Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Date: November 9, 2021

Held at The Birches Academy

Present: Chair: Christie Storniolo (CES), Vice Chair: Christine Miele (CM), Secretary: Alyssa Ross (AR) Treasurer: Michael Gendreau (MG), Bob Hawkes (BH), Pamela Sarantis (PS), Debbie Kruzel (DK)
Staff: Chris Smith (CDS), Jessica Wachsman (JW), Erin Balfe (EB), Aimye Haroutunian (AH)
Public: see below

CES called meeting to order at 5:34pm

General

Board meetings are intended to take place in person again, though committee meetings may still be via Zoom.

Approval of minutes from October 12 regular meeting. PS motions to approve, CM seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

Correspondence

- 2 letters related to school reopening plan; will submit into the record when we get to that part of the agenda

Upcoming events:

- November 9: Spotlight tour
- November 12: Parent/teacher conferences
- November 18: Picture make up day

Next meetings

- December 7: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- December 14: 5:30pm Board
- January 11: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- January 25: 5:30pm Board

School highlight

Mrs. Hawkes shared an overview of the different elements of the art program (art history, open studio, etc.) and talked about the approach to and reasons for arts integration, and shared some lessons as examples. Her goal is to develop arts appreciation by the time students graduate, and teach empathy and tolerance through learning about artists. 6th graders will start The

Memory Project this week, focused on making portraits of children in (and learning about) Nigeria. First and second graders learn about mouth painting, which focuses on disabilities and ways you can still make art even with physical challenges. Artsonia is used as a digital gallery that will follow students through their entire time at The Birches; with older grades it is also used for artist reflection which also helps Mrs. Hawkes ensure comprehension about the lessons. Board then each did an art project with fall leaves.

Dean of School update

2021-22 Reopening Plan

- CES welcomed the in person audience, shared the guidelines
- CDS shared:
    - Quarantine numbers
        - 33 closed cases
        - 0 open cases
        - no in-school transmission
    - Results from SASS: 40 negative
    - School employees positions on masks
        - CDS: at this time he recommends we continue with masks, but understanding that vaccines have been made available for kids so is open to the idea of a shift to reduced mask wearing if we can offer parents ample time to have their children vaccinated if they choose to. He and JW are working on a decision matrix for incidents that would trigger targeted mask wearing.
        - At this time CDS feels teachers do not seem to have shifted their stance on mask wearing.

- CES reminded everyone we got 2 letters: one from teachers and one from a parent; have been submitted on the BBOT shared drive for members to read.
- CES shared the that BBOT has had a number of conversations since last meeting, especially given that the FDA has since approved vaccines for 5-12 year olds. BBOT would like to go towards masks being optional - but reiterated there is no commitment - once parents have the time/opportunity to get their children vaccinated; discussion also that we want everyone to more safely experience the holidays and so the idea could be to return to school mask optional in January. Again, no decision or commitment - this is just some of the discussion taking place among the BBOT.
- CDS reiterated he and JW will work on a matrix to guide situations regarding any outbreak, in conjunction with state guidance. CES asked if CDS will provide that matrix for the December meeting and he confirmed that he will. CM asked CDS to send at least 5 days prior to the meeting so BBOT has ample time to review and ask questions.

- CDS said that if we go mask optional students will still need to have a mask with them daily but only some circumstances will require wearing them, such as when they're in close proximity like Forest Forum. Bus students are required to wear masks, which is not determined by Birches.
- State of NH is the only one that can decide if vaccinations will be required; it is not something a district or a school can currently mandate.
- We may ask families for voluntary, confidential vaccination status to help guide decision making and advice. This is not yet decided.
- Vaccination clinics are being offered by many sending towns; determining if Birches students are eligible on a town by town basis just to let parents know if that is an option.

Public comment on reopening plan:

- Dan Keefe: What has been said until now was that teachers may resign if we go mask optional, wanted to know why this may change based on earlier comments from BBOT. Reiterated his past statements that masks are a health liability. Shared Children's Health Defense Found info, he will send to the BBOT after the meeting.
- Katey Vesta: first year as a TA and Night Owls lead. Would like to not have masks at all but feels that the time is not yet here to stop wearing them and that time won't necessarily be after winter break either. Feels even vaccinations may not be enough to stem the spread and vaccines are more helpful at preventing hospitalizations or severe disease over spread. Also concerned about the variants. We are getting there but just because finish line is in sight doesn't mean we can stop what we've been doing.
- Chris Mederois: parent who is concerned about children wearing wet masks and that children don't always know masks are dangerous at times. Feels we have school choice and we should have mask choice.
- Rich Glatz: still in favor of masks even with the addition of the vaccine for ages 5-12. As a doctor he is seeing the numbers rise again as they did last winter.
- Shane Wakeen: parent who is advocating for mask optional. Sees how the kids are living outside of school v inside of school, including at sports. Feels kids are confused about why masks at school and not everywhere else. Other charter schools of our size are not being masked.
- Jessica Grover: opposes mask mandate, wants mask optional. Everywhere else in the community no one is wearing masks, they're mixing with kids from all over and there have not been outbreaks.

Board comments on reopening plan:

- DK: also confused about why we have masks in school when kids are out in the community without them, because the documented numbers for kids and their impact show that low numbers; there are few mandates in other places and so students are not living in the same reality in and out of school
- MG: we live mask free in society so why do we have masks at school
- PS: agrees she doesn't want kids in masks but doesn't think the kids care as much about wearing them, parents are making is more stressful for them; also concerned about a big spread and the impact on admin time to manage this

- AR: we still don't know long term effects of COVID so even though cited death rates are low that doesn't mean zero impact, and last year at this time we didn't have the vaccine when the numbers went up; now that all of our students are eligible we should lift the mandate but wait until January; this will allow all students to get both rounds and will not put anyone in a position to have a higher possibility of exposure prior to the holidays; teachers can prepare physically and emotionally for this change - there has to be an end date

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CES asked if anyone has changed their vote from the October meeting. No one has. Mask policy remains in place. CES shared that none of the Board wants masks and we will continue to look at the data and listen to our staff. Confirmed we will revisit this in the December meeting and will look at the FAQ to see if updates are needed.

Had a discussion about how to prepare students about choice and moving to mask optional. EB shared how this was handled last year when masks were first made optional outside and how teachers reminded students it is not their job to comment on other people's mask wearing.

Enrollment

- 223 enrolled
- Wait list at 138

Events and Updates

- Makerspace club starts on November 30; a four week session with plan to run another group after the first of the year.
- Karate International and Skateboarding took place this month; both very successful after-school offerings.
- Music will be creating videos to share with families in lieu of a winter concert. Mr. Jones will be hosting open workshops the week of December 13 so that parents can get an idea of what music class is like for their kids. This will happen in grades K-5 in tandem with the book fair.
- Crazy hat parade went very well; students were happy to have that tradition back.
- Collected over 1300 pairs of socks for the homeless community in Merrimack Valley.
- Currently running a food drive for We Care charity in Salem.
- Participating in Operation Holiday Cards; Mrs. Hawkes has taken the lead on this to help students make cards or sign donated cards for the troops.
- Charter renewal: the inspection from the state went well and CDS and JW are still working to correct a few infractions.

Personnel Update

- Searching for 2 additional TAs
- Have had a number of staff out this month for various reasons, and CDS and JW are working to develop a substitute list. Two parent volunteers have submitted their background checks; we are hoping to expand this number for potential substitutes as well as chaperones for big all-school trips; will ask in an upcoming bulletin. Will also consider doing paid shifts.

Foundation update

***Recent activity*:**

- Socktober
- Boo Grams: Bugs & Kisses holiday gram sale
- Salem Town Halloween Event Tuesday, October 26
- Note: Windham Mom Alliance Annual Daycare/Preschool/Kindergarten Fair postponed due to a COVID cluster

Planned events:

- November:
    - Canned food drive
    - Cash Calendar sales start. Drawing month of January with cash to win cash every day.
- December:
    - Scholastic Book Fair December 12/10-12/17
        - There will parent & family viewing times in conjunction with Mr. Jones music workshop classes- we will schedule a formal Special Friend/Grandparents breakfast in March
- January: Cultural Fair, School Choice Week, Alumni Open House
- February: Candy Grams
- March; Read a Thon, Special Friends/Grandparents breakfast
- April; Fill OUR Cuy (trying to reschedule)
- May: Spring party, TAW
- June: NH Day of Giving

Committee updates

Finance

- 401K match
    - Motion to approve to offer a 401K match for employees. BH motioned to approve, PS seconded. All in favor, none opposed.
    - Discussion about what % to have for the match for the rest of this fiscal year. CM feels 1.5% makes sense for now, because we are always operating in the red. BH feels we should do 2% because it is a maximum impact of $3K if every eligible teacher participates. We could try to fundraise for the differential by telling

the parents we are just now offering a matching program and we want to offer this to teachers as an incentive to stay. AR motioned to approve 2%, PS seconded. BH and CES abstained. All in favor, none opposed. JW to share with staff tomorrow.

- Review October financials through October 31. PS motions to approve, CM seconds. All in favor. None opposed.

Governance

- MG is working closely with a potential member; will ask the candidate to come to a Board meeting soon.

Outreach/Day of Giving

- CM, AR met to discuss 10 year anniversary plan, overlaps with Day of Giving planning; CM, AR, AH met about Day of Giving plan and have action items that we will follow up on week of November 15
- Looking at CoC event January 18 or January 24
- Updating overall marketing plan
- Have a parent who has offered to to help with outreach since we have not gotten an intern; AR sent details and is following up
- AR to put K lottery and cash calendar in Windham Independent
- AR to check with Eagle Tribune about a 10 year article, NH Chronicle

Personnel, Curriculum, Strategic Planning

- None met but
    - Personnel will schedule time with CDS for his review/goal setting
    - CES asks that we focus more on the curriculum committee in the coming months

Facilities Management

- Met last week and will meet next week

Policy Reviews

November:

- **None**

December:

- ***Possibly* Code of Conduct**

CDS motions to move into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II(c) at 8:06pm. BH seconds. All in favor.

CM motions to move out of non-public session and into public at 8:12pm. AR seconds. All in favor.

Vote to seal the minutes of the non-public session because divulgence of the non-public minutes is likely to adversely affect the reputation of a person other than the member of the Board per RSA 91-A:3, II(c). All in favor.

- PS motions to approve, CM seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

Public comment:

- None

BH motions to adjourn. CM seconds. All agree. 8:13pm meeting adjourned.