

**Gettysburg Montessori Charter School  
Board of Trustees Official Minutes  
May 28, 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

**Others Present**

Dr. Faye Pleso, CEO  
Jay Appleton, Greyhawk

**Executive Session**

The Board met for Executive session at 5:38pm via Webex 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 5:48pm.

**Call to Order**

Tom Hockensmith called the meeting to order at 6:03pm 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. No introductions were necessary.

**Public Comment on Agenda Items**

No comment

**Old Business**

No old business

**Approval of Consent Agenda**

Ashley Reid 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**

Jay Appleton from Greyhawk reports that the Design phase of our building project is complete and we are entering the Construction Procurement phase. He explained that the Keystone Purchasing Network will be a good resource for us, providing pre-qualified and pre-vetted Pennsylvania contractors. They will give us a full bid package with all contractors' bids submitted together. We will benefit from this because their timeline allows for this package to come in quite early in our bidding process. The Keystone Purchasing Network will let us know if there are any problems and we'll have the time to address them. For instance, if bids and proposals are coming in too high, they will be able to re-visit them. Using the conventional bid process may lead to very high proposals on a later timeline – we would be stuck. Jay plans to hold a mid-June pre-bid conference to make sure that word is out on our project and that we receive the maximum amount of proposals. He plans to have bids due on June 25<sup>th</sup>.

Construction is set to start June 29<sup>th</sup> with renovations in the existing school building to make the most of the summer break. All bids and our schedule place this as our priority. The construction schedule is still considered feasible, with a scheduled finish date of early June 2021.

Jay Appleton reports that we are using two bid proposals – one with our entire 'wish list'. If bids come in too high, then modifications to the multipurpose room will be removed from the list.

Jay Appleton will be posting public notices (probably in the Gettysburg Times) as well as directly calling 40 local contractors he has identified within the four "prime" categories of contracting.

Jay Appleton reached out to Mobilease Modular Space in NJ five times to try and get a revised quote for removing our modular units. He is still waiting on a price.

Jill Clinton raised the issue of signage as part of our new building. Jay Appleton agreed that we need to put this into the mix and plan for signage or lettering, as well as putting together a sign package to prep and take to Straban Township for approval.

### **Adminstrator's Report**

Enrollment is at 215 as of May 28<sup>th</sup> (up from 200 on May 19<sup>th</sup>). Dr. Pleso and the Board discussed 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 various schools decide to do in 2020/21 with respect to traditional school, blended school, or distance learning approaches.

Dr. Pleso believes this is also affecting returning GMCS families. She is waiting to hear from about 25 families that may have otherwise already re-enrolled under normal circumstances. She and her staff are conducting outreach. The Board and Dr. Pleso are beginning to discuss contingencies should enrollment dip significantly for 2020/21.

Dr. Pleso reported that the tri-annual review of our Wellness Policy was due this spring. Due to the coronavirus-related shutdown, she was granted an extension to June 2021 by federal authorities overseeing the review.

GMCS's summer packets for students are being prepared. Packets for the incoming Kindergarteners have been sent out online. Ashley Reid inquired about these and Dr. Pleso agreed to follow up and make sure they have been sent.

Wonders, Zearn, and other online platforms used by students during our distance learning period are being extended, at the school's expense, for all families to continue distance learning at their own pace over the summer months.

Plans for our second annual two-week summer academic camps are proceeding. Dr. Pleso will let the Board know if these will take place traditionally, at the school, or a blend of at-school and distance learning, or all distance-learning. At this point, Dr. Pleso believes it will be blended, and serve a bonus purpose as a trial-run for the academic school year, but she will know more at the June meeting of the Board.

Registration for the summer camp weeks is currently being offered to all GMCS families, incoming Kindergarteners, and will then be open to Gettysburg and Adams County families. The first week will be for Kindergartners and 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> grade band students and the second week will be for students in the 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade bands.

Dr. Pleso believes the academic summer camp weeks will be a pilot program for staff to learn best practices for the upcoming school year. The Board discussed some of the many factors to consider when trying to envision a safe 2020/21 year, including all of the different sending districts, buses, childcare needs, technology needs, staff, student, and family safety, food services, etc. Dr. Pleso discussed purchasing wash stations, face shields, and thermometers. She noted that there are many expenses involved in making sure the staff and students practice social distancing and other mitigating efforts, like masks, sanitizing, and hand washing.

There may be a need to purchase more Chromebooks and tablets to facilitate needed distance learning, as well. She will update the Board at the June meeting. Dr. Pleso informed the Board that PBS is offering a grant for antennas for families in rural areas to download information and material, which may apply to several of our students.

Jesse Bean of Charter Choices had suggested to Dr. Pleso that the school should be able to use some of the funds from the CARES Act to offset these expenses. He also mentioned that there may be a \$40,000 grant to purchase supplies and provide training that is separate from the CARES Act funding.

Dr. Pleso is planning an all-staff meeting on May 29<sup>th</sup> to discuss the new academic year and will have information to report to the Board at the June meeting. Becky Uppercue passed on a message from parent and substitute Melissa Ring, saying that she would like Dr. Pleso to consider inviting guest teachers to the staff meeting, as well. Dr. Pleso agreed to take that under advisement.

Dr. Pleso is also doing weekly check-ins with laid-off staff, including our teaching assistants, personal care assistants, and food service workers to make sure they know we are thinking of them through this and hope to resume employment for them as soon as possible.

Dr. Pleso and 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> teacher Katie Sauter are making plans to drive to each graduating 6<sup>th</sup> grader's home next week to deliver cupcakes and congratulations for their accomplishments.

Dr. Pleso delivered marvelous news to the Board: GMCS has received their 5-year charter renewal from the GASD! We are now chartered through the 2024-25 school year. We were evaluated in several areas by Gettysburg's Board and their attorneys. In finance, they looked at five years of our audits, contracts, and more. In human resources, they looked at compliance, clearances, salaries, staff degrees, policies, and more. In student services, they looked at our homeless, ESL, attendance, demographic, and Title 1 policies and compliance. In special education, they looked at our communication and compliance with PDE policies, as well as monitoring and progress documentation. In curriculum, they examined our resources, curriculum samples, teacher evaluations, grading policies, PSSA results, PA Future Ready Index data, and other achievement-related information.

Some of the GASD and attorney recommendations as a result of the process involved finance information on the website and clarity and detail of the Board minutes; Dr. Pleso made sure that Dr. Perrin knows there may have been a miscommunication in these recommendations as these two areas have been fully addressed and compliant beyond the level they need to be. Rose Thornberry mentioned that the GASD employs a company to take and produce their Board meeting minutes; Dr. Pleso said that she would look into the software needed to aid in this.

However, Dr. Pleso did note there were a couple of recommendations that did require action. In the area of special education, Dr. Pleso needs to change the reference to the LIU to "providers" in the annual report to be clear that special education services are GMCS's responsibility. In addition, both the administration and the Board needs to increase their awareness about

“Sunshine Law” compliance. In the past, the Board has tried to over-inform and over-notify when it came to public notices, with notification at the school, in the Gettysburg Times, and on the school website, but this needs to be a continuous practice. To this end, with the public health crisis, the Board has called on our attorney, Kathy Nagel, for guidance about additional public notices as it relates to meetings held virtually.

The GASD’s attorney went through our bylaws, mission statements, handbooks, policies, clearances, MOUs, property deed, SOFIs, certifications, annual reports, Montessori-related info, bonds, activities, safety and security measures, Act 44, Act 55, memos, agendas, and minutes.

In the end, the charter renewal process went quickly and our charter was renewed by the GASD unanimously, with no questions asked or objections noted by any concerned party or stakeholder. The Board wishes to thank Dr. Faye Pleso and her team, particularly Leigh Gugliette, Megan Freeman-Parks, and Rebekah Black, for their outstanding attention to detail, follow up, hard work and professionalism throughout this process. Their continued efforts have helped GMCS establish best practices when it comes to documenting, reporting, and accessing information needed to help make our second charter renewal far smoother than the first. The Board is excited to partner with and support Dr. Pleso as she moves GMCS into another decade of providing a Montessori-based, academically rigorous choice to Gettysburg-area students.

Based on several discussions with the Board, Dr. Pleso has recommended Christine Kirkpatrick to serve as Assistant Principal. Becky Uppercue made a motion to hire Christine Kirkpatrick as the Assistant Principal as of June 15, 2020 at a salary of \$65,000 with full benefits. Diana Williams seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

### **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 June 25<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 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 that the Staff survey went out on time and we have already received six responses. In addition, the Board survey has also gone out to all six members. The Parent survey is still coming together. Tom was looking for feedback, noting the changes made to reflect experiences with the Rosetta Stone program and our recent distance learning. The Board discussed the expanded survey. Jill Clinton said that while it is great that we were able to touch on an exhaustive amount of areas, 65 survey questions may be too much. Other members agreed, but felt that it would be better to at least get surveys where some, if not all, questions were answered, and they may be based on a parent's level or area of interest. Others said it was important to gather feedback on our distance learning and that those questions may be eliminated on next year's survey. Rose Thornberry suggested that Board members find and questions that we may be able to eliminate as we do the survey. Becky Uppercue asked if we could share the survey on the family Facebook page. Tom will let her know and send out the survey via email to all families, as well as post on the school's website in the coming week.

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. Dr. Pleso added that all full-time staff need to complete it by June 5<sup>th</sup>.

Tom Hockensmith reminded Board members that our next meeting is June 25<sup>th</sup> and that our PA state required Act 55 training needs to be completed by the end of June. Diana Williams, Jill Clinton, Becky Uppercue, and Ashley Reid need to turn their answers in to Dr. Pleso. Jill Clinton reported that she is about halfway through the modules and has found several interesting things she would like the Board to explore in coming meetings – one is the idea of succession documents and plans, which the Board has started to discuss, and the other is 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.

The Board briefly discussed artwork for the school. Nurse Adrian Kavanaugh had forwarded a link to Jill Clinton that included prints from an artist that painted an image of the historic Hunterstown schoolhouse previously on our land at 888 Coleman Road. Adrian suggested that we purchase a print for somewhere in the school. Tom Hockensmith forwarded the link to Dr. Pleso and Board members so they could see the print in question. Dr. Pleso shared her vision of artwork, which would include historic, black and white photographs of local schoolchildren, buildings, or other sites blown up to a very large size – perhaps pixilated on canvas – to be hung in the lobby.

## **Finance Committee**

A Finance committee meeting was held on May 20<sup>th</sup> via conference call to review the April financial statements, which showed \$811k in the school's checking account and approximately \$404k in the school's savings account, which means that we will still be well over the \$1 million in assets required for our loan.

We are still owed \$324k in district receivables, but these will continue to roll in.

We currently have 119 days of operating cash on hand, which is our highest amount this year. Per Jesse Bean of Charter Choices, these are great numbers to share with the underwriters going into the loan process.

Net income for this fiscal year (through 4/30/20) is about \$520k.

We are on top of PSER's payments for the fiscal year and paid up on all outstanding debts.

Total income/gross profit is at \$252k, thanks to more in local revenues than budgeted, including conservatively budgeted rates, back payments from districts, savings on personnel expenditures, and projected construction costs.

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.

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 a pre-COVID timeline and he will continue to operate with these assumptions until further notice.

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. While there was a 3% COLA included in the proposed budget, Jesse Bean suggested that Dr. Pleso be open with the staff about the possibility of no COLA raises in the 2121-22 fiscal 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. Dr. Pleso expressed concern at the prospect of hiring an assistant principal only to have to let her go due to potential budget issues in 2121-22. Given those prospects, and the fact that we may not be

returning to the school building this fall, Dr. Pleso has decided to maintain a part-time gym teacher instead of filling it as a full-time position.

We are carrying over \$260k in construction-related funds that were not used this fiscal year and adding additional funds based on cost estimates (we spent \$176k for the architects and \$54k for the owner's rep)

\$18k has been appropriated for "emergency restoration" to cover contractors as-needed during renovation of our existing building.

Dr. Pleso led a discussion about how to split the \$157k cost of removing the modulars between the 2020-21 and 2121-22 budgets. Jay Appleton has called Mobilease to try and get a more reasonable figure.

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.

Other elements of the new budget include a decreased cost for IT due to a new contractor, saving the school \$3,000. Grant writing services were also cut from \$8,000 to \$4,000. There was also savings in LIU services being over-estimated and keeping the gym/health teacher position to part-time.

\$30k has been budgeted for various LIU services, including \$5,000 for professional development and \$10k more was added for curriculum.

Charter Choices, the Finance committee, and Dr. Pleso continue to base the budget draft on 237 students. We currently have 200 enrolled as of May 20<sup>th</sup> and Dr. Pleso projects an additional 150 by the start of school, though so much depends on COVID-19 restrictions.

Overall, the current budget proposal includes a projected \$16k surplus, but it is likely we'll have more due to conservative projections in several areas.

Jesse Bean cautioned that we need to keep a tight rein on the budget and continue to watch economic developments due to the financial and health crises. While this fiscal year, we may have stipends, grants, and additional state and federal government funding sources, we need to be aware that this will likely all go away in the 2021-22 fiscal year. We also have to keep in mind that the first 15 months of our business loan are interest-free, then payments will nearly double to include the principal and interest.



We are in a holding pattern with Members 1<sup>st</sup> and our building loan because the first appraisal came back extremely low. It was too low for the bank, so Dr. Pleso has hired a different appraiser and reported that Members 1<sup>st</sup> was also were not pleased with the outcome of the first appraisal. Since they recommended that appraiser to us, they offered to pay for the second appraisal, which is to take place by the end of May.

The 2020-21 proposed budget needs to be posted for 30 days prior to a vote by the Board. Dr. Pleso will have Rebecca Yurkanin post the budget draft on the website following the meeting.

### **Governance Committee**

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.

Jill Clinton will coordinate scheduled committee meetings, if possible, to review their clearances and re-interview both Tom Hockensmith and Diana Williams this summer in time to be sworn in at the August meeting, if recommended by the committee and approved by the Board. Jill will try and coordinate Tom's interview at the next Governance committee meeting on June 11<sup>th</sup>.

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. At the May 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the committee, candidate Traci Elligson was interviewed and vetted. After discussion, the committee unanimously decided to recommend Traci for the seat on the Board. Traci has provided all materials and clearances except for the PA Criminal Background check and FBI Criminal Background check. She has both on file with her employer in Maryland, but will need to provide Pennsylvania copies to us.

After recommending Traci Elligson for the vacated seat on the Board, Jill Clinton asked Tom Hockensmith to schedule a vote by the Board at the next meeting, June 25<sup>th</sup>. If approved, Traci will also be sworn in that evening. Our attorney, Kathy Nagel, reported to Tom that the Board would not have to swear Traci in again at the start of her new term, 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 is trying to get Shanin Caplener to return her copy of the Board handbook for Traci. Diana Williams also said she did not receive hers prior to the pandemic shutdown, due to missing a

meeting. Jill will try and find her handbook with Dr. Pleso's help when she is back in the school building.

**Personnel Committee**

Tom Hockensmith expects to have initial results of the Staff survey, Parent survey, and Board survey for the Board at the June 25<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 8:00pm.

Approved:



Jill Clinton, Secretary