Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Date: February 15, 2022

Held at The Birches Academy

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

CES called meeting to order at 5:37pm

General

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

Approval of minutes from January 10 regular meeting. CM motions to approve, PS seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

Correspondence

- 24 letters related to school reopening plan; will submit into the record when we get to that part of the agenda
- No other correspondence

Upcoming events:

- February 15: Spotlight Tour
- Through March 11: online talent show submissions; will be developed into a video to be shared with the school community
- March 15 Board meeting: Mrs. Baldonado will share about her experience with flipping the classroom (postponed from February)
- April 6: ADD safety training for teachers from Windham PD; will have a parent meeting after that

Next meetings

- February 22: 5:30pm Finance special meeting on 2022-23 budget
- March 7: Special Board meeting to approve charter renewal document
- March 8: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- March 15: 5:30pm Board
    - PS will miss this meeting

- April 5: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- April 12: 5:30pm Board

General business

- CES needs to sign annual General Assurance FY2022 document. This is to validate that the federal funding we receive is used as intended. CM motions to have the Board chair sign the GS FY2022, DK seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.
- Update to school calendar to remove March 18 day off for School Charter Day since it will not be held by the state. This would make the last day of school June 14 barring additional snow days. DK motions update the calendar, CM seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.
- Will review draft calendar for 2022-23 once Salem approves theirs, likely in the April Board meeting.

Dean of School update

Enrollment

- 224 enrolled
- Wait list at 141
- Kindergarten for 2022; 25 admitted, 15 accepted so far, 26 on waitlist

Events and Updates

- Celebrated the 100th day of school; many students took part by dressing up
- Staff participated in a bake-off which Mrs. Black-Ward won with her amazing Whoopie Pie
- Fifth grade was victorious in Penny Wars; overall we raised $1200
- Held spotlight tours on January 26 and February 9, as well as several private tours including for families of students who had been accepted into the Kindergarten for next year
- Kindergarten lottery was on February 2, Senator Morse drew the numbers for the 51 applications. Still waiting for 10 confirmations but no one has declined yet.
- February 9 delayed opening workshop on PLCs which led to the generation of the Social Emotional Learning (SEL) by the elementary teachers who generated a plan to begin working on the SEL curriculum (encouraging positive social behaviors, recognizing targeted positive behaviors which can be both general and targeted at specific students who need extra support). This will be shared with the whole school but may be modified at the middle school level.
- Middle school teachers are going to resume electives

COVID Update

- Quarantine numbers - students and staff, currently at 5
- Results from the last two SASS tests yielded one positive result each; up to 86 participants last time
- Position on masks
    - At this time, it remains CDS's opinion that students should wear masks at school. Teachers have also verbally expressed to CDS they would prefer to keep masks.
    - However, given the expressions of community support and the fact that nearby schools have moved to mask optional CDS understands retaining the in-school mandate doesn't seem tenable so he reluctantly suggests that we move to a mask optional position with the understanding that our guidelines for dealing with an outbreak or a cluster as defined in our Mask Optional Guidelines will be in force.

Public comments on COVID plan:

- Board received 24 letters (some were from the same people), all from parents, no staff; all have been shared with the full Board in a dedicated folder
- Alex Amore: has a Kindergarten student, he begs the board to remove the masks, feels paper masks do not do anything, feels the students needs to see expressions from teachers and fellow classmates
- Becca Allen: would like to know what the policy is for outbreaks in classrooms
- Jennifer Carpine: parent of third grade twins, is pro-mask but would like to know if a new policy is put into place when it would it go live since we are still in cold and flu season
- Lindsay Bleisch: parent of first/third graders; thanks the teachers who have dealt with COVID these past few years, thanks Mr. Smith who responds to her emails. Says she wishes she'd come to each meeting to fight for no masks as her observations have been masks have a negative impact on her children, from relief when they can take the mask off each day to getting scolded at lunchtime for mask wearing.
- Ken Greenwald: parent of twins in fifth grade, asks for mask choice now that current variant is closer to a cold, now more of a standard risk - understands that there was a time for the masks, his students have not been complaining but he thinks it's time and that his sons have not been impacted but are looking forward to seeing teacher faces
- Victoria Austin: prospective Kindergarten parent for next year, really hoping we are a mask optional school with the ability to see faces; would like to know how many teachers would still be wearing masks
- Ron Valerio: parent of 4th grader, science shows masks don't do much so it should be a choice, creating problems for a lot of children which are not always visible
- Jessica Wakeen: very happy parent and would like to stay but have their children on wait lists elsewhere and would reluctantly pull them if the mask policy does not change

- Jess Grover: parent of two children plus incoming kindergartener - has sent multiple letters but wants to reiterate her position of going mask optional

CES asked CDS a few questions about scenarios if were to go mask optional

- CES recognizes some staff and students may be anxious about going mask optional; what will be done in the school to help those individuals that may require support for this change?
    - CDS said it will mostly be on the teacher level
    - Parents often call CDS to ask for support on certain issues, he expects this could extend to talking to students about masks regardless of scenario - but the staff can't be mask police, but they can talk to certain students at parent request
    - CDS and JW did ask if Board votes mask optional can they have a few days to let students know and let families and/or classrooms have time to have conversations
- CES asked CDS how we can reinforce across the school community that people need to be supportive of whatever people chose
    - CDS said this happens in many instances, all the time - so masks are just another in a series of discussion points about tolerance and respect

Board comments on COVID plan:

- PS:
    - asked CDS why he and teachers feel we still need masks. CDS said he can't speak for teachers, but can say many have told them they would still like masks. CDS said he does read all articles sent his way plus more and feels there is science both ways. He reads a lot of studies and he looks to those he trusts as experts. He feels the incidence of COVID spread is lower when people are wearing masks, both from experts he follows and anecdotal evidence. He also feels he will do absolutely everything to keep students safe in all situations and if masks help keep even a single student safe that is very important to him, even though he recognizes that there are concerns about the negative impact of masks.
    - Asked EB the same as her perspective as a teacher. EB said she has had to call out much less since wearing masks, even if it's not COVID, and this prevents her from having to shift her teaching, put her job upon others, etc. and give the students more consistency and continuity.
- AG: cannot vote tonight as her final background check is pending but expresses her opinion that masks should be optional. Feels we need a few days to prep students and teachers for the change so the transition is easier.

Voting:

With regard to the section in the back to school reopening plan of August 2021 that is mandating masks, roll call vote to retain that section. Motion to vote AR, CM seconds.

- *DK: no*

- *PS: yes*
- *CM: no*
- *BH: no*
- *MG: no*
- *AR: no*
- *CES: no*
  ***RESULT**: 1 yes, 6 no*

WIth the above vote to change the back to school reopening plan of August 2021 that is mandating masks, the Board will create an addendum in this federally-mandated plan. :Board is working from a draft but needed to address many points

- Effective date - board agreed to Monday, February 21
- PS recommends we require masks the week after February break - week of March 7-11; majority of Board disagrees but we can put a recommendation in the weekly communication that masks are a good idea that week
- When should masks be required? Close contact/can't have 3 foot distance? Forest Forum - we want to get the whole school back together and if we do this we risk a larger outbreak? Small groups because some students and staff are immunocompromised. Ultimately decided on only including 4 scenarios:
  - Riding the school bus (field trips included)
  - There are 2 or more related cases in one classroom (a *cluster*); that classroom will mask for 10 school days.
  - There are 2 or more *clusters* in the school (an *outbreak*); the entire school will mask for 10 school days.
  - A student returns to school after testing positive for COVID-19 and are on days 6-10 post positive test

Motion to add an addendum to the August 2021 reopening plan making masks optional. Motion to vote CM, AR seconds.

- *DK: yes*
- *PS: yes*
- *CM: yes*
- *BH: yes*
- *MG: yes*
- *AR: yes*
- *CES: yes*
  ***RESULT**: 7 yes, 0 no*

Foundation update

Recent activity

- Penny Wars: Super Bowl Coin Toss raised $1,200
  - Saplings 2 won an ice cream party
  - Whole school won popsicles on Friday

- “Ultimate Tuesday”: 2/22/2022 we are collecting dog & cat items for our community partner SARL

Upcoming events (pending confirmation)

- March; Dining of Dollars at Bertuccis March 9
- April: Special Friends Day, exact date TBD
- May: Clothing Drive drop off starts May 4 and ends May 5, 9 am. Spring celebration date to be determined
- June: NH Day of Giving: June 7

Committee updates

Finance

- Motion to accept period ending January 31. DK motions to approve, CM seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.
- Continuing to work on 2022-23 budget; having a special finance meeting February 22. Goal for full Board reviews/votes in March.

.***Outreach/Day of Giving***

- 10 year commemoration was held January 25th
  - AR submitted article to Salem Life and Windham Independent
- External Social Media/web:
    - AR working on FB and IG content; parent Lisa Kelloway taking pictures regularly around school which has been a huge help in getting fresh images and more ideas
    - AR will begin posting some testimonials from families and refresh these on website
    - Added 10 year logo to website January 18
    - CM wrote/mailed second issue of newsletter
- Ongoing projects
    - AR continuing to staff pictures, new bios to website
    - Updating marketing plan for 2021/2022
    - Collecting Birches memories/appreciation postcards for display around school

Personnel

- AR, CES, CDS meeting 9am February 21 on annual review

Charter Renewal

- State is requiring to change wording from A Public Charter School to Chartered Public School
    - AR can change promotional content; JW to tell when this needs to happen
    - JW to look into everywhere this needs to be changed with state, federal government

- Got an extension on submitting the charter to March 11; JW and CDS reviewing February 18 and will send to whole Board to review by late February; Board will review and have a special meeting on March 7 at 5:30pm to vote on changes
- CM to provide updated org chart

Governance

- Received a new potential member; scheduled a call with them this week
- Have several email threads with another potential BOT member that are in early stages
- If anyone has any names that they feel could be a good fit for the BOT please do not hesitate to reach out to MG

Curriculum

- CDS looking at Dibbles result and how to interpret/combine the data to show growth over time

Facilities, Strategic Planning - did not meet, will schedule meetings for both

Policy Reviews

February:

- Reporting Abused and Neglected Children
    - Board comments that were provided in writing addressed
    - CM motions to accept. AR seconds. All agree. None opposed.
- Code of Conduct
    - It's a new law for charter schools to have this policy whereas before it was just traditional public schools
    - Board comments that were provided in writing addressed
    - PS motions to accept. DK seconds. All agree. None opposed.

March:

- Likely none due to charter renewal

MG motions to adjourn. BH seconds. All agree. 8:24pm meeting adjourned.