

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School**  
**Board of Trustees Official Minutes**  
**June 25, 2020**

**Board Members Present**

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

**Board Members Absent**

Diana Williams, Member, at-large

**Others Present**

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO  
Christine Kirkpatrick, Assistant Principal  
Jay Appleton, Greyhawk  
Traci Elligson, Board of Trustees member-elect

**Executive Session**

The Board met for Executive session at 5:37pm via Webex conference call to discuss several employee-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 Board in Executive session to discuss these matters. Executive session closed at 5:52pm.

**Call to Order**

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:01pm via Zoom conference call, in accordance with PA state health guidelines during the COVID-19 crisis. All information regarding public access to the meeting was advertised in the Gettysburg Times. Introductions of all attendees 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. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

### **Building Committee**

Jay Appleton from Greyhawk reports that he held the pre-bid conference and it was very well-attended, with four-to-five contractors representing the four prime trades (general, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing) there. Jay remarked that several contractors commented on the quality of our construction documents and expressed interest in bidding on our project, so he is optimistic about receiving a multitude of bids on the July 8<sup>th</sup> due date.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed the start of our project, Jay Appleton feels confident we can still meet all deadlines using a hybrid bid process, which included the Keystone Purchasing Network. While Jay expected their proposal this week, the contractor declined to bid since his brother's company will be submitting a public bid. As a result, KPN had to get another contractor, delaying the process until July 10<sup>th</sup> by which time we'll be unable to take advantage of their potentially lower bid prices.

In another minor setback, Jay Appleton reports that Straban Township has declined to preview plans, as is often done as a courtesy. This would have helped to speed up our permitting process and now, because permitting will likely be delayed, renovations to the interior of our existing building will not start June 29<sup>th</sup> as expected.

In a 'best case' scenario, Jay Appleton said that if we get terrific public bids and don't even need one from KPN, then we can go ahead and award a bid sooner and if all goes well, we may be able to start on July 20<sup>th</sup>, but even then we would really be pushing it to finish by the start of school on August 19<sup>th</sup>.

In the more likely scenario that renovations do not even start until school is in session, Jay Appleton will work to prioritize from an operational and programming standpoint when bids come in because we will not be able to do all of the needed construction while school is in session. For example, contractors will have to erect fences to limit their contact with staff and students and they will not be allowed to work in areas with students present.

Jay Appleton continues to try and get Mobilease Modular Space in NJ to give us a revised quote for removing our modular units.

### **Administrator's Report**

Dr. Pleso reports that enrollment is at 222 as of June 11<sup>th</sup> (down from 237 on May 19<sup>th</sup>) with 37 Kindergarteners; 40 1<sup>st</sup> graders 35 2<sup>nd</sup> graders; 34 3<sup>rd</sup> graders; 32 4<sup>th</sup> graders; 23 5<sup>th</sup> graders; and 21 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Dr. Pleso and the Board are concerned about the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on our enrollment numbers. There are families that are waiting to register their Kindergarteners, either weighing their options with their home districts, private schools, or home schooling depending on what the GMCS and other schools decide to do in 2020/21 with respect to traditional school, blended school, or distance learning approaches.

Dr. Pleso received two exit surveys; one family gave very positive feedback and was leaving to join middle school in their home district. Another family said that they did not like two grades in one classroom and lamented the lack of a library.

Dr. Pleso and our new assistant principal, Christine Kirkpatrick, assembled a team to do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis in May of the GMCS response to the coronavirus shutdown this spring which illuminated successes and challenges when addressing the re-opening of school in August. The team met four or five times to discuss distance learning and how to overcome challenges and make it more successful this school year. At this point, this will be part of our re-opening strategy and they identified areas to address prior to that. Christine Kirkpatrick is taking the lead on creating the Pennsylvania Phased School Reopening Health and Safety Plan. Their pre-planning through the SWOT analysis helped to more quickly and easily fill in the Health and Safety Plan template and aided in completing the more involved one for the LIU.

Board members asked about specific plans for re-opening. Jill Clinton mentioned that she particularly liked the idea of temperature checks and the separate heated tent set up so that any ill students or staff could be kept out of the building and contact with others while waiting to be picked up if necessary. Jill said she wanted to hear more about plans for ventilation in the buildings – either via HVAC or windows/doors open when possible, as well as disinfecting plans for the buildings as a whole.

Becky Uppercue asked if distancing students six feet apart is feasible in the modular classrooms and Christine Kirkpatrick said they were able to get 12 desks (24 students) in each room. Jill Clinton mentioned that each desk would require a partition between each pair of students sharing a desk. As enrollment stands now, if all students were to return for in-person instruction, there would be 18 or 19 students in each Kindergarten classroom and 22 students in each of the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grade rooms and in each of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> rooms.

Currently, there would be 25 in each of the 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> grade classrooms, but Board members noted that there are likely to be several families opting for distance learning, which should alleviate the

crowding (as it pertains to social distancing) in those classrooms. Ashley Reid expressed concern about the density in the Kindergarten rooms, but Dr. Pleso said she will revisit this issue at the July Board meeting as she and Christine Kirkpatrick get a better idea of what models the school will be offering and what families are choosing to do.

The Board held a brief discussion of the rooms and the rearrangement, movement, and removal of furniture and supplies. Jill Clinton suggested renting a POD for the year to store items. She said she would research the costs and report back to the Board in July.

Christine Kirkpatrick said that as of now, and this is subject to change based on state directives, GMCS is planning to provide in-person instruction five days a week for any enrolled students who choose that model. They are also preparing for students to choose to do distance learning five days a week and they are looking at a synchronous teaching model. This would amount to teaching in smaller 'blocks' and one (or two) teachers would teach in person, while the second (or third) teacher in the grade band would facilitate for distance learners. Christine also said she would work with any family that would like to do a blended model. Families would need to state their choices and would have to stay with them through each semester before making a change to keep things organized and avoid confusion.

In addition to cleaning and sanitizing supplies, wash stations have been ordered and child face shields have arrived. These were 3-D printed at cost by an alumni-related business. They allow for the plastic shield to be changed out should it become damaged.

Dr. Pleso is waiting to hear from the aftercare program to see if they will be running that at GMCS this year. She is not confident that they will, which will help keep the amount of people in the building lower (and for a shorter time) and help with cleaning, but it will be hardship for many GMCS families that depend on aftercare if they do not run the program this year.

Plans for our second annual two-week summer academic camps are proceeding and registration to all remains open to all Gettysburg area families. This year, they will be divided by grade with K-2<sup>nd</sup> attending the week of July 13<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> attending the week of July 20<sup>th</sup>. With Adams County remaining in the 'Green' phase of re-opening, Dr. Pleso now believes the camp weeks will be run in-person at the school, while offering distance options for interested families. A letter to families about health and safety measures, rules, and guidelines will go out prior to the start of each week. There will be temperature checks, a health questionnaire, liability agreement, mask/shield requirements, individualized snacks, personal water bottles, and social distancing. Dr. Pleso believes the academic summer camp weeks will be a pilot program for staff to learn best practices for the upcoming school year.

There may be a need to purchase more Chromebooks and tablets to facilitate needed distance learning, as well as large amount of PPP and cleaning supplies in order to fulfill the goals of the Health and Safety Plan for re-opening. Dr. Pleso said there are two sources of funding: one is the PCCAP grant, which offers \$90,000 for each charter school, and the other is the CARES Act grant, with uses a formula similar to that of the Title One program to determine the amount. For GMCS, that sum is \$26,000.

Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the Health and Safety Plan as presented. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso gave an update on her recent contact with the University of Delaware's Montessori Teaching Residency program. She is very excited to work with them to provide a new direction for our blend of public school and Montessori and better incorporate not only the Montessori philosophy, but also employ greater use of Montessori works in our curriculum. The university has partnered with the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector to instruct and certify Montessori teachers from participating schools and will help meet the unique needs of contemporary Montessori schools like ours, who must address trauma, special needs, diversity, English-language learners, family engagement, and other areas beyond what was within the purview of the traditional Montessori method.

This professional development program will take a year to re-train the staff and develop deeper levels of understanding and use of the Montessori works. While we are still in the beginning stages, Dr. Pleso is waiting for a proposal that she believes will lead to a three-year relationship.

### **Governance Committee**

Ashley Reid made a motion to appoint Traci Elligson to fill the remainder of the term vacated by Shanin Caplener. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Tom Hockensmith swore in Traci Elligson, a GMCS parent, as a member of the Board of Trustees to fill the seat vacated by Shanin Caplener. That term expires in August of 2020. Our attorney, Kathy Nagel, reported to Tom that the Board would not have to swear Traci in again at the start of her first, full term on August 27<sup>th</sup>. She will, along with other recommended candidates for open seats, need to be voted on by the Board at that meeting, however.

Jill Clinton reports that the terms of Tom Hockensmith and Diana Williams will expire at the end of August and she was happy to announce that they are both seeking new terms. For Tom, it will be his first two-year term, as he is currently filling a vacated seat. And for Diana, this will be her final two-year term, though she, too, filled a vacant seat prior to serving her first official term.

Tom Hockensmith was re-interviewed and his current clearances submitted at the June 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Governance committee. The committee's discussion lead to a decision to recommend Tom for a first two-year term on the Board, as he finishes up the term vacated by Melissa Ring. The committee's recommendation will be made at the July Board meeting. The Board will then vote on whether or not to appoint Tom to the seat on the Board. If approved, he would be sworn in at the August meeting.

Jill Clinton reported that the Governance committee will not meet on July 9<sup>th</sup>, but will meet during the scheduled August 13<sup>th</sup> meeting date. They will plan to re-interview Diana Williams and review her clearances.

Jill Clinton is working with Traci Elligson to get her the Board handbook; she will coordinate with Dr. Pleso to pick it up at the school in the coming weeks. Jill is still trying to get Shanin Caplener to return her copy of the Board handbook for Diana Williams.

### **Report of the Chair**

Tom Hockensmith announced that meetings of the Board and its committees will likely continue to be virtual via Zoom for the foreseeable future. Jill Clinton will contact the Gettysburg Times to provide public notice of the Zoom id and passwords for the next Board meeting on July 30<sup>th</sup>. He and Dr. Pleso determined it is not necessary to provide that type of public notice for the Governance and Finance committee meetings, as per our attorney, Kathy Nagel. She advised that notice of the Zoom access information for those public committee meetings need only be posted with the agenda on the school's door and on the school's website.

Tom Hockensmith asked Dr. Pleso if there was a schedule available to parents who need to contact someone at the school over the summer. She explained that administrative staff is in the building Monday, Wednesdays, and Fridays and work from home on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She said that any time a message is left on the school voicemail, Leigh Gugliette and Rebecca Yurkanin both receive an email.

Tom Hockensmith reported that he will reach out to Jesse Bean at Charter Choices to determine what the Board needs be doing for the Annual Report and if we are meeting our deadlines/timelines.

Tom Hockensmith announced all of the surveys (Parent, Staff, and Board) have been closed and he is compiling the results for the July Board meeting.

Tom Hockensmith reminded the Board that Christine Felicetti's Trauma Informed Training course is available online and all members need to complete it by the end of June.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meeting is July 30<sup>th</sup> and that our PA state required Act 55 training needs to be completed by the end of June. Diana Williams, Becky Uppercue, Ashley Reid, and now Traci Elligson need to turn their answers in to Dr. Pleso. Jill Clinton completed the training and would like the Board to discuss the idea of succession documents and plans, as well as explore the idea of an academic committee that would work with Dr. Pleso to drill down on results from the PSSAs and PA's Future Ready Index data to interpret all of the information for the Board, identify areas of improvement and concern, and ensure we are achieving our academic goals and maintaining academically rigorous standards. Jill would like to see an ongoing Board discussion about these two Act 55 ideas.

### **Finance Committee**

A Finance committee meeting was held on June 17<sup>th</sup> via conference call to review the May financial statements, which showed \$1.14 million in the school's checking and savings accounts, down about 480k since the end of April as the school begins to incur construction-related expenses and awaits district payments.

Becky Uppercue shared that district receivables are up to \$489k and that Jesse Bean from Charter Choices suspects this is because the districts are holding on to their money to see how the COVID-19 crisis plays out for them. He noted that several checks have come in over the past week, which will be reflected in the June financials (then there is typically a reconciliation process over the summer for unpaid funds).

Accounts payable balance is currently at \$71k and all invoices received have been settled.

Local school revenues now exceed YTD budget (\$119k positive variance over the past 11 months) due to conservative tuition rate estimates and the resolution of prior enrollment discrepancies (actual vs billed).

The school has utilized \$229k of released funds from its Committed Fund balance toward capital improvements (architect and owner's rep fees) so far this year.

GMCS currently shows a net income of \$501k due to conservative revenue assumptions, the achievement of ambitious enrollment targets, and the expense variances (net income last year was \$434k despite predictions that this year might be tighter due to the start of the construction process).

Becky Uppercue hoped to collect all of the SOFI forms by the end of March, but the COVID-19 crisis hampered her efforts. Tish Weikel's is now the only one still outstanding. Dr. Pleso advised Becky to document her due diligence in trying to contact her.

There were no updates to the proposed 2020/21 budget, but it has been publicly posted to the GMCS website, and the Finance committee is waiting for the Board's vote.

The new appraisal commissioned by Members 1<sup>st</sup> came in significantly higher than the first appraisal and is closer to the range the bank requires for our loan. There is now a \$266k variance. The total building project is priced at \$3.4 million and overall loan will be \$4.2 million when absorbing the current building mortgage.

As per Jesse Bean of Charter Choices, we have three options:

- 1) The Building committee will have to work with contractors on ways to reduce the costs match (ie, "value engineering").
- 2) We could get a short-term loan from Charter School Capital, which specializes in short-term bridge loans (ie, a 6 month re-payment plan from our own receivables)
- 3) We may have to spend the \$740k we currently have to start the process, with the likelihood that we will accrue additional funds by the time we owe the final \$266k – and it's likely that Members 1<sup>st</sup> will work with us (ie, open a construction draw account where we move money then pay for construction until we exhaust our 20% toward the project and the bank loan kicks in...)

A discussion of these options will be held during June and July Board meetings and at the July Finance committee meeting.

Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve the 2020-2021 budget as presented. Tom Hockensmith seconded the motion. The motion was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

### **Personnel Committee**

Tom Hockensmith expects to have initial results of the Staff survey, Parent survey, and Board survey for the Board at the July 30<sup>th</sup> meeting, but may decide to hold a Personnel committee meeting to go over the data prior to the Board meeting.

### **Executive Committee**

Nothing new to report.

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

**Public Comment**

None

**Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 7:42.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary