

Gettysburg Montessori Charter School
Board of Trustees Official Minutes
February 27, 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 (due to illness)

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO

Executive Session

The Board did not hold an Executive Session.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:06pm. No introductions were necessary.

Public Comment on Agenda Items

No comment

Old Business

No old business

Approval of Consent Agenda

Rose Thornberry made a motion to approve the consent agenda as submitted. Becky Uppercue seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Administrator's Report

Enrollment increased from last month's total of 237 to 239, as reflected in Dr. Pleso's report. However, just prior to the Board meeting, she enrolled three additional students. The five total new students since last month included a Kindergartener, three 2nd/3rd graders, and a 5th grader. Dr. Pleso also reports that there is some additional 'shadowing' at school with potential students. student who previously withdrew from the school and then decided to return.

Dr. Pleso gave the Board an overview of her personnel recommendations for 2020, which for now are limited to the long-discussed assistant principal and a full-time specials position. Dr. Pleso has begun the search for the assistant principal via ads with Indeed.com and other resources available through the American Montessori Association and Dr. Brad Sterner at the LIU. She will begin interviewing as soon as she has candidates. Her proposal for the full-time specials teacher extends to the Gym/Health position. She is trying to find more professional duties that will justify the additional hours. Ashley Reid suggested that this person could also serve as an “outreach coordinator” for the school. Dr. Pleso is also discussing scheduling with staff and trying to find ways that this teacher could work throughout the day – including potentially including recess duty as a part of the job description.

Dr. Pleso mentioned that there are two new anticipated staff maternity leaves this summer, in addition to the ones currently underway and the others that are impending this spring that we will need to keep in mind when thinking about staffing.

Katie Sauter is spearheading our 10th Anniversary/Maria Montessori 150th Birthday Celebration set for Saturday, August 1st. She has had three meetings already to arrange for a DJ, tents, portable toilets, vendors, food, and other elements of the party. She will make appeals for parental involvement.

Dr. Pleso informed the Board that she has looked into requirements for a Superintendent’s certificate and found that she already meets most of them and may investigate an “alternative” path to receiving one. She has found a “Principal Leadership” program through the National Institute for School Leadership that is free and she has completed the first two courses already. She needs the final course, consisting of six classes, which is offered through the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Through this, she would earn a Superintendent’s certificate. There is also a “Superintendent Academy” through the Pennsylvania Department of Education which is run by Dr. Pedro Rivera, the head of the department. It is also free and runs for 18 months. Dr. Pleso has applied.

Dr. Pleso is also looking for ways to help the school become more “Montessori” in its educational delivery. She found Dr. Linda Zarkowski at the University of Delaware who has created a Montessori academy specifically for public (charter) Montessori teachers. She came to meet with Dr. Pleso and provided her with a rubric for our teachers to do a self-assessment of just how much of the Montessori principles and practices they are applying in their classrooms. Dr. Pleso would also like to show the staff videos of other public Montessori instruction. In addition, she would like to potentially work with Dr. Zarkowski to help provide GMCS with a blended curriculum (she shared examples to our LIU consultants to make sure these elements are incorporated into the new curriculum they are currently working with us to write) and team instruction.

The School Food Authority review, which occurs every five years, is ongoing. We need to make a number of changes and improvements, including breakfast signage changes and maintaining temperature logs in our refrigerators and freezers. Overall, there are nine items to improve and/or supplement that Rita Engloff and Dr. Pleso will oversee. Rita will also be tasked with writing a Food Safety Plan.

Our Kindergarten enrollment for 2020-21 stands at 24 students. Open houses have taken place and registration is ongoing. Ashley Reid inquired about the order of eligibility should our classes fill quickly. Dr. Pleso explained that siblings have first priority, followed by children of staff members, and Gettysburg residents third. After that, any PA resident may enroll their children. Dr. Pleso will let the Board know during the last weekend of March whether she anticipates a lottery for the 44 Kindergarten spots being necessary. If it is, it will take April 1st and the Board will need to be involved.

The charter renewal process continues to move forward. There has been no update during the month of February, except that the committee has asked for additional items from our Special Education Coordinator, Rebecca Black. 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.

Dr. Pleso provided the Board with an update on our upcoming Comprehensive Plan. The Pennsylvania Department of Education is experiencing glitches in its software pertaining to charter schools, so Dr. Pleso applied for and received a six-month extension. The Comprehensive Plan is now due October 30th.

Report of the Chair

Board member-at-large, Shanin Caplener, had to resign her seat effective immediately due to a new job with an Adams County court that precluded her from serving on governing bodies of any kind. Tom Hockensmith accepted her written resignation and the Governance committee has begun a search for her replacement. The term she was filling expires at the end of August.

Ashley Reid attended the February 25th staff meeting. Jill Clinton will attend the March 24th meeting and Becky Uppercue will plan to go to the April 28th meeting.

Ashley Reid reported that the kick-off for our building project is taking place in the multipurpose room on March 4th. Jill Clinton has been asked to start the event by reading If I Built a School to students attending with their families. There was a discussion about refreshments, seating arrangements, music, photos, enter-to-wins, and new language to communicate the event to the school community. Ashley also said there were several other areas touched on at the staff meeting, including a lockdown drill and fire drill.

Ashley Reid also said there was an extensive discussion about new dismissal procedures to tighten things up and ensuring that every child is where they need to be at the end of the school day. Staff need to use their computers to update transportation info throughout the day. Families will be asked to make sure changes are submitted in the morning/early afternoon, not at the last minute. There will also be a new bus dismissal routine staff is calling “on deck” where students will line up so that they will be ready when the next bus rolls up.

Dr. Pleso also shared that she was a victim of an email scam that involved staff. The situation is being handled by the local police and the FBI, but it prompted a discussion about ways to tell if the email is coming from an outside source and not truly from our server. Tom Hockensmith and Ashley Reid both offered ways in which the school could take part in online security training.

Ashley Reid also mentioned upcoming events covered at the staff meeting, including Read Across America next week. There will be various dress-up days for students and the staff brainstormed other ideas that don't just focus on Dr. Seuss and would appeal to the upper elementary students. George from the Adams County library system will come to read to students, as well. Our book swap will also be held next week and our first science fair is on March 17th. Keri Bechtel is coordinating it and could use some additional help with judging. Our first talent show is on April 9th. There are over 70 students participating! Auditions are March 11th during school hours. Strawberry Hill Nature Preserve trout release on April 18th at 10:00am. There are also plans in the works for a breakfast with farmers that Becky Black is coordinating.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meeting is March 26th 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. Dr. Pleso told the Board that we will discuss these matters in more detail at the March meeting of the Board.

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

Finance Committee

Becky Uppercue distributed Statements of Financial Interest to all Board members. She currently has all the ones needed, except for those from Lucretia Swain, Rose Thornberry, and Tish Weikel. She's been in touch with everyone and anticipates having all SOFI forms by the Board meeting in March.

According to the December financials, Becky Uppercue reported that our cash on hand decreased significantly to \$854k as the school received several large district payments. District receivables increased to \$409k; most of the outstanding receivables are from the current school year.

Our accounts payable balance is currently at \$35k 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 \$62k.

Our local school district revenues are moving closer to YTD budgeted figures (\$44k) as the previous enrollment discrepancies (actual vs. billed) were resolved.

Total personnel costs are lower at \$111k than budgeted due to the delayed hiring of several positions and savings on health insurance. Total expenses are similarly lower by \$266k than originally budgeted, due in part to building costs that have not yet come to fruition.

GMCS has used \$66k of released funds from the Committed Fund Balance toward capital improvements so far this year. We show a net income of \$239k due to conservative revenue assumptions and lower cost expenditures.

Our financial partners in the building project, Members 1st, have been invited to attend the March 4th construction kick-off party.

Plans are in the works for Dr. Pleso, Charter Choices, and the Finance committee to draft a budget for 2020-21 in time for the March meeting. In addition to the two new personnel positions (assistant principal and full-time gym/health teacher), the only major budget wish list item Dr. Pleso intends to include is a new information management system that will track attendance, lunch count, and other items. She may also include better communication devices for use in school, such as wireless headsets, as a budget request.

Jill Clinton inquired about the 2019-20 budgeted expenditure for new computers and tablets in the classrooms, noting that over 25% of the funds (\$7,500) in the "Computers" line item has not been spent. Additionally, almost \$7k of the "Technology – Other" line item had also not been spent.

Dr. Pleso explained that additional devices had been purchased for the classrooms over the summer, but only recently put into service. She is mindful that our Montessori philosophy does not encourage heavy use of technology, but agreed to look into this and how the computers are currently being used, as several Board members noted that we have certain curriculum elements that are computer-based, such as typing, and that only a fraction of students in each classroom can access this at any one time, leading to sporadic engagement with these lessons. Dr. Pleso also noted that she does intend to fully equip the 5th/6th grade classrooms with Chromebooks for the 2020-21 school year.

Personnel Committee

Nothing new to report.

Executive Committee

Nothing new to report.

Governance Committee

Jill Clinton reports that the terms of Tom Hockensmith and Diana Williams will expire at the end of August and she hopes to hear whether or not they intend to run again by April or May.

In the meantime, the Governance committee will begin searching for a replacement for Shanin Caplener. She was filling a term that expires at the end of August. Her replacement will see out that term and be eligible for two additional two-year terms.

An appeal for interest in a seat on the Board was put on the school's website and Facebook page, garnering interest from Rachel Earnest. Jill Clinton sent her in initial email with next steps, but she never replied.

Jill also reached out to Abbie Beall and Traci Elligson, parents who both expressed interest in a seat on the Board over the summer. Abbie was previously a Board member several years ago who left mid-term. Abbie did not return an email or a text follow-up from Jill. Traci, however, replied and plans to return her signed Acknowledgement Form. She also received a copy of our bylaws. Her next steps are to submit her clearances and a resume. Jill will proceed with the regular meeting of the Governance committee in March and will reach out to Megan Stough, Shannon McConnell, Ashley Reid, and Diana Williams to see if they can attend. If March 12th does not work for all parties, they will try to meet on April 9th. If that date does not work with everyone's schedule, Jill will try to reschedule or arrange for a new Governance committee date in which to interview and discuss Traci Elligson's candidacy, but also any new candidates who come forward in the interim.

Dr. Pleso and Ashley Reid both said they may have interested candidates and will reach out to them and forward information to Jill. Jill has also asked the other Governance committee and Board members to reach out to other parents, guardians, and community members to see if they have any interest in serving on the Board.

Building Committee

The committee met in January to discuss a prioritized “wish list” for renovations on the existing building. All members were encouraged to submit their ideas and Dr. Pleso would present the final list to the Digsau team.

The final submitted list, in order, was as follows:

1. New flooring
2. Reconfigured office space (additional walls)
3. HVAC updates
4. Repurpose the walkway structure that currently shelters the space between the modulars and the existing building
5. Repainting, especially the hall and lobby
6. Washer-dryer hook-up
7. Replace the windows due to be lost in Becky Black’s and Nurse Adrian’s offices
8. Additional outlets for Becky Black’s office
9. Wall for Rita Engloff and Leigh Gugliette
10. Skylights/solar tubes in the hall and/or lobby
11. New/additional windows in the multipurpose room

We hope to be able to cover at least the first eight items on our list, but we will find out more at the next meeting in March.

Dr. Pleso is researching old photos of the schoolhouse that used to be on this property to potentially enlarge and use as artwork in the lobby. So far, no one has had any to share, but she is still looking.

The next committee meeting will be on March 4th at 1:30pm. Our new Owner’s Rep, Jay Appleton from Grayhawk, will be in attendance.

New Business; for the good of the order

Becky Uppercue mentioned that there were a lot of complaints from families about school photos this year. Despite continuing to work with Victoria Allen Photography, for some reason this year saw prints arrive months late and some parts of families’ orders missing and never delivered. Dr. Pleso has heard the same complaints and has already investigated the idea of additional bids for the photography contract.

Jill Clinton presented a packet of information to Dr. Pleso on a device called a “Breakout Box” made by Breakout EDU. It is an immersive games platform that is similar to the exciting challenges of an “escape room.” The platform offers a huge amount of options for curriculum and standards-aligned games in ELA, math, science, and social studies across several grade levels, particularly 3rd/4th and 5th/6th. Jill saw one in use in a 2nd grade classroom and observed how engaged all students were for a remarkable period of time for that age level and understood how well suited the platform is to the Montessori philosophy as a sophisticated, customizable work that could be used by both grade levels in each classroom at once. Dr. Pleso agreed that the idea was interesting and would review the information and costs.

Public Comment

None

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by the Chair Tom Hockensmith at 8:16pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary