

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School  
Board of Trustees Official Minutes  
January 31, 2019**

**Board Members Present**

Jill Clinton, Chair  
Becky Uppercue, Vice Chair  
Rose Thornberry, Secretary  
Lieucretia Swain

**Board Members Absent**

Tish Weikel (Illness)  
Diana Williams, Treasurer (Personal Matter)

**Others Present**

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO

**Executive Session**

The Board and Dr. Pleso met in executive session at 5:52pm to discuss student and employee related issues, which if conducted in public would violate a lawful privilege or would lead to a disclosure of information confidentially protected by law. Executive session closed at 6:02pm.

**Call to Order**

Jill Clinton called the meeting to order at 6:03pm.

**Introductions**

None

**Approval of Consent Agenda**

Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda as submitted. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The Consent Agenda was unanimously approved by roll call vote.

**Public Comment on Agenda Items**

No comment

**Old Business**

No old Business

### **Report of the Chair**

Melissa Ring resigned from the board effective January 23, 2019.

Topics for the next newsletter, due March 27, 2019, were discussed. These included an update on the budget process, the building project, and upcoming vacancies on the Board.

The January staff meeting was cancelled due to early inclement weather dismissal. Becky Uppercue will attend the February 26th staff meeting; Jill Clinton will attend the March 26th staff meeting; Lieucetia Swain will attend the April 23rd staff meeting; and Rose Thornberry will attend May 26th staff meeting, which is expected to be the last of the 2018/19 school year.

The Board binder/handbook project was cancelled, due to legal involvement and ballooning costs. Charter Choices graciously waived all fees. Lieucetia Swain and Jill Clinton will work together to come up with a basic guidebook for Board members on a smaller scale, based on relevant proprietary information, such as action calendars, drawn up and documented by previous GMCS Board members.

Dr. Pleso reported the school counselor, Ms. Christine Felicetti, will attend next board meeting to provide an overview of her role and discuss projects she is working on.

Dr. Pleso reported that all teachers and teacher's assistants completed a 90-minute online Montessori training course from the American Montessori Society titled, "Professional Development that Mirrors Montessori Principles and Practices." Dr. Pleso has found an additional online course that she feels might be appropriate for staff and will update the Board at the February meeting.

The dropbox meeting with Jill Clinton, Rose Thornberry, Megan Parks, and Kathy Johnson was successful and many documents for charter renewal can be found there. New documents will be uploaded and organized by Megan Parks going forward.

Dr. Pleso reported that the Hoffman Foundation is requesting additional information to move forward with our grant application. Dr. Pleso is also working on a matching state grant (Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program) for \$500,000 toward the new building project. We have missed the deadline for an Adams County grant, but will apply next year.

Jesse Bean from Charter Choices will attend next board meeting to present 2017-2018 audit and discussed options for Act 55 compliance.

The Executive Committee will meet February 12, 2019. At that meeting they will review the Special Education and Students with Disabilities Policy. Agenda for the meeting is due February 5, 2019.

The Finance Committee will meet February 20, 2019 to discuss the audit and the current budget. The committee will work with Dr. Pleso to adjust the remaining budget now that we are halfway through the fiscal year. They will continue to refine their 'wish list' for the next fiscal budget. Agenda for the meeting is due by February 13, 2019.

The Governance Committee will meet March 4, 2019 to review candidates for the open seat vacated by Melissa Ring. Jill Clinton will temporarily rejoin the Governance Committee due to the opening left by Melissa Ring's resignation. Agenda for the meeting is due February 26, 2019.

The Personnel Committee will begin to discuss the upcoming parent and staff surveys. Rose Thornberry will replace Diana Williams on the Personnel committee in an effort to more evenly distribute committee memberships amongst the Board. There remains one open seat on this committee.

Melissa Ring, after resigning from the Board, volunteered to spearhead any Teacher Appreciation Week (May 6-10) efforts on behalf of parents. Lieucetia Swain offered to assist her. Jill Clinton said she would reach out to Melissa to determine if she is still interested, copying Lieucetia so they can move forward from there.

Jill Clinton recommended a future Open House at school with Digsau, so that staff and families can meet Jamie Unkefer and other principals at the firm, view their portfolio and initial drawings for GMCS, and share ideas for the building project.

Jill Clinton proposed revising our website's Q & A section based on the more robust FAQ developed by Rose Thornberry. Dr. Pleso will review it and pass along notes to Jill Clinton and Lieucetia Swain, who will meet to edit the document and return to Rose Thornberry for a second draft.

### **Administrator's Report**

Current enrollment remains at 221.

Dr. Pleso is preparing for the upcoming Comprehensive Planning Committee. The committee develops a plan for the future of the school every three years and the next one is due November 2019. The committee must include 6 teacher representatives, 2 educational specialists, and 2 administrators appointed by Dr. Pleso. The committee must also include 2 parent representatives,

2 local community representatives, and 2 local business representatives appointed by the Board of Trustees. Dr. Pleso would like the Board's recommendations by the end of February and have a first meeting in March. Jill Clinton will follow up with Board members to get ideas of people that we can approach to volunteer to serve on this committee.

Dr. Pleso presented the current Future Ready PA Index which shows the schools progress in meeting state goals by 2030. Unfortunately, an interim target is not specified. In the English Language Arts/Literature assessment, 57.5% of students scored proficient or advanced. In the Mathematics/Algebra assessment, 29.6% of students scored proficient or advanced. In the Science/Biology assessment, 65.0% of students scored proficient or advanced. The Index also showed 75% of students are meeting annual academic Growth Expectations in English Language Arts/Literature and 50.0% of students are meeting annual academic Growth Expectations in Mathematics/Algebra. She has already begun to meet with teachers about strategies to address particular scores and has identified K-2 is not where they need to be and are lacking phonic skills. She is continually working with RTI teachers and WIN groups.

Dr. Pleso explained this is the second year of the new Eureka math program with teachers reporting that students are doing much better with the program this year. It has been a persistent challenge to introduce a whole new math 'vocabulary' but with consistent, high-level instruction, she feels we are on the right track. She also explained she researched and learned about the initial dip in scores when first implementing a new program and then the second year rebound of scores.

Dr. Pleso has implemented a number of actions to improve scores, including professional development in TDAs (text dependent analysis) because students are not writing complex enough answers. Teachers will get additional instruction in this area. WIN ("What I Need") groups and RtI groups are identified via Dibbels to identify students who can benefit from additional support.

Dr. Pleso, along with a recommendation from Ms. Loren Householder, is requesting to add the Heggerty Phonics Program to our curriculum. This program supplements and supports our existing Wonders program. The program is \$129 per teacher. After researching the program, she learned of the improvement of phonics scores after using this program in the Central Dauphin school district. She will roll out the program in Kindergarten during the remainder of this school year and then expand it through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (as well as RtI) for the 2018/19 school year. Lieucetia Swain made a motion to approve the implementation of the Heggerty Phonics Program. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

The Future Ready PA Index also showed that the school has an 86.7% for regular attendance which is greater than the statewide average and Dr. Pleso would like to improve that number

even more and is beginning to stress the importance and benefits of regular attendance to families. The state has implemented new attendance laws that mandate that three unexcused absences trigger a certified letter to parents/guardians and GASD notification. Dr. Pleso is working with staff to implement an attendance improvement plan.

Dr. Pleso has scheduled the first Building Design Committee meeting for February 13, 2019. The committee includes Dr. Pleso, nurse Adrian Kavanaugh, teacher Nicole Gulden, administrative staff members Crystal Moore and Megan Parks, parent Heather Preece, and Board chair Jill Clinton. Eventually, Dr. Pleso would like to add our insurance agent Andy Stouffer, PA State Trooper Myers, Curb Technologies, Law Security, and Jarvis Landscaping. The meeting will be led by architect Jamie Unkefer, principal at Digsau.

Dr. Pleso reported that Trooper Myers and the PA State Police conducted an active shooter training for teachers. They were trained on the Run, Hide, Fight protocol which not only trained them about an active shooter in the school setting but also in their everyday lives expressing the need to always be aware of their surroundings. The protocol teaches to run as your first defense, to hide and barricade yourself as your second defense if you cannot run, and fight the active shooter as your last resort.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Ashley Russo as 1/2 grade band teacher. Rose Thornberry made a motion to approve the hiring of Ashley Russo at \$39,000/year salary, prorated, full-time, full benefits offered, retroactive to January 29, 2019. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Hope Lansford as 1/2 grade band teacher aide with Mr. Stare. Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the the hiring of Hope Lansford at \$17/hr, less than 30 hours a week, retroactive to January 29, 2019. Lieucetia Swain seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Keri Bechtel was promoted to 2/3 grade band teacher on December 24, 2018 at \$39,000/year salary, prorated, full-time, and full benefits.

### **Finance Committee Report**

Becky Uppercue presented the summary of the December financial report and added that Charter Choices thinks we are in a good position for this point in the fiscal year. The audit and new fiscal year 'wish list' will be discussed at the next Finance Committee meeting on February 20, 2019. They will also look at where we are with this fiscal year's remaining budget and discuss with Dr. Pleso ways in which line items may need to be adjusted.

Dr. Pleso received an email from Jesse from Charter Choices that contained a webinar explaining our options for collecting our state subsidies. It explained the 3 options to determine charter school tuition rates as offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The first is to use a 363-rate form that has been accepted by PDE. This is the best option as it is the highest and also the most accurate since it has been previously endorsed by PDE. The second option is to use a 363-rate form that has not been submitted to PDE. This is considered second-best, only because it has not yet been accepted by PDE. The third option is to use a 363-rate form calculated by Charter Choices. This is considered a 'last resort' and the least desirable option.

Of our 16 sending districts, nine are using the first option; three are using the second option (including GASD); and four are using a 363-rate form from prior years and do not have one that has been accepted by PDE.

Dr. Pleso has requested to fund a two-week, 2.5 hr/day "summer school" to next year's budget. While still in the very early planning stages, this would likely take place at the end of July. In the coming years, as the school's student population grows, Dr. Pleso would like the Board to consider potentially adding a social worker, Assistant Principal, and two RTI part-time teachers to a future budget. She would also like to purchase computers. However, in the immediate future, the Board will need to budget for an owner's representative for the new building project, charter renewal legal fees, and the tear down and removal of the mods which will be split into two fiscal years.

### **Personnel Committee Report**

Becky Uppercue presented the May 2018 Parent Survey (run via Survey Monkey) in which 55 parents/guardians responded, which is an excellent response rate. Over 80% of parents feel GMCS lives up to its identified mission, would recommend GMCS, plan to re-enroll, does a good job of blending Montessori curriculum, and were satisfied with their student's academic progress. Most parents believe the principal is accessible and is keeping the school focused on academic achievement. Parents like the teacher and staff commitment, care and concern for the children, teaching social skills and independence, class size, educational philosophy, and approachability of staff. Parents would like to see stronger 5/6 curriculum to prepare for transition to 7th grade, more electives, more than one parent/teacher conference a year, more feedback from teachers throughout the year, a more Montessori focus, and more socialization opportunities for parents and families outside of school hours. Recurrent comments included the feeling of "loss of Montessori philosophy," poor communication from teachers and school, and too many behavioral issues. Parents would like to see middle school grades added, a larger playground, more educational field trips, after school clubs, and the use of technology increased in the school in the future. Parents also added their recommendations for more creative fundraisers and ways to keep kids connected outside of school.

Lieucetia Swain is going to look into upgrading the survey package with Survey Monkey in the future in order to be easier to read.

### **Building Committee**

Dr. Pleso updated the Board on financing options for our bridge loan for the building project. She met with Centric Bank and they are currently reviewing our documents. Our financials have been sent to Citizens Bank. Charter School Capital has offered a \$450,000 loan. PNC is no longer interested. Dr. Pleso will meet with Members 1st again in April. The Reinvestment Fund is waiting for questions to be answered by the USDA, which has been hampered by the partial government shutdown.

The USDA is also waiting for our environmental review in order to secure our loan, but that cannot be done until the design/architecture process has been started.

Charter Choices has delayed our feasibility study. The accountant they chose now cannot complete it, because they were not comfortable with forecasting a charter school's enrollment and that is a required part of the report. Dr. Pleso has been working to secure a new accounting firm and will contact the USDA for a list of firms they work with. The feasibility study will now cost \$25,000 instead of the \$15,000 we had budgeted. Jamie Unkefer from Digsau has scheduled our first meeting and is working on starting their portion of the feasibility study in February.

### **Housekeeping**

None

### **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Jill Clinton at 8:27pm.

Approved By:

Rose Thornberry, Secretary