

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School
Board of Trustees Official Minutes
October 21, 2019**

Board Members Present

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

Board Members Absent

Ashley Reid, Member, at-large (family emergency)

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO
Loren Householder, Reading RtI Learning Support
Jesse Bean, Charter Choices

Executive Session

The Board met for Executive session at 5:21pm to discuss an employee-related matter, which if conducted in public would violate a lawful privilege or would lead to a disclosure of information confidentially protected by law. Kathy Nagle, Conrad & O'Brien attorney representing GMCS, and Jesse Bean of Charter Choices were invited to join the Board in Executive session to discuss this matter. Dr. Faye Pleso was invited to join the Executive session at 6:04pm 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. Executive session closed at 6:10pm.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:12pm. 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.

Finance Committee

The current budget was distributed and Tom Hockensmith said he would be forwarding the September financials because they arrived too late to be distributed to members, due to the Board meeting being moved up to October 21st. They will also be included with the October financials in the next package that goes to the GASD in mid-November.

Jesse Bean, our business manager from Charter Choices, gave an overview of our monthly financials and background on what specific line items are for the edification of newer Board members. Discussions were focused on the balance sheet and profit-and-loss reports.

Jesse explained that the 'current ratio' is our ability to pay our bills (similar to a debt-to-income ratio that banks look at when applying for a loan) went up significantly from June-September due to retained earnings.

In the 'days cash on hand' (funds used to pay our bills, but not including savings), we are at a lower margin, 71 days, because we recently transferred money from checking to savings. This is expected to improve, and Jesse would like to see it back to 90-100+.

Total checking and savings (including both Centric and Member 1st accounts) was \$725k at the end of September.

Several school districts still owe us \$238k from the 2018-19 school year. The filing deadline for reconciling these discrepancies was October 1st, so payments should start coming in to us over the next several weeks. For the school year 2019-20, school districts still owe us \$282k. We have been billing them at the 2018-19 rates, but Charter Choices believes that higher rates will be approved by most of our 17 sending districts.

Net income for thus far for the 2019-20 school year was \$303k and, when added to the \$800k fund balance we have already, positions us very favorably. This is due to conservative budgeting and spending, but Jesse also noted that personnel costs are running significantly lower due to budgeted positions that have not been filled yet, such as the assistant principal position. Approximately \$84k is not being utilized as budgeted as of the end of September.

Dr. Pleso would like us to have a Fund Balance policy. Jesse can provide the Board and Kathy Nagle with some language we can use to craft the policy. Dr. Pleso thinks that the auditors may

want a documented paper trail, though she thinks that what we have currently is sufficient – but we may want to have a standing policy.

Jesse led a discussion on Governor Wolf's proposition to significantly change special education funding for charter schools. This would begin with cyber charters, but information has leaked from the governor's office that they will be targeting brick-and-mortar charter schools with these proposed changes as well.

Governor Wolf is proposing that special education students be funded at a multiplier of 1.5, compared to regular education students. Currently districts budget based on weighted averages. For example, GMCS receives an average of \$11k per each regular education student and \$25k per each special education student. This number would shrink to \$17k, significantly impacting GMCS, which currently has 39 special education students. The effects on the school would be completely devastating and accomplish a Wolf administration goal of discouraging current charter schools from remaining open and others from forming

The worst potential outcomes for GMCS would result in a loss of total funding of \$290k (or approximately \$8k per special education student) for the 2019-20 school year. Jesse believes that this is an ambitious, overreaching starting point to begin negotiations to lower funding for special education students attending charter schools. Advocacy groups and some legislators are proposing a bi-partisan funding committee or commission to examine the issue.

The budget is essentially balancing out similarly with a few minor changes, mostly related to staffing and salaries. It changed from \$151k to \$161k budgeted net income. Dr. Pleso will talk with Michael Snyder at Charter Choices to discuss specific numbers on the revised budget and will plan to present it at the November meeting for the Board to vote on.

Dr. Pleso noted that she has added one PCA to the staff and increased the hours for RtI teacher, Julie Rawlicki, though they are still under 30/per week. She also explained that the LIU line items have increased due to the broader scope of work being done by Dr. Brad Sterner, including instructional coaching and other support the LIU is providing this year.

Adminstrator's Report

Current enrollment dipped to 235 as of October 9th. Kindergarten has 38 students; 1st/2nd grade has 79; 3rd/4th has 73; and 5th/6th has 45.

In September, 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." Jill Clinton made a motion to change the language in the 'Title 1 Parental

Involvement” policy to “Title 1 Engagement” policy and Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote. Becky Uppercue made a motion to change the language in the “Related Services” policy to include “...provided at no cost to families” and Shanin seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Loren Householder, a Learning Support (RtI) Reading teacher, presented an informal curriculum or method called “Kid Writing” to the Board. It is designed to accelerate the reading and writing skills of young learners through structured activities that help teachers individualize instruction and develop students’ phonics, spelling, and writing skills.

It includes an alphabetic principle (what we say, we can write) and includes instruction for phonics, but takes the ‘invented spelling’ approach. The philosophy behind the curriculum is that students are already writers and that the teacher is there to support them as they write stories based on their lives and interests.

With “Kid Writing,” the teacher develops a daily mini lesson based on the needs of students and provides praise and teachable moments while conferencing. The teacher also provides structure for scaffolding and helps children understand the process of sounding out words, while embracing phonetic writing. Through this method, students learn the sound/letter relationships and they see conventional writing during the teacher’s underwriting phase. This approach is also student-centered because it addresses the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, and cultural backgrounds of individual learners. It also provides for collaborative learning – students work together to stretch sounds or seek help. Loren feels that this method is highly differentiated, open-ended, and developmentally appropriate.

Since implementation in Kindergarten this year, Loren has seen remarkable early results. She is currently co-teaching this with Heather Edmond, but plans to roll it out to Brittany Lawrence’s Kindergarten class as well as 1st grade shortly.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Melanie Kansagra as a Learning Support (RtI) teacher at \$25/hr, for less than 30 hours, with no benefits, effective October 22nd. She will be working with K-6 grade and the RtI team will decide whether she will focus on Math or Reading support, depending on student needs. Becky Uppercue made the motion and Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

The first part of our Comprehensive Plan is due November 30th. There are four sections that will be addressed:

- Pro Ed Plan
- Induction Plan
- Safe & Supportive School Plan

- Student Services Requirements

Dr. Pleso need to post each of these four sections publicly for 28 days. The Board will set up the necessary vote at the November meeting. Tom Hockensmith may need to look at the PA Department of Education website and sign off on it.

The Board's assistance is not needed until March; the previously outlined sections will require the work of more staff, teachers, school counselor Christine Felicetti, and Dr. Pleso.

Dr. Pleso informed the Board that the state requires a Certified School Nurse to oversee registered nurses like Adrian Kavanaugh who do not have that particular certification. Dr. Pleso will begin interviewing a CSN who can serve as a consultant and fill that role for us.

Dr. Pleso prepared a very comprehensive job description update package for 2019-20, which has been filed in Dropbox and forwarded to the GASD.

At the last meeting, Keri Bechtel presented the new PhD Science/Great Minds curriculum to the Board and we engaged in thorough discussion. Shanin Caplener made a motion to move ahead with this science curriculum and all associated costs. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso presented the results of the Acadience Math and Reading reports, which were also forwarded to the district. This is very early data since it was collected in September, so Dr. Pleso is waiting for more comprehensive, usable data from the next assessment, but this gives the faculty benchmarks and baselines for students at the beginning of the school year.

Dr. Pleso was very impressed with some 6th grade reading scores, with a whopping 83% Reading Composite Score at-or-above benchmark! The Math Composite Score in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades was a bit concerning, with all three grades having only 36%, 33% and 36% at-or-above benchmark, respectively. 5th and 6th grade scores were more alarming, with only 34% and 19% at-or-above benchmark, respectively. Dr. Pleso reiterated that these were very early assessments and that teachers were fighting the 'summer slide' at this point. She is also addressing some support issues with more RtI learning support teachers and increasing hours for our current ones, which should help raise our scores during the next Acadience testing period.

Dr. Pleso had some good news from the American Montessori Society. Instead of the listed dues on their website, which was approximately \$3,000, they were lowered for GMCS to \$1,440 because we are a charter school. Dr. Pleso's membership is an additional \$149.

While the Board was not able to vote to approve changes to the budget at this meeting, it will be on the agenda at the November meeting or addressed at a special meeting of the Board, if

necessary. Tom Hockensmith will need to sign a printed resolution and the Board will need to approve the revised budget as presented by Jesse Bean, our business manager at Charter Choices, and by Dr. Pleso.

Report of the Chair

The next edition of “Montessori Moments” has been put to bed and should be out by the time report cards are issued in November, if not sooner.

Diana Williams will be attending the staff meeting on October 29th and Jill volunteered to cover one of the November meetings. She will let Tom Hockensmith know whether she will attend the one on November 12th or 26th meeting. Tom will cover the December 10th meeting.

Jill Clinton will follow up with Jackie Hoover in the front office to see if the binders and other materials she ordered have come in and then she can begin to put the Board manuals together. Dr. Pleso is still working to correct the Board calendar, so Jill will use an older version in the manuals for now.

Tom Hockensmith asked Dr. Pleso if she would make sure the GMCS website links to the American Montessori Society site, which is very comprehensive and would be a great resource for current and prospective families.

Dr. Pleso is still working with Shanin Caplener to craft a press release about our recent grants and plans to release it to all local press outlets in Gettysburg, Hanover, York, and Harrisburg.

Tom requested that Dr. Pleso follow up with Leigh Gugliette regarding the request the Board made for contingency documents. Leigh will be tasked with creating brief documents outlining important due dates, instructions, websites, contact numbers, and other information vital to the compliance of the school should she not be available to continue her duties.

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 October 10th. 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 next newsletter.

Building Committee

There is a tentative meeting set for October 30th, but Dr. Pleso is waiting to hear from architect Jamie Unkefer on what time he can attend before sending out invitations to stakeholders.

Dr. Pleso reports that nothing has changed in the design, but that all members of the committee were tasked with thinking about changes, including the idea that the classrooms switch wings in the new plan to accommodate bathrooms for 5th/6th grades and 3rd/4th grades and providing more storage.

Members 1st executives have met with our architect and we will be inviting our water treatment contractor, our technology contractor, a state trooper and safety consultants to attend future meetings.

Dr. Pleso will be placing an ad for an owner's rep in November and stated that she already has five or six recommendations. She is hoping to have a contractor for this position hired by January.

New Business; for the good of the order

Rose Thornberry forwarded a suggestion to Dr. Pleso for inspirational, uplifting artwork for the student bathrooms, with the idea that perhaps our 6th graders could spearhead it.

Tom Hockensmith asked Dr. Pleso for a brief overview of the recent Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools conference she attended. She mentioned that the two-day meeting was beneficial and included several relevant breakout groups and seminars.

The Board reviewed our 2019 Gettysburg Giving Spree video appeal, which started two of our upper elementary students.

Public Comment

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 8:01pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary