

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

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

Others Present

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO
Jay Appleton, Greyhawk

Executive Session

The Board met for Executive session at 5:35pm via Zoom conference call to discuss 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 6:07pm.

Call to Order

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:09pm via Zoom conference call. Introductions were made. All Board members were introduced to the Owner's Representative for our building project, Jay Appleton, PE, CHC, CSSHO. He is a project executive at Greyhawk consulting in Mount Laurel, NJ.

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. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The consent agenda was approved by unanimous roll call vote.

Building Committee

The Board was excited to welcome Jay Appleton from Greyhawk to our monthly Board meetings via Zoom. He has an incredible depth of knowledge in all areas of contracts, construction, and permitting and will work closely with our architecture team at Digsau and our civil engineer, Bob Sharrah. He will be joining us each month to provide detailed updates on our building project now that renovations and the project itself are moving forward.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Digsau has moved the completion date for the construction documents to May 22nd and that moved the project calendar back a bit. Jay Appleton has adjusted the calendar to reflect the changes. He mentioned that he is thrilled to be working with the professional and creative team at Digsau and highly complemented our choice of architect on this project.

Jay anticipates bid notices going out on May 25th, followed by meetings with interested contractors on June 10th, with bids due on June 25th. Jay noted that we must meet some specific wage and advertising requirements, but thinks we will have a lot of interest in our bid notices. He also noted that under the circumstances, with Pennsylvania's long shutdown, it is a good time for public bidding. He also noted that all contracts for the different trades and services must be bid separately.

Construction is set to start June 29th with renovations in the existing school building to make the most of the summer break. The construction schedule is still considered feasible, with a scheduled finish date of early June 2021.

Jay reported that Bob Sharrah expects our plan to be approved by the Straban Township planning board on May 4th at their regular meeting.

Administrator's Report

Enrollment stands at 239, with 175 students having already turned in their paperwork. 35 of our 44 Kindergarten spots have been taken, though there was no need for a lottery this year. In addition to 35 incoming Kindergartners, the re-enrollment numbers are as follows:

1st grade: 33
2nd grade: 25
3rd grade: 27
4th grade: 24
5th grade: 16
6th grade: 14

Dr. Pleso believes our Kindergarten spots will be gone before school is out and we will end up starting the new school year with 250 students, but she is mindful of the changes that the

pandemic crisis may bring. The school may or may not open for the new year and distance learning may continue.

Dr. Pleso informed the Board that the state is requiring all districts/schools to submit a “Continuity of Education Plan” surrounding our new distance learning model. She noted that GMCS was ready with packets from the very first day of the shutdown. Our plan was prepped with guidance from the LIU and the Montessori Society.

While our distance learning plans are still being adjusted, Dr. Pleso has received positive feedback on the Schoology platform, the accessibility of the teachers, read-alouds, links provided, and Montessori activity suggestions, among other things. Negatives have been the overwhelming amount of resources and links and the technical glitches within the platforms and websites. In addition, it is apparent that some teachers are adjusting better to the new education than others. Jill Clinton’s suggestion was that Dr. Pleso encourage teachers to continue to evolve and tweak their presentation to students and not allow each week to stagnate with the same types of assignments. She would like to see them have continuity with the basic ELA and Math platforms, but vary offerings of enrichment, links to new websites and videos, Zoom videos and instruction, Zoom class calls, and Zoom one-on-one calls.

Jill also suggested that Dr. Pleso make a Zoom video for families, so that they can see her and still feel connected to what’s going on with the leadership of the school. Further, she suggested Dr. Pleso make appearances on various class Zoom calls so that students can see her. She is such an important daily presence in the school that Jill thinks students and families need to see and hear from her at this uncertain time. Dr. Pleso liked the idea and will look into it.

Dr. Pleso has reviewed our participation and compliance with the McKinney-Vento Act, which outlines policies and procedures that protects children who are homeless by providing a continuity with schooling and transportation. This vulnerable group need not switch schools when homelessness has caused their location to change. Transportation will continue to be provided under these circumstances, as well. For GMCS, this affects approximately 5-10 children per year. After review, Dr. Pleso determined that nothing needed to be changed at this time.

Dr. Pleso spearheaded a Music Survey of families and shared the results with the Board. She has begun to make a variety of changes in response to the robust feedback (approximately 45 responses) she got from families. For instance, from now on both Kindergarten classes will have their seasonal concerts on one night. In addition, each grade band will have their own night for concerts, though she is considering having the 5th/6th grades participate with the 3rd/4th grade classes. Dr. Pleso has also ordered more chairs to accommodate our families in the multipurpose

room. Dr. Pleso will be making more changes, as she noted many specific responses from families, many of which echoed each other.

Dr. Pleso worked with the GMCS attorney, Kathy Nagel, to craft a GMCS Technology User Agreement for those families borrowing devices to use during distance learning. They also developed a waiver – a Remote Learning Notice and Confidentiality Agreement – to address privacy concerns. Both of these documents will be included as updates to our policy manual.

Dr. Pleso has recommended Rebecca Yurkanin as the new Front Office Assistant. Becky Uppercue made a motion to hire Rebecca Yurkanin as the new Front Office Assistant retroactive to April 2, 2020 at a full-time salary of \$25,000 with benefits. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Dr. Pleso asked to move the hire date of the Assistant Principal candidate to June 15th from July 1st and increase the offered salary by \$5,000. The hiring for the position has been tabled until the May Board meeting. She will forward additional paperwork to Board members in response to a query from Jill Clinton.

The Gettysburg Area School District has scheduled a hearing on our charter renewal on May 4th. Kathy Nagel will be joining Dr. Pleso via Zoom, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The GASD will vote on our charter renewal on May 18th. Dr. Pleso will forward a link to meeting information on Zoom to the Board.

Dr. Pleso continues to conduct grade band meetings and is in touch with staff daily via email. Staff is also still working on writing the new math curriculum.

Ms. Felicetti continues to work on setting up a way to watch the trauma-informed training seminar online on May 18th.

Dr. Pleso plans to send out a survey in early June to gather feedback from parents on distance learning and will work to refine it should it be needed in the fall.

Report cards and our newsletter will go out on June 2nd, the last day of school.

Dr. Pleso and Jesse Bean, our business manager at Charter Choices, are investigating a CARES federal grant to support our second annual two-week summer school in July as well as other ideas to encourage learning to continue throughout the summer.

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 May 28th and for the Governance meeting on May 14th.

Tom Hockensmith will work on getting a Personnel Committee meeting together with Ashley Reid and Rose Thornberry in order to start working on the Staff Survey and Parent Survey. Jill Clinton noted that Becky Uppercue, Kathy Johnson, and Lieucetia Swain all have recent experience with the surveys should the committee need to consult with them. Tom mentioned that they would need Dr. Pleso to re-activate our access to Survey Monkey.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meeting is May 28th 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 May meeting of the Board.

Finance Committee

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 and Lieucetia Swain’s forms are still outstanding.

There was no Finance Committee meeting in March due to the committee chair’s health and the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the March financials, Becky Uppercue reported that our cash on hand is \$757k with over \$400k in savings, so we will be approaching Members 1st for our loan with over \$1.1 million in liquid assets.

We are on top of PSERS payments for the fiscal year and paid up on all debts. Our total income/gross is \$252k more in local revenues than budgeted due to conservative estimates of rates, back payments from districts, and savings on personnel. Jesse Bean thinks that the school’s finances are stronger than ever and we are in a great position.

Dr. Pleso, Charter Choices, and the Finance Committee worked together to draft a first version of our proposed 2020-21 budget and discussed it at the April 22nd meeting via Zoom call due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When crafting the proposed new 2020-21 budget, Jesse conservatively projected a 0% revenue increase in regular education payments and a 2% increase in special education payments, as well as 3% increase from other revenue sources like grants and savings from contracted services. He said it's unlikely we'll see a decrease this year, but warns we may in the 2021-22 fiscal year due to the financial crisis caused by COVID-19. Jesse's projections were based on numbers as of February 29th, as school has been closed since March 14th.

The new budget is also assuming a 10% increase in health benefits (though Jesse acknowledged that this may be closer to 5%-7%) and unemployment costs due to vastly increased claims this year.

In addition, the proposed budget includes \$65k for an Assistant Principal and an increase of about \$6,000 for a phys ed/health teacher, who would go from part-time to full-time.

Other budget plans include a re-appropriation of funds to be dedicated to students with Speech IEPs as required by the PA Department of Education. Dr. Pleso noted that \$6,400 also needs to go to ELA curriculum writing or professional development.

In addition, a proposed \$18k would be appropriated for "emergency restoration" to cover contractors as needed during repair and renovation to our current building this summer.

Dr. Pleso will call the modular building company to see if the costs we were originally give for removal of the leased units (an incredible \$157k) have changed; the committee will then determine how to split this cost into the 2020-21 and 2021-22 budgets.

Other elements of the new budget include a decreased cost for IT due to a new contractor, saving the school \$3,000. \$30k has been budgeted for various LIU services, including \$5,000 for professional development. Dr. Pleso noted that she will likely need \$10k more for curriculum. Jesse will ad this to the next budget draft.

Overall, the current budget proposal includes a projected \$35k surplus, but it is likely we'll have more due to conservative projections in several areas.

Jesse reviewed a letter from Members 1st for the committee. It confirms we have a line of credit with them and we can use this to share with any vendors who might need it.

The committee discussed the building project and determined that there will be approximately \$4.2 million in total costs. We owe approximately \$900k on our existing building loan, which will be acquired when we close on our new loan. The interest rates we were offered (4.3% for a

5yr ARM and 4.5% fixed rate) for the 10 year loan are slightly lower than what they initially offered back in the fall of 2018, which is excellent news. In addition, our “commitment fee” was reduced from \$17k to \$10K, offering a substantial savings.

Jesse, Becky, and Dr. Pleso all preferred the 4.5% fixed rate because an ARM could prove too unpredictable and put us in a bad financial position. The Finance Committee’s recommendation to the Board was to choose the fixed rate. Dr. Pleso discussed the recommendation with Kathy Nagel and she drafted a resolution should the Board decide to move in that direction. The Board discussed these options and agreed that the percentage rate is only very slightly higher with the fixed option and that the fixed rate is a safer choice for our school.

Jill Clinton made a motion to approve the resolution stating that the Board approves acquiring a commercial loan up to \$129,000.00 from Members 1st Federal Credit Union. This is for the GMCS building project (previously approved by the Board) under the conditions described in a letter received from the lender on March 20, 2020. The Board has chosen Option 2 regarding the interest rate as detailed fully in the letter. Ashley Reid seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

Governance Committee

Jill Clinton reports that the terms of Tom Hockensmith and Diana Williams will expire at the end of August and she needs to hear whether or not they intend to run again before the end of May. If they decline, an appeal will go out immediately for candidates. If they accept, they will need to be re-interviews and their clearances reviewed over the summer in time to be sworn in at the August meeting.

The Governance committee has been 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. Jill has not received any further interest or inquiries.

However, Traci Elligson is moving forward in the process. She received a copy of our bylaws and has returned her Acknowledgement Form. She has also forwarded her resume to the committee. Her next steps are to provide a Statement of Interest and copies of her clearances.

The regular meeting of the Governance Committee on April 9th did not happen due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Jill will reach out to members Megan Stough, Shannon McConnell, Ashley Reid, and Diana Williams to see if they can attend a Zoom call on the next scheduled meeting date, May 14th. If candidate Traci Elligson is available, she will be vetted and interviewed during the meeting.

Jill hopes the committee will have a candidate to recommend to the Board at the May or June meeting.

Personnel Committee

As mentioned above, Tom Hockensmith will work on getting a Personnel Committee meeting together with members Ashley Reid and Rose Thornberry in order to start working on the Staff Survey and Parent Survey. Jill Clinton noted that Becky Uppercue, Kathy Johnson, and Lieucetia Swain all have recent experience with the surveys should the committee need to consult with them. Tom mentioned that they would need Dr. Pleso to re-activate our access to Survey Monkey.

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 7:31pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary