

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School
Board of Trustees Official Minutes
July 25, 2019**

Board Members Present

Jill Clinton, Chair
Becky Uppercue, Vice Chair
Rose Thornberry, Secretary
Shanin Caplener, Member, at-large

Board Members Absent

Tish Weikel, Member, at-large (Family Commitment)
Diana Williams, Treasurer (Family Commitment)
Tom Hockensmith, Member, at-large (Family Commitment)

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO
Ashley Reid

Executive Session

The Board met for executive session at 5:07pm to discuss the CEO evaluation which ended at 5:53pm. The Board then invited Dr. Pleso to attend the rest of the session which included 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 6:04pm. Introductions were made.

Public Comment on Agenda Items

No comment

Old Business

No old business

Approval of Consent Agenda

Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the consent agenda as submitted. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Report of the Chair

There was a brief discussion about Board content for the next newsletter, which is due in October. Lieucetia Swain will still be producing these.

Jill Clinton and Dr. Pleso worked together to update the Board calendar for 2019-20 and reviewed it with the Board. We discovered a few typos and will ask Megan to correct these and have updated calendars ready for the August Board meeting.

The staff and parent surveys from 2018/19 are complete. Becky Uppercue was able to put together a report just prior to the meeting date and we were able to review it at length, as outlined in the Personnel Committee report here. Jill will include a copy of this summary in the next Board package for the district.

Tom Hockensmith worked to take the data and responses from the surveys to distill into the draft of Dr. Pleso's evaluation. The Board met in Executive Session to review it and worked together to craft new goals to be included. When the evaluation is finalized, the Personnel committee will meet with Dr. Pleso for her review and signature before the August Board meeting.

The updates to the Student/Parent handbook are in progress proposed changes will be included in the August consent agenda.

Jill and Dr. Pleso have set up a meeting to review and approve the PDE report.

Jill reached out to Jesse Bean at Charter Choices to get clarity on our newest Board member, Shanin Caplener's, deadline to complete the Act 55 training. While he reported back that she has a year from now to complete this, Jill encouraged her to do it sooner, as it will be very useful to her term on the Board.

The next Finance Committee meeting is August 21st. Jill mentioned that there won't be Governance Committee or Executive Committee meetings in August.

Jill proposed that Dr. Pleso and the school join the American Montessori Society. Jesse agreed that while he doesn't have personal experience with the organization, his research suggested this would be a net positive for GMCS. Dr. Pleso was familiar with AMS as she had used some of their training courses for staff in the past and was happy to see that they are now open to accepting charter Montessori schools. The cost is somewhat prohibitive at around \$3,600, but Dr. Pleso will consider it. The program offers extensive resources for the school and staff in terms of marketing, networking, training, certifications, and other resources that would help the school in several different areas. It would also please families that urge the school to be more "Montessori." The Board discussed the opportunity and would be happy to see the school join.

Jill also requested a spreadsheet for the Board to use a reference that outlines starting salaries for teacher aides, aides with teaching certifications, teachers, and teachers with additional certification or degrees. She suggested that Dr. Pleso may or may not want to also include starting salaries for specials teachers, RtI and Special Ed staff, and administrative staff. Dr. Pleso said she will bring this to the August meeting.

Jill is working on the Annual Report. She will reach out to Jesse to have the data from Charter Choices updated and then will meeting with Dr. Pleso and Diana Williams to go over next steps in getting the report completed by the end of August.

Administrator's Report

Current enrollment stands at 230, down from 231, for the 2019-2020 school year.

Dr. Pleso reported that the year-end budget review will be complete by next week. The Finance committee will discuss this and present this, along with long-term budget priorities, at the August Board meeting.

The process of re-vamping the school's website is underway, a project that will take several months to complete, but she will have the bulk of it completed before school starts.

The Robert C. Hoffman Charitable Endowment Trust contacted Dr. Pleso to inform her they have made the rare decision to increase the amount of our grant from \$15,000 to \$18,000, the amount we originally requested for books for our new library. Dr. Pleso is working with them to allow for a delayed purchase of the books, coinciding with the library's opening in August 2021. Shanin Caplener has offered to craft a press release and send it to the *Gettysburg Times*.

Celebrate Gettysburg has asked Dr. Pleso to be on the cover of the August/September issue as an area expert in education. They will also be interviewing her regarding unique education opportunities in the area. This will be Dr. Pleso's second cover appearance in the magazine!

Dr. Pleso presented two proposed policy changes – one in the area of Evaluations, Reevaluations, and Independent Evaluations and the other in the area of Instruction Conducted in the Home and Homebound Instruction. These were discussed and will be added to the August meeting agenda for approval.

Dr. Pleso also made several minor student/parent handbook changes which will be included in the August consent agenda.

Dr. Pleso has received positive feedback from the first week of the inaugural academic summer camp which is currently underway, including incoming students being introduced into a school atmosphere and teachers being able to assess who will need extra support in the coming school year.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Chelsy Rodgers, Hannah Hood, and Courtney Seitz as classroom teacher's assistants. Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the hiring of Chelsy Rodgers, Hannah Hood, and Courtney Seitz at \$17/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Lisa Rufalo as a classroom teacher's assistant. Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the hiring of Lisa Rufalo at \$20/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Stephanie Crater as a long-term substitute in Kindergarten beginning August 5th. She will eventually transition to part-time RtI learning support. Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the hiring of Stephanie Crater at \$125/day for the substitute position. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the hiring of Stephanie Crater and Brittany Perry at \$25/hr for less than 30 hours, with no benefits, for the RtI learning support positions. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

These learning support positions had been put on hold in June, but Dr. Pleso decided to move forward based on the needs of the incoming IEP students.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Sierra Boehner as a PE/Health Teacher. Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the hiring of Sierra Boehner at \$25/hr, less than 30 hours, with no benefits. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

The flyer Dr. Pleso created for *The Merchandiser* has gone out, along with an editorial article about the school. Rose Thornberry reported receiving it at her home.

Finance Committee

According to last year's budget, the school brought in over \$200,000 beyond what was budgeted. The school's total current assets of \$993,053.89 with \$65,867.12 in total accounts payable. We have \$714,000 on hand in checking as of the end of June and we still have over \$200,000 in receivables. We do owe \$65,000 in salary due to paying full time staff over the summer. This terrific financial news is due to Charter Choices' conservative estimates, particularly when is

comes to rates from sending districts, as well as Dr. Pleso's frugal fiscal choices throughout the year.

Members First has offered two loan proposals for the school to consider: Option 1 is a 25yr loan with an APR of 4.5% with \$38,000 in closing fees. Option 2 has an APR of 4.87% with \$17,000 in closing costs. Charter Choices studied the matter and determined that a minimum of 257 enrollment is needed to consistently cover the monthly payments, far less than our full capacity of 285. However, Members First requires that we keep 1.2 times more on hand than we owe them.

The Board discussed this at length and where we are with the USDA. After several contact changes at the agency and queries about our position, they have not moved from their position that they will not even consider our loan until after charter renewal is complete, a brand new requirement. In addition, they stated that any renovations to our building in the meantime will exclude us from loan consideration.

The terms offered by a commercial lender are not as favorable as a federal loan, but their requirements are less onerous and allow for a personal, local banking relationship. In addition, due to the many government requirements for application, we have completed all studies that Members First needs, except for our year-end financial report. Jill Clinton noted that we were previously in a place where no commercial bank would work with us just a few short years ago and are now in a position for significant financial support from a local banking institution.

After continued discussion amongst the Board members -with input from its Finance Committee, CEO and Business Manager – the Board recommend the selection of the Members First Federal Credit Union as the primary lender on its upcoming construction project to convert its modular classrooms to permanent space. Members First has been selected and recommended for board consideration based on the competitiveness of their rates and terms (4.5% over 25 years, first year interest-only during construction, closing fees of \$38,000) and on the overall quality of their presentation of banking services to the school. A proposed amortization schedule of the principal and interest payments on this loan has been included for Board member's consideration and was sent to the district, as well.

It is noted that the selection of Members First as the primary lender in this transaction represents a decision not to pursue USDA loan funding any further. This conclusion has been reached by school leadership and the Finance Committee based on a number of factors including prohibitive cost, time investment and the relative strength of the Members First rates.

Jill Clinton makes the motion that the Board approve the selection of Members First Federal Credit Union as its primary lender for the upcoming construction/expansion project. The Board

authorizes its CEO and Business Manager to work with the credit union to establish a date and time for loan settlement and to file the necessary documentation. Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Personnel Committee

Becky Uppercue provided a Parent Survey analysis based on 43 responses. Dr. Pleso received praise for her leadership, accessibility, and commitment to the students. The Board discussed feedback looking for a better transition into public school for 7th grade; more STEAM activities such as a science fair; a desire for expanded specials, including instruments for upper elementary students and the hope the GMCS will expand to include 7th and 8th grades. Becky's summary will be included in a package to the District in August.

The Board will finalize the goals of the CEO/Principal evaluation and Tom Hockensmith will include these in the overall evaluation to present to Dr. Pleso by the end of August.

Executive Committee

Shanin Caplener made a motion to adopt the GMCS Policy on Personal Relationships, as presented at the Board of Trustees meeting on June 26th. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Rose Thornberry made a motion to adopt the policy changes and updates to the Health & Safety; Substance Abuse; and Students with Disabilities Policy. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

As mentioned in the Administrator's Report, Dr. Pleso presented policy changes to page seventy-six (76) under Evaluations, Reevaluations, and Independent Evaluations Policy and Instruction Conducted in the Home and Homebound Instruction Policy. Actions for approval at the August meeting.

Governance Committee

New Board member Ashley Reid will be sworn in at the August meeting. She has submitted all clearances and paperwork and has been recommended and voted on by the Board. She is replacing Tish Weikel, who is not seeking a second term. Ashley's term will expire in May 2021.

Jill Clinton recommended Rose Thornberry for re-election to the Board. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Jill recommended Becky Uppercue for re-election to the Board. Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Rose Thornberry recommended Jill Clinton for re-election to the Board. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

The Board will swear in the three re-elected members at the August meeting. This will be Jill's and Becky's second terms, though Rose will be eligible for a second term as she was previously finishing out that of another member. All three terms will expire in May 2021.

The Board will also elect officers at the August meeting, as well as determine a meeting schedule for the Board and committees. Committees will also be formed at the August meeting.

Building Committee

Jamie Unkefer, our architect with Digsau, proposed moving the building timeline up slightly, and they now plan to break ground in spring of 2020. Charrettes (design-related brainstorming sessions involving all stakeholders) will also be planned in the spring, to take advantage of student and family feedback while school is in session.

Advertising for the project manager will begin in May now, rather than waiting until the summer months.

New Business; for the good of the order

None

Public Comment

Ashley Reid notified the board she has created a Facebook page for GMCS parents. The board had a lengthy discussion and decided that the Facebook page will be combined with Becky Uppercue's page and they will both be administrators. The page will not represent the school or be affiliated in any way. Dr. Pleso will check with the school's attorney on the propriety of a Board member administering a social media page referencing the school.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Jill Clinton at 7:48pm.

Approved:



Rose Thornberry, Secretary