

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School
Board of Trustees Official Minutes
September 26, 2019**

Board Members Present

Tom Hockensmith, Chair
Rose Thornberry, Vice Chair
Jill Clinton, Secretary
Becky Uppercue, Treasurer
Shanin Caplener, Member, at-large
Ashley Reid, Member, at-large
Diana Williams, Member, at-large

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO
Keri Bechtel, 2/3 Grade Teacher
Leigh Gugliette, Head Executive Assistant

Executive Session

The Board met for executive session at 5:47pm to discuss employee and student-related issues, which if conducted in public would violate a lawful privilege or would lead to a disclosure of information confidentially protected by law. Dr. Pleso was invited to join the Board in Executive session to discuss these matters. Executive session closed at 6:00pm.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:03pm. Introductions were made.

Public Comment on Agenda Items

No comment

Old Business

No old business

Approval of Consent Agenda

Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the consent agenda as submitted. Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Adminstrator's Report

Current enrollment remains steady at 239 for the 2019-2020 school year.

Dr. Pleso presented two changes in current policies: a move to change the title of on policy from “Title 1 Parental Involvement Policy” to “Title 1 Parental Engagement Policy” and an addition to the Related Services policy which would include “...provided at no cost to families.” These changes were briefly discussed by the Board and will be put on the agenda for a vote in October.

Keri Bechtel, a 3/4 grade teacher, made a presentation on a new science curriculum she is going to use this year. This is the first year a third 3/4 class has been added and Keri has taken on the science and social studies piece of the curriculum for all of the grade band’s students. The science program she has chosen is called ‘PhD Science/Great Minds’ and her assessment, along with Dr. Pleso’s, is that it is a strong, hands-on program with a vigorous writing piece and other elements that make it a good fit with our overall Montessori philosophy. It emphasizes collaborative learning, making detailed observations, and logging (writing) observations, hypotheses, and experiments. Keri also believes that it dovetails nicely with our Wonders curriculum and Eureka math curriculum.

The Board members engaged in a brief discussion about the new program. Jill Clinton asked if there were plans to roll this out to the other grade bands next year or sooner. Dr. Pleso said this is a trial period and there will be plans to include other grades next year if this program proves fruitful.

In addition, Keri reported that she’ll be spearheading the school-wide, first-ever science fair in the spring. Through ‘PhD Science/Great Minds’ she plans to assign a science project for 3/4. It will be mandatory for 5/6 as well.

In all, the cost of the new program was \$2,800 for the science experiments, building kits, and associated books. Keri did not purchase the traditional, standard textbooks in favor of more hands-on STEM learning involving experimentation, trial and error, and building-based learning, pulling from all other areas of the 3/4 curriculum.

Shanin Caplener has reported resistance from the Gettysburg Times when submitting her press release about our Robert C. Hoffman Charitable Endowment Trust award and its rare decision in August 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 offered to help her get some kind of response through her contacts. If nothing looks promising by the October meeting, Shanin will move on.

The October newsletter content is due October 24th. Jill Clinton has some ideas about submissions and will run them by Tom Hockensmith and Dr. Pleso. She will work with Becky Uppercue after the next Board meeting to reach out to Lieucetia Swain and get this done.

Dr. Pleso reported that the Speech Language Pathologist that we contract with through the LIU, Rebecca Kane, has been removed from our school and placed elsewhere. The LIU has been unable to find a replacement for us after making these changes so late in the summer, so Dr. Pleso and Becky Black have worked to find an adequate temporary program for the numerous students needing speech services until the LIU can find a replacement for GMCS. Until then, Becky will be overseeing a Skype-style service called Teach Speech that will involve a live video conference with a Speech Language Pathologist and the applicable students in Becky's office throughout the day. Jill Clinton noted this was certainly not ideal and we should continue to pressure the LIU to provide us with a regularly scheduled SLP as soon as possible.

Dr. Pleso would like to amend our rules on 'excused education trip' days. She believes some families are taking advantage of this informal policy and it is hurting the school's position with the state, which is monitoring student absences more closely than ever. Dr. Pleso spoke with the school's attorney, Kathy Nagel, who told her that the amount of days we allocate to 'excused education trip' days (currently five) is at our discretion. Dr. Pleso plans to change the amount of days to three. In addition, she will not allow these excused absences to occur during the first week of school and will require a two-week advanced notice before approving them. Dr. Pleso will make these changes in the Parent/Student Handbook.

Leigh Gugliette, Head Executive Assistant at GMCS, presented an overview of our PIMS (Pennsylvania Instructional Management System) data collection system. Unlike most elementary schools who have an administrative district office to manage all of the data collection and reporting for their schools, Leigh is solely responsible for those tasks at GMCS. She showed the Board her calendar, filled with myriad due dates, as well as her student spreadsheets that have well over 200 fields. She also showed examples of the enrollment and district transfer spreadsheets she manages. Leigh is also responsible for dealing with the state to create IDs for students that come to the school without them already set up. All of her duties involve meticulous collection, organization, reporting, and computer skills combined with the responsibilities of properly tracking, updating, managing, and reporting an almost overwhelming amount of data to the district and state.

Leigh also presented to the Board the results of the 2018-19 Safe Schools Report that she puts together. This report for the state tracks any incidents that happen at the school effecting student and staff safety over the course of the school year. GMCS had 12 incidents of truancy and 17 out-of-school suspensions in 2018-19.

The Board members expressed their appreciation for the vast amount of data the Leigh manages. Rose Thornberry asked Leigh if there was a 'succession' plan in place should Leigh need a leave of absence or otherwise leave GMCS' employment. This was discussed at length and Tom Hockensmith stressed the need for there to be a 'cheat sheet' of some kind created for other

GMCS administrators to have should the circumstances arise – phone numbers, helplines, websites, passwords, calendars/due dates, and an outline of the basics so that someone unfamiliar with Leigh’s job might be able to jump in and help meet key state reporting deadlines and know how access and retrieve/input data into our data management system. Leigh offered to start work on a document that we can have on hand.

The Board had requested at a previous meeting that Dr. Pleso prepare a baseline salary worksheet so that all base pay rates for each type of job at GMCS is outlined for the Board to use as a reference and for future members and administrators have to use as a guideline when hiring. Dr. Pleso presented this document, it was included in the district package of documents this month, and we briefly discussed it at the meeting. Members thanked her for such a clear, helpful outline. Jill Clinton asked if Dr. Pleso could direct Megan Parks to upload this as a stand-alone document in Dropbox. Tom Hockensmith said that he would follow up with that, as well.

Becky Uppercue met with Melissa Ring, who was our parent representative to the state’s SPAC Title 1 conference over the summer, to gather some detailed information about what she learned there. Becky reported to the Board that Melissa attended several classes, including one about strategies to improve PSSA scores through an interactive study process and school-wide game. She was provided with a complete guide to the implementing this program, which Melissa gave to Dr. Pleso. Melissa also shared with Becky info on the best class she attended, which revealed how important regular cardio exercise throughout the day is for enhancing active student learning and long-term memory. The instructors suggested that after 17 minutes of seated learning, the students would benefit from brief, vigorous exercise to re-engage the brain and prevent it from starting to go into ‘rest’ mode. This will also help students retain and store the information they have learned and promote continued learning throughout the day. Through examples, Melissa was able to see and feel the benefits and believes this could work very well in the Montessori classroom. The instructors also recommended yoga, which is a practice GMCS has embraced. They went on to emphasize games with balls (catching, throwing, rolling) as well as singing, jumping, and standing on one foot as a way to practice crossing-the-midline exercises, which are important to the brain development, learning retention, fluency, and reading readiness. These skills made a significant difference for students with learning delays.

Melissa also shared with Becky that there was a recurring theme at the conference about social media and how to get parents involved using these tools to promote school activities, connect parents to resources, and create community involvement. She also told Becky about resources she learned about in a class that help motivate the home learning process, particularly for challenging students. They brainstormed ideas about a GMCS presentation for families that included organizational tips to help overcome the challenges of working with challenging kids at home. One specific tip was the use of audiobooks, which may seem counterintuitive, but

Melissa learned that is one way to increase students' literacy and even speech skills independent of caregivers.

Finally, Melissa passed along several ideas for parent, teacher, and administration collaboration, including reading a collective book as a school and participating in a school-wide activity related to the book as well as a program available via grant for Title 1 schools called "ThinkStretch." This was recommended for helping to bridge the summer learning gap and could be easily incorporated into our summer academic camp. The Board offered its thanks to Melissa for attending the conference and coming back with such a thorough review of the concepts and ideas presented there. Members felt that several of these could be implemented in a modified way to benefit our students.

Dr. Pleso recommended adjusting Kim Barber's rate to \$20/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits. This increase is due to Kim, working as Mrs. Stough's 3/4 grade classroom teacher's assistant, holding a Master's degree. Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the rate increase for Kim Barber to \$20/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Jamie Farris, Tiffany Schetter, and Shauna Wolfley as personal care assistants in Mrs. Lawrence/Mrs. Perry's classroom, Mrs. Lansford's classroom, and as a floater in the 3/4 grade band. Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the hiring of Jamie Farris, Tiffany Schetter, and Shauna Wolfley at \$14.50/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits. Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

Report of the Chair

Board members and Dr. Pleso continue to edit and refine the Board calendar. Jill Clinton will reach out to Megan Parks and ask her to correct these and have updated calendars ready for the October Board meeting.

The Board discussed conflicts with the advertised Board meeting date in October and agreed to move it to October 21st. Jill Clinton will advertise the rescheduling in the Gettysburg Times within the next week and forward a copy to the district in the next Board materials package.

Tom Hockensmith reminded members that they have until the end of June to complete their Act 55 training. He has completed it, as have Rose Thornberry and Shanin Caplener, but Jill Clinton, Becky Uppercue, Ashley Reid, and Diana Williams will need to do it as soon as is convenient.

Tom Hockensmith noted that there will not be an Executive committee meeting on October 24th. Becky Uppercue confirmed the next Finance committee meeting on October 16th. Jill Clinton reported that there is no need for a Governance committee meeting on October 10th.

Jill Clinton followed up with Dr. Pleso regarding GMCS joining the American Montessori Society and she confirmed that we are now a member! The organization 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. Jill noted that families will be pleased to see the school as part of a larger, official Montessori school network and would urge them to look into the incredible, user-friendly website: www.amsq.org

Rose Thornberry raised the issue of a contingency plan for Dr. Pleso. She would like to continue the search for an assistant principal as soon as possible. Dr. Pleso agreed that this was a concern for the Board and that she had spoke to Dr. Brad Sterner at the LIU, who has ties to Penn State's principal certification program. He advised that a search for an assistant principal needs to begin in earnest in March if we expect to have someone in place for the next school year. Rose urged the Board to keep this on our agenda as an ongoing discussion.

Ashley Reid inquired about the status of the generous offer made by Dick's Sporting Goods to gift GMCS with a store display in-ground basketball hoop. Dr. Pleso was grateful for the offer, but had to decline because we don't have any current way to transport and store it for now. She was also concerned about breaking ground or otherwise disturbing our current landscape before the building process begins. She would need to get a permit from Straban Township, as well as an inspection and she would prefer to wait to deal with them until it comes to our building project.

Rose Thornberry mentioned to Dr. Pleso that she would be happy to research new vendors for t-shirts for GMCS and Dr. Pleso said she would love to see whatever options Rose was able to find.

The Board engaged in a brief discussion of recent charter school rallies at the state house as the legislature has put forth new drastic proposals affecting cyber charter schools. Dr. Pleso has begun to send updates she receives via email home to families so they can stay apprised of proposed changes and urge advocacy, if necessary, as many of these new restrictions, guidelines, and changes that the legislature proposes for cyber charter schools may likely trickle down to brick-and-mortar charter schools like GMCS in the future.

Finance Committee

Becky Uppercue reports that in August, Charter Choices transferred approximately \$250,000 from our Centric Bank account to Members 1st for monthly payables: \$244,000 in Members 1st operating account and several smaller accounts are at minimums.

We have \$366,300 remaining at Centric Bank for now.

Our total checking and savings for all accounts is \$616,000.

PDE missed a 'unipay' in August and is now including it with our September payment, which is due to arrive next week. We also did not have an \$80,000 payment from GASD reflected in our August financials.

Our long-term liabilities including our primary building loan of \$887,000 (\$7226/month) and our secondary building loan of \$70,000 (\$1182/month). We still have 100% of the \$500,000 committed fund balance available for the building project.

Our net income is \$204,000 so far, since the start of the fiscal year in July. Very early days, Becky Uppercue noted, but according to Jesse Bean at Charter Choices, "We are looking good so far for the year. We will likely hit or be close to our million-dollar assets goal this year."

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring a least one more personal care assistant at \$37,649/yr as soon as possible given our current student needs. She recognizes that we very likely may need an additional one or two more PCAs.

Becky Uppercue reported that our actual budget is now not inclusive of an assistant principal, which reflects positively on the budget, so that these funds may be diverted for now. However, the Finance committee wants to assure that this goes back into the 2020-21 budget so that we can transition from LIU personnel and administrative support to an assistant principal.

Medical insurance costs came in at \$280,000 versus the \$290,000 we had budgeted, adding to the budget surplus.

Dr. Pleso shared the new rate table she created for the Board with the Finance committee, which breaks down pay rates for GMCS staff, to be used as a guideline and filed for future use.

Becky Uppercue mentioned a brief discussion the Finance committee had regarding new state legislation that says if school districts do not make timely payments to charter schools, the schools may involve PDE to seek out the funds owed, but will take a portion for their administrative efforts on the charter schools' behalf. Essentially, Becky reports, charter schools will be penalized if districts don't pay their negotiated rates. Our worst case scenario if GMCS needed to utilize PDE to seek out payments from all 17 sending districts on a monthly basis would amount to approximately \$3,000/yr.

Personnel Committee

Nothing new to report.

Executive Committee

Nothing new to report.

Governance Committee

Jill Clinton reports that as there is now a full Board with terms not expiring until May 2020, there was not a need for a meeting on September 12th. She said there will also not be meetings through the end of the year unless necessary. Recruitment will need to begin in earnest in the beginning of the year. She will likely write an appeal for interested parties in the newsletter that prints in January. She also mentioned that she is touching base with two parents who expressed interest in joining the Board in the last couple of months.

Building Committee

Meetings with our architect, Jamie Unkefer, of Digsau, will begin again on October 1st. There will be a financial-based meeting at 10:00am followed by a design-based meeting at 11:00am. This more general second meeting will also update the timeline. Monthly meetings will likely follow into the new year.

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

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 8:10pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary