year. Morris Brandon also received a Silver Award for highest performing school. Refer to more information in the weekly teacher newsletters and Beemail.

Facility improvements paid for by the Foundation / all parents who donate are also underway. Wall wraps and 3D letters have gone up at Main Campus and Primary Center front entrances. The Morris Brandon emblem will also be installed over the summer on the floor in the Primary Center front entrance. Turf has been added / installed in one area at Primary Center and a gaga pit at both Main Campus and Primary Center. The Innovation Lab is opening today and is planned/led by students. Morris Brandon earned a grant one year ago plus added additional funds for the Innovation Lab. Students will be able to participate in science, engineering and math. Innovation Lab will be a special for next year.

- **On the Horizon** – refer to PTO slide for a complete list of upcoming events. The first World Cultures Night is coming up on May 1st at Primary Center; open to all students and is free, including sumo demonstrations, a mariachi band to listen to and pizza. There are a lot of languages spoken at Morris Brandon; reached out to over 30 of those families and over 25 will be participating to talk about their cultures. Lastly, graduation and end of year activities are happening after Memorial Day. School is in session after Memorial Day with the last day being May 29th. It is really critical that students return to school those last three days of the school year; please put summer plans on hold until school has ended. Attendance is a huge factor in public schools, Georgia and APS and Morris Brandon is #2 in attendance for our district. Thank you to all. If anything is needed, please reach out and reminder to ensure you are signed up for Beemail. Soon all rising Kindergarten families will be on the General Meeting calls; already have 90 Kindergartners enrolled and not even summer yet.

VIII. Closing Remarks

Presenters: Dana Giacone

Discussion: Thanks to all for attending today.

IX. Meeting Adjourned: 11:03 AM

Meeting Recording: The recording for this meeting can be accessed via the Morris Brandon website on the PTO page and/or via this [link](#) with passcode ^j2FEnLH.