Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Date: September 21, 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),
Public: see below

CES called meeting to order at 5:33pm

General

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

Approval of minutes from August 24 regular meeting, with modifications (spelling/grammar). PS motions to approve, MG seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

Correspondence

- 1 letter from a potential Board member
- 5 letters related to school reopening plan; will submit into the record when we get to that part of the agenda

Upcoming events:

- September 28: K parent night 5:30pm
- September 29: Grades 1-8 parent night 5:30pm
- September 30: School pictures 8:30am

Next meetings

- October 5: 6pm Finance committee (remote)
- October 12 : 5:30pm Board
- November 2: 6pm Finance committee (remote)
- November 9: 5:30pm Board

School highlight

- Andrew Jones: music teacher
    - Last year was his first year - many COVID challenges (singing was not allowed, half the class remote, etc.)

    - This year Mrs. Stolar retired so he is taking over her classes too - combining vocal and instrumental
    - Designed an entire new curriculum; has worked with the classroom teachers to tie his work to coordinate with what they're learning
    - Added folk dancing, new instruments
    - Grade 4 / 5 ukulele but it's mostly about learning how to play together
    - Middle school has band, chorus and orchestra - continuing rock band but would also like to develop a traditional band (trumpets, etc.)
    - Have instrumental 1:1, during the lunch hour some students come and do small group sessions, also works with some more advanced students on smaller projects
    - Working to rebuild the chorus as the numbers dropped last year when it was done remotely; will let the 5th graders participate to increase that participation
    - Middle school integrated music elective: expose the middle schoolers to elements of music, practical applications, podcasting, history of music, etc. - this year he is working with EB to combine history classes and music related to the times they're learning about (slavery, jazz age, etc.) - have a TA who is an expert in maritime music and will teach the students about that as well
    - Retaining tradition like Fine Arts Night, Holiday Concerts, etc. but looking to do a Battle of the Bands

Dean of School update

2021-22 Reopening Plan

- CES welcomed the in person audience, shared what CDS provided in his recap:
    - As of 9/14 we have had 13 students that have returned to school from quarantine (no positive cases) and currently have 9 students out on quarantine
    - State information:
        - The nurse participated in the twice a month call with the state (DHHS), and they are still recommending mask wearing as a mitigation strategy when students can not be six feet apart.
        - The state reports that there have been more clusters in the first three weeks of school this year than all of last year. 24 clusters totalling 147 kids.
        - They did not report whether these schools were or were not mandating masks -
    - CDS observes that the students are doing well with masks, he is advocating to retain the policy
    - Update on SASS
        - 35 people participated

        - Teachers went with students when possible
        - All negative
        - Biweekly so next testing is Wednesday, September 29
        - People can still sign up
    - CES reminded all that we decided last meeting that we will review the mask policy in each meeting

- Public comment on reopening plan:
    - **Dan Keefe**: 4th grade parent, works with Salem middle school wrestling and in a prison - he does not see much difference in numbers with and without masks. Shared some studies and reports on mask health, including testing from Florida that showed viral impacts on masks, clothing, etc. Would also like to raise the psychological impact of masks on children. Also submitted a letter with more details and links to study; the Board has received and reviewed that.
    - **Jessica Grover**: 4th grade and 1st grade. 1st graders are learning to read and other things that are harmed with masks: can't see facial expressions, visual cues, etc. Out of school masks are all optional. She feels like school, where kids are starting to learn, should be mask optional and parents could be informed if there is a high transmission rate.
    - **Jacqueline Madeiros** - 1st grader, works in the pharma industry. There has been no long term study about the impact of mask wearing both socially and educationally. Speech is being impacted: this could result in a cost down the road by needing outside therapy. Kids take off masks to eat, etc. Why can't they be mask free when they are with their cohort? Feels masks breed bacteria that go into their lungs.
    - **Chris Maderois** - almost decided to pull his kids but didn't. Feels there is no evidence that masks help. Death rates are low. He understands people feel we are helping each other but we are actually harming the children.
    - **Shane Wakeen** - asked about the 5 letters; if they were pro or con. CES replied that they were both and one was from a large group of teachers.
    - **Jenni Wakeen**: has it been discussed for parents to get a vote? CES reiterated the governance of the school has never called for parents to vote, that for 10 years/under our charter the Board makes all decisions though with community input.
    - **Jessica Grover** - wonders why we are so much smaller than the Salem school district and have more restrictions; Salem students are less than 3 feet apart and they are not wearing masks at their desks, just in the halls and in groups.
    - **Megan Burns** - sees both sides of the argument. We are all part of a community, we do have family members at home who are immunocompromised, people who have babies. If there is anything she can do to protect her children and her community she will sign up for it. Acknowledges bacteria, etc. but it's the lesser of two evils. WIshes her child didn't have to wear one but also that we weren't in a pandemic. We won't know until we get more data. But we can see on the news that the hospitals are filling up. Feels mask wearing is about global citizenry and

it's a good lesson for kids to show they care about others. Speech pronunciation develops until age 8 so kids can catch up.
    - **Rob St. Germain** - 2nd and 4th grade. Had debated pulling his kids after last meeting, but opted to keep them. Feels studies show that the types of masks worn students don't protect, they let air and bacteria in. Shy children are more impacted. Wants to be on the record they love the school but they think it should be parent choice. He's had family that has been impacted by COVID and he still feels this way.
    - **Dan Keefe**: wants to know why mask optional wasn't considered
    - **Ken Greenwold**: parent of two children; his understanding is that unless it is a specific type of mask it won't help and hopes the Board is taking into consideration the data in spread, hospital beds, etc.

- CES reminded everyone we got 5 letters; CDS said he just got another which he added into the same folder for the Board to read during the meeting

- Board comment on reopening plan:
    - **DK**: glad to see that the SASS results show no spread; feels a lot of other things are happening mask-free in society and numbers have not gone too high so mask choice should be in place
    - **MG**: feels it is still hard to get good numbers - we will never get to 0% but the numbers are low so if not now to get rid of masks then when
    - **PS**: feels it is too soon to tell, cases and reporting can lag - feels we should watch it over the next month and watch what happens with the schools who are not requiring masks

AR asked for non-public session before vote. 6:48pm

AR motions to move into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II(c) *Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this board, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to include any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant.* CM seconds. All in favor.

CM motions to move out of non-public session and into public at 7:04pm. 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.

7:05pm back in public session. CES asks if any Board member would like to add comment prior to vote.

- **AR:** would prefer to not have masks but our teachers are overwhelmingly asking for masks; also we are required to protect the immunocompromised children and if we don't we could get sued which we cannot afford, we also only have one class per grade so we don't have the option of creating immunocompromised classrooms
- **CES:** reiterated that 75% of our students cannot be vaccinated and the teachers are also concerned about that

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CES asked if anyone has changed their vote from the August 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 we also have a set of actions to look into prior to the next meeting including polling the staff, investigating numbers of immunocompromised community members, etc. Confirmed we will revisit this in the October meeting.

Enrollment

- 223 enrolled
- Wait list at 76
- Had some changes right before school - a mix of moving to schools and homeschooling

Events and Updates

- State Inspection coming up as part of charter renewal; JW will start to add documentation for the Board to review - there are some new sections so the Board will help put it together along with CDS and JW

Personnel Update

- Hired a math teacher
    - Bryan Shaffer joined us the first day of school and will be co-teaching with Mrs. Scali for the first month to get up to speed on our procedures.
- Searching for an additional TA

Foundation update

Current fundraisers:

- Tuft & Needle
- Amazon Smile
- Clothing Drive: 10/30 8am-11am
- Spirit Wear: online site will open late September; working with a new vendor
- Meadow Farm Catalog Sales direct ship to purchaser; online store will open 10/1 and run for 2 weeks
- Three Rivers Wreath: Middle school DC trip fundraiser

Community Event Plan:

- October: Meadow Farms Catalog sales
    - Socktober
    - Halloween event - Free party at the school
    - Windham Harvest Fest 10/16- looking for volunteers to do Trick or Treating
- November:
    - Fill Your Cup fundraiser (may be rebranded) 11/19
    - Canned food drive
- Pelham Festival Of Trees: opening weekend 11/27
    - Can donate a theme tree
    - Can buy ad space in the program
- December:
    - Movie Night/Stuff a Mascot Event 12/3
    - Scholastic Book Fair December 12/10-12/17
    - Grandparents/Special Friends breakfast 12/14
- January: Cultural Fair, School Choice Week, Alumni Open House
- February: Candy Grams
- March: Read a Thon
- April: Cash Calendar
- May: Spring party
- June: NH Day of Giving

Committee updates

Finance

- Review July and August financials. CM motions to approve, PS seconds. All in favor.

Capital Campaign

- CM created new plan called Day of Giving - she will update this and move to the October folder, Board members should review and comment prior and be prepared to discuss in next meeting

Governance

- MG is in communications with several candidates

Outreach

- Updating overall marketing plan
- We have a parent who will help with outreach since we have not gotten an intern; AR needs to send her details
- 10 Years celebration
    - Working on logo
    - CES suggests we connect with some of the original founders
    - Creating a social media plan
    - JW has a 5 year time capsule; need to determine if we will open it and/or do a 10 year one

Facilities Management

- Met last week to look at options
- WIll go into non-public to discuss

Curriculum, Strategic Planning - did not meet but Curriculum will schedule time with CDS for his review/goal setting

Policy Reviews

September:

- **Indoor Air Quality Policy**. CM motions to approve. BH seconds. All agree. None opposed.
- **Homework**: CM motions to approve with changes discussed. PS seconds. All agree. None opposed.
- **Criminal Records Check**. PS motions to approve. BH seconds. All agree. None opposed.
- **Bylaws**. We are sending these to our lawyer with our questions; JW said we need it by January for the renewal.

October:

- **COVID-19 Attendance**
- Others TBD depending on charter review process

Public comment:

- Jacqueline Madeiros asked if there is public information about teaching on sensitive topics and when they are being taught. CDS shared the plan by grade and said anyone can reach out to him at any time.

AR motions to move into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II(j) *Matters which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of any person, other than a member of this board, unless such person requests an open meeting. This exemption shall extend to include any application for assistance or tax abatement or waiver of a fee, fine or other levy, if based on inability to pay or poverty of the applicant.* BH seconds. All in favor.

CM motions to move out of non-public session and into public at 8:56pm. 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(j). All in favor.

PS motions to adjourn. BH seconds. All agree. 8:58pm meeting adjourned.