

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

Board Members Present

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

Board Members Absent

Shanin Caplener, Member, at-large (illness)

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO

Executive Session

The Board met for Executive session at 5:40pm 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. Executive session closed at 6:05pm.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:08pm. 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

Current enrollment remained at 235 as of November 11th, but Dr. Pleso has given four recent tours to prospective families and two have enrolled their students in Kindergarten and 1st grade.

Loren Householder, a Learning Support (RtI) Reading teacher, presented an informal curriculum or method called “Kid Writing” to the Board at the October meeting. 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 has proved fruitful during the initial roll out to Kindergarteners.

Rose Thornberry made a motion to approve the Kid Writing curriculum and associated costs for Kindergarten and 1st grade. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso updated the Board on the Comprehensive Plan, which is done every three years. It is due to be revamped this year, but instead of all 35 sections needing to be done by November 30th, only four sections are due on that date. The rest will be due in March. The first part due November 30th include these four sections that will be addressed:

- Professional Education Plan
- Induction Plan
- Safe & Supportive School Plan
- Updated Assurances for Chapters 12 & 14

Dr. Pleso has already identified a language change that is needed on page six in the “Health & Safety” area under the “Safe & Supportive School Plan” section. It should include information that our school nurse, Adrian Kavanaugh, has received her emergency certification to act as our Certified School Nurse temporarily, until a permanent CSN is hired, as required by state law.

Dr. Pleso has posted these four sections publicly for 28 days. Becky Uppercue made a motion to approve these four sections of the Comprehensive Plan, as presented by Dr. Pleso. Rose Thornberry seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso presented a proposed Fund Balance policy for the Board’s review. It would serve as recognition that the maintenance of a fund balance (defined as a measurement of available financial resources – the difference between total assets and total liabilities in each fund) is essential to the preservation of the financial integrity of the school and is fiscally advantageous for both the school and the taxpayer. The goal is to use an excess fund balance for nonrecurring expenditures, not for normal operating costs. The restricted fund balance (amounts limited by external parties or legislation, such as grants or certain debts) will be reduced to the extent that the underlying reason for the restriction has been eliminated.

The policy proposal also sets forth the order in which the fund balance would be consumed, should the school experience more expenditures than revenues in a given fiscal year. The order would be:

1. Restricted fund balance to the extent that the expenditures related to the restriction contributed to the excess of expenditures over revenues.
2. Committed fund balance (these are amounts limited by Board policy or Board action – which must be taken by the Board in order to commit the fund balance for the designated purpose prior to the end of the fiscal year) to the extent that the expenditures related to the commitment contributed to the excess of expenditures over revenues. If a plan for the periodic use of the committed fund balance is reviewed and approved by the Board, the committed fund balance will not be reduced by more than the amount designated in the plan.
3. Assigned fund balance (these are amounts intended for a particular purpose, such as a capital/building project) to the extent that the expenditures related to the assignment contributed to the excess of expenditures and revenues.
4. Unassigned fund balance (amounts available for consumption and not restricted in any way) for any remaining excess of expenditures over revenues.
5. The Board may elect to consume unassigned fund balance prior to restricted, committed, or assigned fund balance.

The Board consensus was that this is a positive step and will add it to the December meeting agenda for a vote.

Dr. Pleso presented the first Future Ready PA Index report to the Board. The Board reviewed the 2019 data and also had the 2018 data for comparison. While the data is collected quite early in the school year, there were several areas of concern within the “Proficient or Advanced” categories on the PA State Assessment tests, such as all student groups not meeting interim goal/improvement targets in ELA/Literature – but Dr. Pleso pointed out that our trend is the same or increasing, not decreasing in this area. Our percentage proficient or advanced is 57%, while the statewide average is 62%. Similarly, in the Mathematics/Algebra category, we are trending upward, although all student groups did not meet interim goal/improvement targets. Our percentage proficient or advanced is 36%, while the statewide average is 45%. Science/Biology results were more promising, because our students met or exceeded the interim target and were trending upward from there. Our percentage proficient or advanced is 69%, while the statewide average is 66%.

We have 17% of students testing as “Advanced” in ELA/Literature and 10% in Math/Algebra. The statewide average in both areas is 18%. However, the statewide average is 30% in Science/Biology, we have over 41% of students testing as “Advanced.” This prompted a discussion about support for Gifted & Talented students. This is an area that Dr. Pleso is exploring and she is looking to provide more testing and resources to identify and support these students in 2020-21.

Moving away from the state assessments, in the umbrella category of “Meeting Annual Academic Growth Expectations,” we fared much better. Our academic growth score is 73% in ELA/Literature, just shy of the statewide average of 75%. Similarly, our Math/Algebra academic growth score is 70%, just short of the statewide average of 75%. We are trending upward in both areas and have shown marked improvement in Math/Algebra since 2018. We also exceeded the statewide average of 75% in Science/Biology with a score of 77%.

In other testing areas, we have seen significant improvement in regular attendance, with over 87% versus the statewide average of 86%. Dr. Pleso attributes this to better systems and communication put in place to track and monitor student attendance.

In a final area of interest, the state tests college and career measures, setting a career standards benchmark. The statewide average is 90% and we scored a 100%. The state now requires each student to have a portfolio with two new activities or components each year related to career exploration and interests, so we meet this requirement with our annual career day and other areas of instruction by school counselor Christine Felicetti.

Dr. Pleso informed the Board that the LIU has still not replaced our Speech Language Pathologist. She has become increasingly dissatisfied with Teach Speech’s services and has reached out to IU13 to see if they can provide similar virtual speech services, while we wait for the LIU to hire a new SLP. Dr. Pleso notes that while we are still in compliance with IEPs, we will double up on services when someone comes on board, hopefully in December.

The Comprehensive Plan committee continues to work with Dr. Pleso to develop and refine our Mission, Vision, and Values Statement. This needs to be finalized and reviewed by March as part of the Comprehensive Plan. The Committee is currently fine-tuning it and making it consistent across all formats. Dr. Pleso is planning to present it to the Board in December or January.

School Counselor Christine Felicetti has put together a training for staff and the Board on “Trauma-Informed Approaches” meant to comply with Act 144. The training will take place at the school on January 7th from 3:30pm-5:00pm. Dr. Pleso will talk to Christine about potentially offering the training on an additional day and/or setting up the training on YouTube or another platform for those who cannot be there due to scheduling conflicts.

The Board has also decided to invite Christine Felicetti to the next Board meeting to present some of the data she has collected, as well as an overview of her curriculum when teaching Guidance in the classroom. Dr. Pleso will coordinate with Christine to ensure she can attend on December 19th.

Dr. Pleso is wrapping up the financial audit and currently working on a procurement audit for the federal government. She has outlined the school's process in a Procurement Transaction Procedures document which requires the CEO to, in all cases, identify needs and then select the method of purchase: Micro-Purchase, Informal or Formal.

- **Micro-Purchase** – if goods/supplies or services are less than \$10k.
 1. No quotes are required but compare prices from three different vendors
 2. Consider the price to be reasonable
 3. Distribute equitably among suppliers if practical
 4. Use small, minority-owned or women-owned businesses and labor surplus firms if possible
- **Informal Procurement** – if goods/supplies are between \$10k-\$20,100 or if services are between \$10k and \$249,999
 1. Obtain at least three documented quotes
 2. If three vendors do not exist, we may go with fewer, but this should be documented
 3. Another option is to go through COSTARS
 4. Use small, minority-owned or women-owned businesses and labor surplus firms if possible
- **Formal Procurement (Sealed Bids)** – if goods/supplies are more than \$20,100
 1. Advertise for sealed bids in two major newspapers for three weeks
 2. Contract is awarded to the bidder with the lowest, firm, fixed price
 3. Manage contract
 4. Another option is to go through COSTARS
- **Formal Procurement (Competitive Proposals)** – for services more than \$250k
 1. Advertise for Request for Proposals in two major newspapers for three weeks
 2. The price is not the sole selection factor...consider experience, technical resources, and past performance
 3. Post on GMCS website the evaluation method for scoring competitors
 4. Oversee contractor for performance, according to the terms, conditions, and specifications of contract

Non-competitive Proposals (Fixed Price or Cost-Reimbursement) can occur: if in a public emergency; available only from a single source; if inadequate competition; or if awarding or pass-through agency authorizes it; in response to a written request from GMCS.

In reviewing these procedures, Dr. Pleso found that our food service vendor, Michelle Michaels Catering, had an expired license. It had been in place when we first contracted with them, but it had since not been renewed. The owner has now re-applied through the Division of Food and Nutrition in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Pleso has begun the charter renewal process. She met with Superintendent Perrin of the GASD, who is an expert in charter renewals. He explained to Dr. Pleso that he has overseen approximately 16 charter renewals through his work at Penn State. He met with Dr. Pleso to outline our next steps and gave her reports and applicable paperwork. He told her it will be essentially the same process that VIDA just successfully completed. There are no set rules for charter renewal, but Dr. Pleso feels we are fortunate to be working with Dr. Perrin because he set so many of the guidelines while at Penn State.

There are seven sections to charter renewal and the Board was pleased to learn that Dr. Pleso and her team are already on the fifth section. Dr. Perrin may return to GMCS – possibly as early as January - with as many as six people from the GASD to take our prepared materials. Dr. Pleso expects a letter announcing this to arrive in December.

Report of the Chair

The November staff meeting has been canceled and Tom Hockensmith plans to attend the December one on the 10th. Jill Clinton will attend the January staff meeting.

Jill Clinton reports that the Board manuals are nearly done (she is waiting on some pocket pages on order with Jackie Hoover) and she will have them ready for the December Board meeting. She will also add her member terms document and an updated Board calendar to the binders.

The Finance committee meeting is on December 11th, with an agenda due on December 4th. The Executive committee meetings have been canceled for November and December and will resume on the posted date of January 30th.

Tom Hockensmith noted the upcoming 10th anniversary of GMCS and Dr. Pleso added that next year is also Maria Montessori's 150th birthday. We discussed forming a committee to explore celebration ideas, including a summer party and alumni reunion.

Tom Hockensmith announced that we will be voting on the revised budget in December. This needs to be posted publicly for at least 30 days.

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.

Tom Hockensmith requested that Dr. Pleso follow up with Leigh Gugliette regarding the request the Board made for contingency documents. While this may take longer than anticipated due to her extensive work on charter renewal, 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. Tom 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.

Finance Committee

Becky Uppercue reports that GMCS currently has a net income of \$219k due to conservative revenue assumptions and the negative expense variances mentioned in past minutes. In addition, Jesse Bean of Charter Choices reports that we have received \$100k from GASD and several smaller checks from other districts in the past week. These will be reflected in the November financials.

We have \$254k in checking, with approximately \$403k in savings accounts and \$549k in district receivables. We currently hold approximately \$1.1 million in assets.

Our assets-to-liability ratio is currently 10:3, even better than last month when it was 11:9, putting us in a very good financial position.

The local school district revenues are below (\$55k) YTD budgeted figures due to discrepancies between billed (216) versus budgeted (237) enrollment. These must be resolved to ensure that the school receives all of its revenue in a timely fashion. Dr. Pleso has asked Dave at Charter Choices to send a detailed list of exactly who has been billed. She said she will get to the bottom of the discrepancy with Leigh Gugliette's assistance.

Our total personnel costs are lower (\$77k) than budgeted due to several funded positions that have not yet been filled. Total expenses are also lower (\$133k) than budgeted due to the seasonality of costs.

GMCS currently shows a net income of \$219k due to conservative revenue assumptions and the negative expense variances mentioned above.

Becky Uppercue also reported that we are running about \$65k ahead of budget YTD and still have \$500k in our committed fund balance for the building project, however we are starting to utilize those funds this month to pay Digsau, our architecture firm.

Dr. Pleso has been working on a contingency plan in the event of an emergency need for funding that involves Charter School Capital, which is a factoring company – a business that provides cash advances to organizations (in this case, charter schools) at a high interest rate. While we do not plan to use them, if we experienced an unforeseen event that required immediate additional funds, Dr. Pleso feels that it is wise to be set up with them ahead of time.

Dr. Pleso questioned Jesse Bean from Charter Choices about the possibility of us having to draw from the PSERS fund if the current wave of state legislative charter school reform negatively impacts us. Jesse indicated that it is very unlikely for us to be substantially affected in the short term and that the federal government would also be involved because each state has different pension laws. Jesse also pointed out that the “cyber” charter schools are currently being targeted and are at the most risk of being hit. Becky Uppercue agreed that this was the overall sense she got when attending the recent Pennsylvania Department of Education committee hearing on October 22nd.

Becky Uppercue reports that GMCS will pay out \$214k to Digsau for the 2019-20 fiscal year. We had budgeted \$176k, so we are off significantly (\$38k), however we also budgeted another \$260k that was not assigned, so we can use this to cover the shortfall. She notes that we will need to have a designated architect line in the 2020-21 budget for \$66k to cover our remaining balance with Digsau.

Dr. Pleso acknowledged that we have not been approving Financial committee meeting minutes, as meetings prior to November 2018 had only one Board member present and thus did not require formal minutes. As a result, the committee fell out of the good practice of taking minutes (though detailed notes were outlined in each month’s Board meeting minutes), but that has been rectified and will be maintained consistently going forward.

Dr. Pleso, Diana Williams, and committee chair Becky Uppercue reviewed the minutes from prior meetings and Becky made a motion to approve the minutes from prior meetings on November 28, 2018 and the following dates in 2019: February 20th; March 20th; April 18th; May 15th; August 21st; September 18th; and October 13th.

Should there be discrepancies on missing dates, it may be assumed that no meeting was held that month or that only one Board member was present, and thus no minutes were required

Becky Uppercue was contacted by Bill Oyster from our auditing company last week and the most prominent issue he raised was our high write-off costs for food services in the 2018-19 school year. Dr. Pleso recognized that our food services director, Rita Engloff, was not aware of the need to send monthly statements to families who have not paid for their students’ meals until the last part of the 2018-19 school year. Dr. Pleso hopes that by sending these letters, some families will become current, but acknowledges that the figures are significant and that after a certain amount of time, it becomes bad debt. Rita recognizes that we continue have parents and guardians who routinely send their kids to school without lunch, understanding that, by law and moral obligation, and GMCS has to feed them. Rita also works to help parents who do not pay to access the reduced lunch program, but often they cannot demonstrate an inability to pay. Non-

payment for food services by families is an ongoing issue for GMCS, but one that is very difficult to resolve.

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 November 14th. She said there will also not be a meeting in December 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

The committee met on October 30th and discussed plantings and the footprint of the new building, as well as the idea of turning parking (the current gravel area) back into a paved lot. Bob Sharrah, of Sharrah Design Group who is serving as our civil engineer, expressed concern about adding impervious services and the flags that might raise with Straban Township. He suggested pushing parking back further, perhaps creating a landscaped island. We discussed the current 47 paved and 42 gravel spaces, which are all needed because of the student population – although the township’s standard for this size is 69 spaces. We have ‘over parking’ but it is truly needed on a practical level.

Bob Sharrah also mentioned that we will need to go from “sediment control” and convert to a permanent stormwater management strategy. Jamie Unkefer from Digsau said that this may become a budgetary consideration.

Nurse Adrian asked Jamie Unkefer if Digsau could provide materials for our “Giving Spree” booth and other fundraising and marketing endeavors and Jamie said he would provide these to her.

The committee also discussed the option of a second playground (perhaps where the mods stand now) or whether we would prefer to build on to the existing one. The consensus seemed to be that it would be better to have a second, separate playground, perhaps for upper elementary students, depending on the final design of the addition. Bob Sharrah reminded the group that as long as it is not an impervious surface and does not go over our approved footprint, we should be fine to move forward.

Several attendees mentioned the need for shade structures and while that is more of a zoning issue, Bob Sharrah feels it would be fine – though the more separated from actual structures and the smaller they are, the better things would go with the Township. He said to be mindful of structures that have a solid roof, thus preventing rainfall coming through – he said this is a red flag for zoning. Jamie Unkefer reminded the committee that it is best to keep these ideas separate from the main project as they often require completely separate approvals.

Nurse Adrian also proposed a parent drop-off loop, but Jamie Unkefer said it would have a major impact on the project and that we should plan to address this at a later date. Dr. Pleso said she envisions changing all drop-off and pick-up procedures in the future, while not adding new roads or impervious surfaces.

The committee also discussed the various tanks on the property, especially the propane tank, which will have to be moved. We will also need either a larger or additional water tank to provide more potable water, as well as necessary water for fire suppression. We would rather not move it due to costs, but will have a mechanical engineer do an assessment.

The new addition will have built-in sprinklers, but Jamie Unkefer's reading of the building code is that the original structure will have to be retrofitted with a sprinkler system.

Dr. Pleso would also like our site to be evaluated for solar, wind, and geothermal feasibility.

Dr. Pleso is in need of our previous Environmental Assessment; Bob Sharrah will look to see if he has it from several years ago.

The committee also discussed restroom needs – staff feels very strongly that we need to match or exceed what we have now in the mods.

Jamie Unkefer showed three plans...one moved the two Kindergarten classrooms to the end of the left wing, the other moved them to the end of the right wing, and the third plan had them next to the library at the top of one of the wings. There was a lively debate about these, which continued to the next meeting on November 13th.

At the November meeting, the committee started by looking at “project precedent” photos and Brian from Digsau showing examples of other similar projects so the committee could get an idea of the final product, before moving on to renderings of our building's proposed exterior, which is metal siding/cladding to match part of our existing building. It will be a neutral color, switching to more playful colors when looking at the interior/courtyard side of the building. Digsau's idea is not to match the current exterior, but rather to complement it and maintain

neutral hues in order to introduce color elsewhere. Brian and Jamie Unkefer, also from Digsau, explained that the different colors used would signify what the usage of that area is.

They plan to also introduce an irregular window pattern for distinctiveness and interest – this sparked debate about windows' role in providing light, security, and distraction for students. Jamie Unkefer remarked that this will be a critical ongoing discussion.

We also returned to the previous discussion about restroom numbers and capacity.

Brian from Digsau said he will forward examples and ideas of storage options for staff to look at and discuss.

Dr. Pleso asked about when we may be able to set up a presentation for families. Jamie Unkefer said that this could happen in early January.

The teachers were given a survey about what they would like to see (and not see) in the new building – unfortunately, only the art, music, and 5th/6th grade teachers responded, so Nicole Gulden will try and seek out more opinions directly. Nicole did express that teacher want tile flooring, not carpeting as well as lots of electrical outlets in the classrooms and hallways. They also want much more storage, lockers in the classrooms, and ceiling-mounted projectors for whiteboards.

The classrooms for the new design have coming it at 857 square feet. This is larger than all current classrooms in the mods, with the exception of the 'double' classrooms in use by the 5th/6th grade classes.

Dr. Pleso is going to look into grants for solar panels on the property and Bob Sharrah from Sharrah Design Group, suggested there might be some way to tie in or 'piggyback' off of the massive 55+ community being built up the road.

According to Dr. Pleso, plans are in the works for an open house sometime in January to show off the renderings and designs to families and other stakeholders.

Dr. Pleso advertised for the owner's rep position in November and currently has four options. First, she will work with Kathy Nagel to develop a job description, which will need to be presented to the Board in December. The Board would then vote on it in January and she would be free to provide it to the interested parties, which would then submit quotes to Dr. Pleso.

The next Building committee meeting is currently scheduled for December 4th, but Dr. Pleso needs to confirm with Digsau.

New Business; for the good of the order

None

Public Comment

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 7:54pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary