

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School
Board of Trustees Official Minutes
December 19, 2019**

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

Board Members Absent

Diana Williams, Member, at-large (illness)

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO
Christine Felicetti, School Counselor

Executive Session

The Board met for Executive session at 6:02pm 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. Dr. Pleso was invited to join the Executive session to discuss these matters. Executive session closed at 6:24pm.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:25pm. 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. Shanin Caplener seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Administrator's Report

Enrollment increased this month from 235 to 237 with the addition of two new Kindergarteners. Rose Thornberry requested a breakdown, or 'delta', of enrollment per month from Dr. Pleso. She will bring it to the January meeting.

Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the Fund Balance Policy as presented. 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. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

School Counselor Christine Felicetti presented a review of ASCA (American School Counselor Association)-approved percentages for a school counseling program and shared the GMCS school counseling program data. Ms. Felicetti noted that our program is falling within appropriate guidelines with 83% of her efforts going toward providing direct services with students and 17% of her time being focused on indirect services, such as contact between her and various agencies, and these percentages align with the ASCA-approved counseling program.

Ms. Felicetti said that she would like to find ways to share what she is doing in the classroom with our families. Jill Clinton suggested that she put together a school counseling newsletter, similar to the one that Art teacher Erica Swiger produces. Ms. Felicetti mentioned that she could also include information from our Comprehensive Plan, such as our values and mission. Ms. Felicetti said she would reach out to Ms. Swiger for a template for the newsletter and will aim to send her first one home to families in the New Year.

Ashley Reid and Tom Hockensmith spoke with Ms. Felicetti about laying out truancy guidelines for families. They felt that the explanation for excused and unexcused absences needs to be more clearly and more prominently outlined. They said that the policy is not in the Parent Handbook. Tom suggested bullet points of the guidelines on our website in the "Student Absences" section, along with examples of what is an excused absence and what is not. Other members agreed that they would like to see these explanations and definitions on our website, along with forms that are needed. It could also be part of a welcome or registration packet, an informational sheet handed out at Back-to-School Night, linked on our Facebook page, in our Montessori Moments newsletter, etc. Truancy has become a major focal point for state regulators, especially, and we need to make sure all families are informed about the rules and guidelines about tardiness, excused absences, and unexcused absences. Ms. Felicetti stated her

goal for the current school year is to increase attendance by 25%. She is also looking into implementing a mentoring program that may have a positive effect on truancy.

Ms. Felicetti also presented an overview of her other duties besides her classroom curriculum and attendance responsibilities. She also oversees transcripts, SAP (Student Assistance Programs), MTSS (Multi-Tier Systemic Systems), the PBIS (Positive Behavior Support Systems) like our Stellar Stones program, and our annual Career Café. She is also working on implementing the Junior Achievement program for grades 3/4 and 5/6 this year. She would also like to introduce JA's BizTown program for 5/6, which is very popular, but costly.

Ms. Felicetti is also putting together a "Trauma Informed Approaches" training on January 7th. All Board members and staff need to attend, but teachers are the priority for this training. State law says that this training must be done school wide by the end of 2020 in order to comply with Act 144. Ms. Felicetti will record the training and make the program available online for those that are not available on the 7th.

Jill Clinton also suggested that we implement at schoolwide monthly "values" focus that dovetails with our Comprehensive Plan's outlined values and mission. This could be accomplished by artwork, books, morning announcements, newsletters, and on our website and Facebook page.

Dr. Pleso has held two meetings to discuss a revision of our stated Mission, Vision, and Values. She received a lot of feedback and thoughtful suggestions via email and in these meetings. Dr. Pleso thinks this is an advantageous time to be doing this with the charter renewal process beginning and was proud to present the results of this collaboration to the Board.

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.

While Dr. Pleso was advised that the Vision statement could include more raw data, she feels that this statement is not the place for that and aims to keep it direct and simple:

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 21st 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*

The Board will vote on the Mission/Vision/Values statements at the January meeting. The Comprehensive Plan, which is done every three years, is still in progress. Four sections were completed and voted on by the Board in November 2019 and the remaining 31 sections of the plan are due in March. Dr. Pleso expects to take next steps in January or February.

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.

The Board will vote on the addition of this language to our Policy manual at the January meeting.

Dr. Pleso reviewed the results of exit surveys after the departure of several students. One family was unhappy with the school, but did not provide details; another loved the school, but moved some distance away; and another left GMCS to homeschool because they objected to several of the schoolwide celebrations as well as the recognition of birthdays in the classroom.

Dr. Pleso provided an update on the ongoing speech language therapist issues created when the LIU removed our SLP, Rebecca Kane, from our school at the beginning of the year. Our contracted video services with the Chester County IU will be in place until January, but the

Board was very happy to hear that the LIU has hired a new SLP named Sara Hoffman. Ms. Hoffman is currently updating assessments, evaluations, IEPs, and other paperwork and will start seeing students in February.

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 send out the scope of work to get 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. Three of these companies, Avison Young, Northstar Museum Education, and Grayhawk, have recently sent proposals. The fourth, Becker & Frondorf, will be sending their proposal soon. For now, Dr. Pleso favors Northstar Museum Education and Grayhawk. We have \$62,000 budgeted for this contracted position this fiscal year and Dr. Pleso expects to have it filled about halfway through the year.

Dr. Pleso presented a very comprehensive outline of the school's procurement process at the November meeting of the Board, which included details on Micro-Purchases, Informal Procurement, and Formal Procurement (Sealed Bids and Competitive Proposals), as well as Non-Competitive Bids (Fixed Price or Reimbursement). She informed the Board that the Procurement Review conducted by the PA Department of Education has been closed, per a letter received November 27th.

In yet another audit, Dr. Pleso is processing the School Food Authority Review. It has ten components and has been very time-consuming. Dr. Pleso expects it all to go well, however. She was also recently informed that we now have to undergo a Federal Programs review, with regulators expected at the school in March.

The charter renewal process continues to move forward. Dr. Pleso has settled on January 27th as the date that Superintendent Perrin and other members of the GASD will arrive to take our prepared materials. Kathy Nagel, our school's attorney, has offered to have our information made into bound books to present to the GASD. Dr. Pleso will look into the fee for having this done, but believes it will be a deeply discounted price.

In related news, Rose Thornberry reports that there are now five new GASD Board members, as well as a new Board chair. It's unclear how or if this will affect our charter renewal process, but this will not be the same Board that just approved VIDA's new charter.

Report of the Chair

Jill Clinton will attend the January 14th or 28th staff meeting and Ashley Reid will plan to go to the February 25th meeting. Tom Hockensmith attended the December staff meeting and heard feedback about the Ag Lab, among other subjects discussed.

Dr. Pleso let Tom Hockensmith know that she needs the Acknowledgement form each Board member signed prior joining the Board. She needs the forms from Tom, Jill Clinton, Melissa Ring, Kathy Johnson, Kirsten Johnson, and Tish Weikel. Jill will send the blank form to Dr. Pleso for her files.

Jill Clinton presented the Board manuals to each member and went through each of the included documents. She also handed out new and updated Board calendars and a list of Board terms of election to add to the binders.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meetings are January 30th and February 27th and that our PA state required Act 55 training needs to be completed by June.

Per the Board's request, a link to the American Montessori Society website has been set up on the GMCS website.

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.

After several executive session discussions of the matter, Shanin Caplener made the motion to approve the addendum to Dr. Pleso's contract, as prepared by our school attorney, Kathy Nagel. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Finance Committee

The Finance committee met on December 11th with all present.

According to the November financials, we went down about \$70k in October due to high district receivables for 2018-19, but Becky Uppercue reports that we are back up to \$860k.

We also have 'solid cash flow' according to business manager from Charter Choices, Jesse Bean. We were down to approximately 70 days' cash flow due to the aforementioned district receivables, but we are now back to approximately 84 days' cash flow. Outstanding district receivables are now mostly from this current 2019-20 school year.

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 (\$173k) than budgeted due to the seasonality of costs.

Jesse Bean anticipates walking into the loan settlement with \$900k in liquid assets with additional district receivables to show.

As previously mentioned in the minutes, Dr. Pleso has asked for quotes from four companies offering Owner's Rep services for our building project. These companies were recommended by Jesse Bean and Kathy Nagel.

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 will contact them separately to determine 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 December meeting of the Governance meeting and chair Jill Clinton said that there will likely not be meeting in January, as well.

Building Committee

The committee met and achieved a milestone with a full building schematic now finished.

The committee did a major materials review and discussed acoustic panels for the music room, a flexible wall for both the music room and 5/6 rooms, exposed wood trusses, operable and fixed windows, and other items.

The team from Digsau is also addressing the issue of bringing in additional natural light to both the new addition and the existing building through the use of more glass, skylights, and solar tubes.

The committee also discussed using versatile furniture, including movable cubbies, new desks for the 3/4 rooms and 5/6 rooms, and standing stations.

The Digsau team had their engineer look at all of our systems and their mechanical engineer has done an assessment and plans to meet with Bob Shaarah.

The next meeting is planned for January 15th.

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

New Business; for the good of the order

Rose Thornberry suggested to Dr. Pleso that an ad for the vice principal position be placed in March, with a hiring target date of June. The Board discussed the idea of placing ads around areas where universities offer the certification courses. The Montessori Society may be of some assistance, as well.

Dr. Pleso would like to have Board members' involvement in the vetting process; Becky Uppercue offered that she knows an interested candidate.

Rose Thornberry and Tom Hockensmith both suggested that an ad should actually begin running in January or February in order to target interviews for March or April, with the vetting and hiring process to follow in May or June.

Dr. Pleso said she will work with Dr. Brad Sterner from the LIU to write a job description and that this would incorporate elements from her job. Rose Thornberry asked if it would also include duties handled by Crystal Moore, Leigh Gugliette, Christine Felicetti, and Meghan Parks and Dr. Pleso agreed that it would make sense to pull certain responsibilities from each that are better suited to a vice principal. Dr. Pleso also envisions this position will include systems management, staff development, and behavior management. She would like a vice principal to take over all aspects of behavior management, including incident reports, reflections, and communication with families. She would also like the vice principal to take over staff development and evaluations down the road. The Board agreed with Dr. Pleso that this position needs to be filled by an individual who will come to understand and embrace the school's culture as quickly as possible and be open to the idea of eventually stepping into the CEO position.

Public Comment

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 8:43.

Approved:

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "Jill Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jill Clinton, Secretary