

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School  
Board of Trustees Official Minutes  
January 30, 2020**

**Board Members Present**

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

**Others Present**

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO

**Executive Session**

The Board met for Executive session at 6:00pm to discuss employee and student-related matters, 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 Executive session to discuss these matters. Executive session closed at 6:17pm.

**Call to Order**

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:17pm. No introductions were necessary.

**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. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

**Administrator's Report**

Enrollment remained at 237 as of January 21<sup>st</sup>. We lost two students over the last month, but had two new enrollments, including one new 6<sup>th</sup> grade student from Colorado and one 5<sup>th</sup> grade student who previously withdrew from the school and then decided to return. Per Rose

Thornberry's request, Dr. Pleso presented the Board with a new way to read enrollment data on her CEO/Principal Report, which includes a breakdown of enrollment at each grade level and comparisons with previous month's information so the Board can more easily track and compare numbers.

Dr. Pleso gave the Board an update on our search for an Owner's Representative for our building project. She is required to have three quotes and has requested bids from four companies that have been recommended by our business manager at Charter Choices, Jesse Bean; by our attorney, Kathy Nagel; or by our architecture firm, Digsau. Dr. Pleso used a spreadsheet provided by Digsau that outlined the duties of each stakeholder and she was able to highlight the ones that the Owner's Rep would be responsible for in order to give the firms an idea of the scope of the work.

Three companies, Avison Young, Northstar Museum Education, and Greyhawk, sent proposals. A fourth, Becker & Frondorf, did not submit a bid. Despite competitive pricing, Avison Young's bid did not reflect what Dr. Pleso is looking for and she did not feel that the representative she spoke to would be able to forge the relationships necessary to make this position a success for the project.

Dr. Pleso presented two final candidates' bids for consideration. Northstar Museum Education, while impressive, was by far the most expensive bid. They projected \$160,000 for the job in addition to travel expenses. We have \$62,000 budgeted for this contracted position this fiscal year.

Greyhawk, the only firm to actually visit our school and meet with Dr. Pleso during this process, submitted a bid totaling \$91,000, which does include travel expenses. The Board reviewed and discussed the bids at length and felt that Grayhawk's proposal and very extensive school project list put them in the best position to provide what we need from an Owner's Rep as we move into the next phase of our building project. Dr. Pleso found during the visit that the project manager we would be working with, Jay Appleton, has personally done many of the jobs of the contractors that he would be working with on our behalf and made a point to acknowledge the importance of relationships in the role of Owner's Rep. Greyhawk's entire portfolio and team work experience was both extensive and impressive and focused on school additions, renovation, and construction projects. In addition, Greyhawk was the least expensive bid and they provided an all-in price that included travel expenses, despite being headquartered in Mount Laurel, NJ.

After the Board deliberations, Dr. Pleso announced that she would like to hire Greyhawk. Becky Uppercue made a motion to hire Greyhawk to provide comprehensive Owner's Representative services for \$91,000 for the life of our building project. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso will draw up a contract with Greyhawk with a line for the Board chair to sign. She hopes to get them to start in February. According to Jamie Unkefer from Digsau, anytime from now until April would be the ideal time to bring on an Owner's Rep as we are currently in the Design Development phase of the project and soon to be moving into the Construction Documents phase. Jamie anticipates that this phase may be slightly sped up, so the timing now is ideal to bring on the Owner's Rep. Dr. Pleso also learned that these firms are in higher demand after winter, so it would be wise to secure a contract now.

At the December meeting of the Board, Dr. Pleso presented a proposed addition before the "Suicide Awareness, Prevention, and Response" on page 116 of the Policy manual. She would like it to read:

### **Trauma Informed Approaches**

GMCS will provide school employees and the Board of Trustees training on trauma informed approaches. The evidence-based training shall address, but shall not be limited to, the following:

1. Recognition of the signs of trauma in students.
2. Best practices for schools and classrooms regarding trauma informed approaches and using multitiered systems of support.
3. Recognition of the signs of the impact of secondary trauma.
4. Services available to connect students.

After the Board reviewed this addition, Ashley Reid made a motion to approve the addition of the "Trauma Informed Approaches" language to the policy. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

At the December meeting of the Board, revisions to the Mission/Vision/Values statements were presented and discussed.

Dr. Pleso proposed this language for our Mission statement:

*Gettysburg Montessori Charter School is a K-6 public charter that embodies the theories of Dr. Maria Montessori while promoting a multifaceted, child-centered learning environment for Gettysburg and the surrounding area. Our Montessori-trained, PA-certified teachers provide children with a dynamic and engaging education using a holistic curriculum that blends the Montessori educational philosophy and the Pennsylvania State Academic Standards. Our mission is to develop the full diversity of human intelligence while nurturing the whole child and instilling a lifelong love of learning.*

Dr. Pleso proposed this language for our Vision statement:

*Our vision is to guide, inspire, and empower children. Our goal is to give them the tools and confidence to achieve their dreams, lead meaningful lives, and make positive contributions as world citizens in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Finally, Dr. Pleso presented the proposed Values statement:

- *Hands-on learning environment*
- *Independent exploration*
- *“Whole child” learning*
- *Freedom within limits*
- *Grace and courtesy*
- *Family and community partnerships*
- *Self-regulation*
- *Mindfulness*
- *Intrinsic motivation*
- *Sensitivity, respect, and compassion*

Rose Thornberry made the motion to approve the revised Mission/Vision/Values statements as presented. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Amanda Braukus as a Teacher’s Assistant in a 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> classroom. Shanin Caplener made a motion to hire Amanda Braukus at a rate of \$17/hour for less than 30 hours per week, with no benefits, and with a hire date of 1/6/20. Jill Clinton seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso also recommended hiring Kristine Gelazela as a Breakfast and Lunch Server. Ashley Reid made a motion to hire Kristine Gelazela at a rate of \$10/hour for less than 30 hours per week, with no benefits, and with a hire date of 2/3/20. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Finally, Dr. Pleso recommended hiring Christine Kirkpatrick as an RtI Math teacher. Shanin Caplener made a motion to hire Christine Kirkpatrick at a rate of \$25/hour for less than 30 hours per week, with no benefits, and with a hire date of 1/27/20. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso presented the school’s 2018-19 PVAAS (Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment Summary) results. These are considered ‘growth results’ to be used in conjunction with our ‘achievement results’ as reported on the PA state assessments. Dr. Pleso believes our curriculum additions and changes have put us in the ‘green’ this past year, so that we are now meeting

standards for PA academic growth. The standard is met when the student group maintains its relative average achievement from one year to the next.

In grade 4 math, we were down slightly (1.2 points) last year, but still met the standard for growth. That grade is showing an even level over three years, again maintaining PA's standard for growth in math. Grade 5 was also down slightly (less than a point) last year, but was down 1.2 points over the past three years. Grade 6 showed a larger area of concern, being down 1.7 points last year, but it should be noted that this is still within the area of meeting PA's standard for academic growth. The cohort for testing in grade 6 has been too small over the past three years to provide an average for that period. Dr. Pleso noted that this should change as we continue to retain more and more sixth graders each year and that there will be third 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> classroom next year. Dr. Pleso also noted that the staff is in the process of writing our math curriculum this year, which should significantly benefit our scores next year.

In grade 4 ELA, there is some area of concern with a downward trend (down 1.2 points last year) that extends to that grade's three-year average. That score, minus 3.1, puts grade 4 in a category ('red') that shows significant evidence that the school did not meet the standard for PA academic growth. By contrast, last year's scores for grade 5 were up 1.9 points and the three-year average showed moderate evidence that the school exceeded the standard for growth (the 'blue' category). This was the highlight of the entire report, as it was our only 'blue' level category. Dr. Pleso and the Board applaud the achievements of Nicole Gulden and her grade 5 ELA students. Grade 6 saw a 1.6 point drop last year, but maintained the 'green' level and again, the student testing cohort has not been large enough to provide a three-year average for this subject in grade 6.

In science, only the grade 4 students are tested. They were up an amazing 9.3 points last year, but are still at a three-year average deficit of minus 6.1. Fortunately, even this score is enough to keep our school meeting the standard for PA academic growth in science for grade 4 last year and over the last three year. Dr. Pleso pointed out that this is the academic category poised for the biggest growth now that Keri Bechtel has taken over our grade 3/4 science curriculum and we have introduced a new program this school year.

The charter renewal process continues to move forward. Eight people representing the GASD arrived January 27<sup>th</sup> to discuss charter renewal. These included Superintendent Perrin, GASD's attorney, assistant superintendent, special education director, human resources director, business manager, and the assistant business manager. They visited the school for two hours and joined Dr. Pleso on a tour and looked at the model for our new addition. The attorney subsequently sent a long list of requests to be fulfilled by Dr. Pleso and Leigh Gugliette.

Dr. Pleso reports that she believes they will be done and present a report to the GASD Board in April, despite our current charter being in place until July. While it was an uneventful visit, we remain in stand-by mode as they continue to investigate items they would like to see from GMCS pursuant to the charter renewal.

Dr. Pleso was pleased to report to the Board that the Comprehensive Plan due date has been moved from March to April to accommodate all stakeholders. She will have another update at the February meeting.

Dr. Pleso was recently contacted by the U.S. Department of Education informing her that Aimee Viana, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, had been made aware of our Small Rural School Achievement Grant we had achieved (which helps to fund ESL instruction) and wanted to visit the school. Mrs. Viana serves as the principal advisor to the Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education on all matters related to elementary and secondary education, including grants management, data reporting and analysis, program evaluation, and technical assistance. She previously served in the Department as the Executive Director of the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics.

A visit was arranged for January 24<sup>th</sup> and Dr. Pleso invited several local and state officials to join us. For several hours, GMCS hosted Aimee Viana and her assistants; State Senator Doug Mastriano, who represents PA's 33rd district; Gettysburg Mayor Theodore Streeter; Adams County Commissioner Jim Martin; and Executive Director of the PA Coalition of Public Charter Schools, Ana Myers. All were given a tour of the school and shown the model of our new building. The guests were invited to observe classrooms and have discussions with students, parents, and faculty. They were able to hear directly how much the kids love GMCS and how special it is to our families.

This was a prestigious, exciting, and highly successful event that was covered by the Gettysburg Times, appearing with color photos on the front page of the Saturday edition. The full story of the visit was posted on their website. Dr. Pleso has also has it posted on our website and Facebook page. The event and its local coverage was a wonderful prelude to the start of our charter renewal and helped continue to raise the school's positive profile in Gettysburg. Dr. Pleso and the Board were grateful to have the support of the local officials who have long understood the importance of both school choice and Montessori education. Ana Myers had the opportunity to speak to a federal education official about the pressure charter schools are under in Pennsylvania under the current governor and his administration. She appealed for support so that proposed budget cuts for charter schools can be avoided.

Following this event, Dr. Pleso was invited to be part of a White House briefing (via conference call) during School Choice Week with Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. About 30 people from around the United States participated and discussed \$5 billion in future federal funding for school choice initiatives.

The LIU's Dr. Brad Sterner recommended that Dr. Pleso post advertising for a 2020-21 assistant principal position in early March. Dr. Pleso has worked with him on the advertising copy and is preparing to place ads with Indeed (online), Penn State University, and will investigate opportunities with the American Montessori Society. She will have an update for the Board in February.

### **Report of the Chair**

Ashley Reid is planning to go to the February 25<sup>th</sup> staff meeting. At the next Board meeting, Tom Hockensmith will see if additional Board members can attend the March and April staff meetings.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meetings are February 27<sup>th</sup> and March 26<sup>th</sup> and that our PA state required Act 55 training needs to be completed by June.

Rose Thornberry inquired about a previous Board request, that Leigh Gugliette prepare contingency documents – brief pages 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. Tom Hockensmith also revisited the Board's request for Dr. Pleso to begin formal documentation of 'succession' plans, as discussed previously. These will continue to be fleshed out and made a priority even throughout the charter renewal process and building project.

The state-mandated Trauma Informed Approach training will take place on May 14<sup>th</sup>. Christine Felicetti will have an alternative set up so that staff and Board members who cannot make it can take the training online.

Dr. Pleso reported the school was gifted with \$1,369 at Adams County's annual Giving Spree in Gettysburg, making it one of our most successful fundraisers of the year. A lot of effort went into preparing for it and the school earned far more than the previous (our first) year. Dr. Pleso said she will print the results of the Giving Spree and other fundraisers in the winter edition of "Montessori Moments."

### **Finance Committee**

Becky Uppercue distributed Statements of Financial Interest to all Board members.

According to the December financials, Becky Uppercue reported that our cash on hand decreased slightly to \$808k as the school as begun to incur costs related to construction. District receivables also decreased slightly to \$380k, but the vast majority are from the current school year. Charter Choices told Becky Uppercue at the recent Finance committee meeting that a large payment of over \$108k will arrive from the GASD by the end of January.

Our accounts payable balance is currently at \$57k and all invoices received have been paid. The accrued payroll was paid out to employees at the beginning of September, so it has been accruing monthly since then and is now at approximately \$50k.

Our local school district revenues remain slightly below budgeted figures at \$63k due to enrollment discrepancies between what GMCS has billed for (231 students) versus what was originally budgeted for (237 students).

Total personnel costs are lower at \$101k than budgeted due to the delayed hiring of several positions (some hired in November, others tbd) and savings on health insurance. Total expenses are similarly lower by \$281k than originally budgeted, due in part to building costs that have not yet come to fruition.

GMCS has used \$45k of released funds from the Committed Fund Balance toward capital improvements so far this year.

The Board voted on Dr. Pleso's recommendation for an Owner's Rep; we hope to have them in place by February or March. This will be a large expenditure that we should see reflected in the next financial report.

Jesse Bean from Charter Choices reminded the committee that we were allowed to switch from PSERS, the PA state retirement fund, which required a 32% contribution to a 403(b) savings plan. This new retirement funding option only requires a 5% contribution from the school, saving a huge amount of money.

Dr. Pleso met with Members 1<sup>st</sup> to show them our new building model provided by Digsau and to update them on the continued financial health and progress at the school. They discussed closing on our loan in June.

### **Personnel Committee**

Nothing new to report.

### **Executive Committee**

Nothing new to report.

### **Governance Committee**

Jill Clinton reports that the terms of Tom Hockensmith, Shanin Caplener, and Diana Williams will expire at the end of August. She contacted them inquire if they wish to run again and hopes to have answers by May in order to have time to recruit and vet new members if necessary. Tom

and Shanin are currently serving vacated terms, so they have two two-year terms open to them. Diana is eligible for a final two-year term.

As there is now a full Board with terms not expiring until next summer, there was not a need for a January meeting of the Governance committee and chair Jill Clinton said that there will likely not be meeting in February, as well.

### **Building Committee**

The committee met on January 22<sup>nd</sup> with Jamie and Brian from Digsau, Dr. Pleso, Adrian Kavanaugh, Nicole Gulden, Jill Clinton, and our engineering contractor, Bob Shaarah.

The team from Digsau told us that we are now entering the Design Development phase, having finished Feasibility, Financial, Team Mobilization, and the Schematic phases. The next phase will be Construction Documents. Jamie Unkefer told everyone present that this phase may be ‘sped up’ due to previous phases going very smoothly and meeting deadlines so far.

Bob Shaarah reminded the team that we are currently about 600 sq ft over where we started when Crabtree & Rohrbaugh originally drew up plans during our building move. He feels this is not enough to raise any red flags with the township and as long as we remain mindful about our impervious surfaces, we should not run into problems with permitting.

In March and April, Digsau and our contractors will submit for permitting we will need to begin construction this summer.

Jamie said any time between January and April would be the ideal time for the school to hire an Owner’s Rep. Dr. Pleso has received three bids from firms who perform these services and she plans to have a contract drawn up in February with the idea to have a company in place in February or March.

There was a lot of focus on the exterior materials. It will be a concrete clapboard and we looked at several different styles. We also talked about an exterior paint scheme for the interior courtyard – this will be a ‘wow’ factor and reflect the developmental age of our students – there was discussion of an ‘ombre’ rainbow paint scheme on the exterior walls, which could be ‘brought in’ from the outside to the library that connects the two wings.

There was also an extensive discussion of what to do with our existing space that is currently beyond the scope of work, like flooring, windows, and painting. The Digsau team asked the committee to meet and submit a ‘wish list’ for items they would like to see renovated as part of the overall project. Dr. Pleso said she would follow up ask members to submit ideas and then meet to discuss prior to forwarding to Digsau.

Dr. Pleso asked again about when we may be able to set up a presentation for families. Jamie Unkefer had originally said this could happen after the holidays, but moved the timeline to late January. Now that we have a model for families to see, he thinks that February could be a good time. Dr. Pleso also asked about what outdoor access we are going to have for a spring/summer 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Jamie outlined what he thought would be the best space to hold a gathering during early construction.

### **New Business; for the good of the order**

Dr. Pleso announced that we are no longer working with Ruth's Harvest, but that Diana Williams had reached out to Bakewell Farms (a consortium of retirees who have a grant to work with schools to tie in history, culture, and science) about partnering with GMCS to make an all-natural, three-ingredient bread and they have agreed to work with our students for a terrific learning experience that dovetails with the Montessori philosophy. Rita Engloff, Dr. Pleso, and Diana will work together to try and plan something with Bakewell Farms by the end of this school year.

Jill Clinton asked Dr. Pleso for an update on our grant writing. There has not been any work with our consultant so far this school year, but she plans to work on something after charter renewal.

Dr. Pleso touched on several upcoming events, such as a 'preschooler welcome night' as part of Kindergarten registration; a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary summer celebration; a middle school transition night; and the potential for a lottery system for registration and re-registration of students for 2020-21. There will be more information to come at the February meeting.

### **Public Comment**

None

### **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 8:07.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary