

Gate City Charter School for the Arts

Board of Trustees Meeting
DRAFT Meeting Minutes
Meeting Date: November 17, 2015

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Time: 6:45 PM
Location: 7 Henry Clay Drive, Merrimack, NH

6:49 PM: Meeting Called to Order

Voting Board Members in Attendance:

Bill Spinelli, Chairman
Bob Amrein, Vice Chairman
Charisa Martin, Director, Parent Representative
Debbie Christianson, Director, Friends Committee Chair
John Keicher, Treasurer
Kim Rivers, Director
Lisa Klein, Director, Curriculum Committee Chair (attending via phone)
Peter Bonaccorsi, Human Resources Committee Chair
Tom Tyler, Secretary

Absent:

Attending Gate City Staff:

Karin Cevasco, School Director

Attending Public:

Sarah Hall
Stephen Martin
Dani Preston
Betsy Moore
Ashley Sullivan
Liz Kolb
Lisa Duffy (Teacher)
Amy Savoie (Teacher)
Approximately 5 others

Quorum: 9 of 9 voting board members were in attendance at the start of the meeting.

Public Comments

Betsy Moore made the following points:

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- The school should have a math teacher. Even having someone part-time would be beneficial to push kids who are ahead a little more. She spoke with Bill Spinelli (Chairman) at the 5K on Sunday further about this.
- The Homework Policy should be revisited, especially for higher grade levels, to help with challenges such as time management (among other things).
- Would like to see student energy harnessed in student government, a civics club, or similar forums.

Bill Spinelli (Chairman) indicated that the Curriculum Committee would be the ideal forum for these concerns. Lisa Klein (Curriculum Committee Chair), added topics to the agenda for the next Curriculum meeting. It was clarified that the public is invited to the Curriculum Committee meeting.

Liz Kolb made the following points:

- It is difficult to find job descriptions for staff. It was unclear what the role of Special Education Coordinator at Gate City is.
- There have been 4 or 5 para education professionals for her child in the past year. This was mostly due to staff changing roles within the school, but also due to staff changes. This creates transitional challenges for her child requiring services.

Bill Spinelli (Chairman) noted that the sending school is responsible for providing all special education services, even those that occur at our charter school, even when services are provided by Gate City staff.

Karin Cevasco (School Director) noted that the Special Education position was hired at 20 hours per week based on last year's case load, but this year the case load is double that of last year.

Liz Kolb noted that there was no proactive communication from the Special Education Coordinator about things cancelling services. She further stated that communications and service coordination were handled poorly.

Bill Spinelli (Chairman) indicated he disagreed with Liz Kolb's assessment of the Special Education Coordinator's performance. He also emphasized the objectives of maintaining a "positive mental attitude" approach to problems and developing a "continuous improvement" mindset throughout the school.

Liz Kolb noted that she feels she has communicated matters through the proper channels, including the School Director and the Board, but felt her concerns were being dismissed rather than addressed. She indicated this could be a great school,

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but she was pulling her children from the school. Liz Kolb then departed the meeting.

Dani Preston asked when report cards would be made available for cases when a conference could not be attended.

Karin Cevasco (School Director) answered indicating report cards will be mailed on November 20 (at the end of the week of conferences). Dani Preston indicated that report cards being delivered during the short 15-minute conferences was not working, and requested that they be made available before the start of conferences.

There seemed to be general consensus from the board that making report cards available before conferences was a good idea. Peter Bonaccorsi (HR Committee Chair) noted this could be changed at the procedural level. Lisa Klein (Curriculum Committee Chair) noted that it probably would not happen this quarter, but could happen after.

Sarah Hall noted that individual parents should be able to request a report card as needed, and expect that it be made available upon completion.

Ashley Sullivan made the following points:

- The Lice Policy stirred up a lot of things. She understands, but was very concerned about communications related to the spread of head lice. She disagrees with timeframes noted in prior communications regarding when the school was notified. She indicated that notification occurred on October 22.
- It was noted that the current procedure is to start notifications to parents upon 4 reported cases. It was noted that in a population of only about 160, that 2 cases would be more appropriate trigger for notification.
- She also noted that actions were not taken that possibly should have been. For example, should "Hat Day" have been cancelled when it was known that there were reported cases of head lice?
- It was also noted that a school nurse would be helpful.

It was discussed that some lessons learned from this experience were a change in communication procedures to notify all parents (not just individual classrooms) after 2 (rather than 4) reported cases. Notification to all parents would also help protect privacy in a small school population.

Peter Bonaccorsi discussed the difference between policy vs. procedure regarding head lice. He noted that Exclusion (whether and when to exclude students with head lice from participation in school activities) and Notification are points of

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contention in general. Typically, both exclusion and notification are in the realm of procedure, and exclusion is at the discretion of the school director/principal.

Sara Hall raised a question about why draft copies of things like draft policies weren't available until board meetings. Tom Tyler (Secretary) indicated this was an area where we are working to improve them. We plan to have a board packet made publicly available prior to board meeting.

8:01 PM

MOTION (Peter Bonaccorsi/Bob Amrein): Motion to approve the minutes as written. Motion passed without objection.

The Financial Report was discussed. It was noted that the board packets can include draft financials. Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) discussed complexities of interpreting draft financials.

John Keicher (Treasurer) stated that overall, financially, the school is sound. He discussed that we look at income sources and requirements, and needed input from different committees on factors that would impact the budget, and mentioned hiring a nurse as an example. He noted he is pleased the Curriculum Committee has been providing their input.

Betsy Moore asked whether the federal funding was exhausted. It was clarified that those start-up funds are expended. She indicated that we need to ramp up our fundraising. There was general consensus on that point. Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) noted that "start up mode" ended this year, and we are going into operational mode.

Betsy Moore asked about how other charter schools operated in terms of how their financial plans worked. Kim Rivers (Director) discussed how the Academy for Science & Design (ASD) operated, with a recommended but optional per-student suggested fee of \$450/student.

Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) noted that increasing enrollment was key. Karin Cevasco (School Director) noted that donations from parents are key for some other NH starter schools.

8:21 PM

MOTION (Kim Rivers/Debbie Christianson): Motion to approve the financial report as written. Motion passed without objection.

Old Business

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1. Campaign for Parental Donations

Debbie Christianson will be doing further research on this. Tabled.

2. Open Board Seat Update

Two committees remain unstaffed:

- Community Relations and Endowment Chair position is opened.
- Grant Coordination Committee is chaired by Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman).

Bill Spinelli (Chairman) and Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) discussed efforts to fill these positions are occurring via networking contacts made, and interviewing of possible candidates. All board members and school community are encouraged to generate possible candidates.

3-6. Policies for Waiting List, Fund Raising Activities, Open Enrollment, and Field Trip

Draft policies will be included in the board packet for the next meeting.

Peter Bonaccorsi (HR Committee Chair) noted a policy on changing policies is needed.

7. Free Lunch Assistance Program

Karin Cevasco (School Director) reached out to an attorney and accountant, who indicated that continuing with an informal program is the most appropriate way to provide lunch assistance.

Dani Preston asked if we are confident that we are identifying students who need lunches. Karin Cevasco (School Director) indicated that having a lunch monitor had made that possible.

Reports and Open Board Discussion

1. Update from Friends of GCCSA

The Friends Committee meeting was rescheduled due to Veteran's days, and will occur on November 19th at 1:15 PM in the Kindergarten room. Debbie Christianson provided a review of various things the committee is working on.

Betsy Moore asked if how money could be donated for a specific purpose, and Debbie Christianson indicated that request could be heard at the Friends Committee.

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Sarah Hall provided an overview of the successful Paint Your Way to 5K event. Turnout was great, with great weather and a fantastic article in The Telegraph. The 5K was operated by about 15 volunteers, and some 7th graders. There were more sponsors this year, and returning sponsors donated in larger amounts than last year.

2. Curriculum Committee Report

Kim Rivers (Director) delivered a verbal report. Some highlights:

- 2 teachers joined the committee, Amy Savoie and Amanda Tanguay.
- A representative from Wheatley English Language Arts curriculum came to talk to the teachers.
- Teachers are now contributing to the news blast that is posted on the Facebook page.
- Multi-age classrooms were discussed. There seems to be a wider age range this year.
- The next meeting for the Curriculum Committee set for December 14 at 4:00 PM at the school.

Debbie Christianson asked whether compensation was typically available for teachers who participate in running clubs.

Priscilla Cormier mentioned that her nephew in Germany wants to come to the States to do an internship of some kind, and asked whether Gate City would be open to that. Karin Cevasco (School Director) noted that the school would be happy to pursue that.

3. Director's Report

Karin Cevasco (School Director) was contacted by Americans for the Arts, and we were a top participant. We can expect to receive \$1,000 toward our arts program in the school. That was announced publicly on Monday, and they asked us to market that through the school.

Facilities update: Windows will be added to some solid windowless doors for safety and other reasons. Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) noted that Karin Cevasco (School Director) needs to contact the building owner prior to doing the work. She noted she would.

The Smarter Balanced test results have been made available, but copies are not available due to technical difficulties. They will be printed and delivered to parents when the technical difficulties (accessing the content from the secured web site) are addressed. They will not be available for conferences but will be afterward.

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Enrollment: Our numbers have gone down. We are at 147, and expect to be at 146¹. Karin Cevasco (School Director) noted she continued going through the wait list. The biggest challenge is that the Wait List for kindergarten is missing and cannot be located. She asked for help from the board on where to go next. There are 3 kindergarten seats available.

Sarah Hall stated that a board policy or procedure needs to be put in place to make phone calls on the wait list, since Karin is overwhelmed. Peter raised a general concern about confidentiality with a non-employee in roles that could involve sensitive information. It was discussed that a volunteer could be involved in setting up appointments. Tom Tyler (Secretary) mentioned that pursuing the waiting list should be treated as a high priority, as enrollment is the lifeblood of the organization.

4. Strategic Planning Committee Report (added to Agenda)

Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) distributed the strategic planning committee document, *Preliminary Strategic Goals for the Gate City Charter School for the Arts*, as we are evolving from start-up to operational mode. It lists 1, 3, and 5 year goals. Among other things, he emphasized the need for planning for large capital reinvestment expenses that will not occur next year, but will in the 5 year span.

EDITME – INSERT REFERENCE TO BOB’S PRELIMINARY PLAN DOC.

It was noted that the web site is missing key content, has some usability issues (partly not being updated, partly some functionality with lunch pages), and has embarrassing gaps (missing descriptions). We discussed getting to a basic “minimum bar” (completing obvious gaps) in short order, and a strategic objective to improve the web site, our “window to the world.”

Sarah Hall will put forth a suggestion for the form of the Arty Award. Karin Cevasco (School Director) will acquire the award, to be awarded in December.

Next Meeting: December 15, 2015 (3rd Tuesday in December).

9:46 PM

¹ The numbers mentioned in the meeting were 153 and 151; actual numbers 147 and 146 were confirmed the next business day.

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MOTION (Peter Bonaccorsi/Kim Rivers): Move go into non-public session under Chapter 91-A Paragraph 2 Subsection (a) (personnel discussions). Motion passed by unanimous roll call vote.

10:19 PM

MOTION (Peter Bonaccorsi/Charisa Martin) Exited from public session. Motion passed without objection.

Bob Amrein (Vice Chairman) asked when we start re-evaluating budgeting if enrollment goes down. John Keicher (Treasurer) responded that we do so immediately.

10:24 PM

MOTION (Peter Bonaccorsi/Tom Tyler) Motion to adjourn. Motion passed without objection.

Meeting adjourned at 10:24 PM.