Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Date: January 10, 2022

Held at The Birches Academy

Present: Chair: Christie Storniolo (CES) - REMOTE, 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)
Public: see below

CM 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 December 14 regular meeting. DK motions to approve, BH seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

Correspondence

- 7 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:

- January 25: Chamber event; limited attendance from Chamber of Commerce members, school founders and select alumni
- January 26: Spotlight Tour
- February 2: Kindergarten lottery; Senator Morse is scheduled to attend to draw the numbers

Next meetings

- February 8: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- February 15: 5:30pm Board
- March 8: 5:30pm Finance committee (remote)
- March 15: 5:30pm Board
- Note: CES shared a proposed schedule for the entire year; is on the 2022 meeting folder and the Board is to note any dates they're not available. Want to make a commitment to

keep the meetings second Tuesday of the month and will vote later in the meeting about amending our process requiring all Board members to be present for voting.

Dean of School update

Enrollment

- 223 enrolled
- Wait list at 102

Events and Updates

- Remote holiday concert was well received and parental visits to music classes was received even more enthusiastically.
- Ski club started on January 4; is being run by a grandparent.
- CM to meet with CDS on state reporting and report back to Board with analysis and any necessary/desired actions.

Personnel Update

- One open position: TA for Kindergarten; have an interview scheduled for this week.
- Family members of community members and Board have been supplementing staff; had these people get fingerprinted so that we can utilize them more efficiently later too.

COVID update

- Community numbers
    - Current quarantine: 39
    - Current positive with school exposure: 11
    - Current positive without school exposure: 11
    - Close family member on quarantine (student not positive): 17
- School situation
    - Have pulled back from mixing cohorts together, such as moving toward a more typical Forest Forum to try to mitigate our higher COVID numbers. Middle school teachers are going to stop combining students for electives for a few weeks to see if that improves COVID numbers.
    - Didn’t receive a lot of communication over the break about COVID exposures and illnesses, but on the Sunday before our return and since have gotten a steady stream of reports of both exposures and infections.
    - Clubs will be continuing after school, but the club leaders will take extra care regarding social distancing and cleaning.

    - Teachers are looking at more remote options for students who are quarantining; the 5th grade teacher, for example, is experimenting with flipped lessons combined with Socratic seminars.
    - Next SASS testing January 12; CDS doesn't have the current number on how many are enrolled as he has been getting questions from families considering participating.
- School employees positions on masks
    - At this time, CDS's opinion is that we should continue to require masks.
    - At this time the teachers do not seem to have shifted their stance on mask wearing.

Public comments on COVID plan:

- Board received 7 letters - 6 parents, 1 staff; all have been shared with the full Board
- Katey Vesta: teacher assistant, Night Owls lead - feels we have seen little spread in school because of us wearing masks; we can still do after school activities including with mixed grades because the numbers in our school are low even with omicron
- Dan Keefe: wants to know why a vaccinated student can come to school whereas an unvaccinated student who has been exposed can not even with a negative test; his students in middle school wrestling don't wear masks and they've had little spread on the team.
- Rob St. Germain: since August we have been told Board will vote each month and even with low numbers nothing has been changed - wants to know why and wants masks to be optional.
- Megan Burns: pro masks because they are pro community not putting individuals first, people at home are immunocompromised and some have children not eligible for the vaccine yet (under 5); towns like Windham are now requiring masks; would love for them to be gone but does not feel we are there yet.
- Jennifer Wakeen: main concern is there is limited scientific evidence for masks working based on how the virus spreads, now everyone has the chance to be vaccinated; no one knows how to use masks properly; believe masks are creating/triggering mental disorders.
- Jessica Grover: for parent choice; kids are confused because rules are different everywhere and they're not free at school like they are in activities in the community; there is no scientific evidence masks work
- Kelly LeBlond: teacher and parent; wants us to retain masks so children can stay in school.

Board comments on COVID plan:

- PS: the administration and the teachers are saying they want masks; they are here day to day trying to manage this; keeping masks is the one thing we can do to alleviate their

stress; they ask for so little and we support them in other decisions, why are we questioning this one?

- DK: CDC stopped promoting PCR test as of December 31 so why are we still relying on that since it can't see the difference between pneumonia and COVID. Reiterated she wants mask optional.
- AR: In talking to teachers/staff, and in what she witnessed when helping at recess, most kids don't care about wearing the masks; recognizes that some kids are upset by and scared about masks, but it would be much more harmful to have kids back at home. Does think we need to look more at how mask breaks are given, perhaps more guidelines and teacher training. Addressed public comment asking about what has changed since August; initially we were waiting for vaccines for 75% of school who was not eligible, that came right before the holidays when we knew people were getting together more…and this is also when omicron arrived and quickly surged, where we are today. Reiterated she doesn't want masks but feels Board has the responsibility to look at all the data and all the evidence out there, and think about the community especially our staff.. More people who speak up at these meetings are for mask optional, but the survey indicated a majority in the community want to retain the masks. Acknowledges COVID may never go away but it will settle, but we are in the thick of it right now and cannot justify reversing the policy at this time. Would like to consider more frequent Board votes on the policy.
- MG: reiterated mask choice, feels mental health is the bigger issue.
- CES: wanted to clarify we aren't flip flopping since August (term AR used in her response); every member has a vote but we look at the data and information - each member votes, there are 7 and that is how it goes per our policy.

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, PS seconds.

- *DK: no*
- *PS: yes*
- *CM: no*
- *BH: yes*
- *MG: no*
- *AR: yes*
- *CES: yes*
  ***RESULT**: 4 yes, 3 no*

Foundation update

*Recent activity***:** Cash Calendar drawing every day in January - 21 more days to go

Planned events:

- January; School Choice Week & Alumni Open House
- February; Candy Grams, 100 days of school, Twos Day (celebrating 2/22/22)
- March; Read a Thon, Special Friends/grandparents breakfast
- May: Spring party, TAW
- June: NH Day of Giving

Committee updates

Finance

- Motion to accept December. PS motions to approve, BH seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.
- Aiming to have a draft of 2022-23 budget for February finance committee, updates in March then full Board reviews/votes in March.
- 6 year lease extension with a liberal out clause at 3 years; lease has been reviewed by legal and finance committee. Motion to accept the 4th amendment to the lease agreement..BH motions to approve, PS seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

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

- 10 year Celebration - January 25th from 8:30 AM- 9:30 AM
    - AR has contacted the Eagle tribune and Chronicle for media
    - AH has secured Salem TV for coverage
    - CM has sent out the invitation to Founders and select Alumni for attendance
    - AH working on marketing products
- External Social Media/web:
    - AR working on FB and IG content; parent to start to help, has been fingerprinted
    - AR will begin posting some testimonials from families and refresh these on website
    - Have 10 year logo, will add to website after January 18
- Ongoing projects
    - AR adding staff pictures, new bios to website
    - CM working on second issue of newsletter
    - Updating marketing plan for 2021/2022

Personnel

- COVID impact lead to postponing CDS review/goal setting on December 22; he has all the documentation but just need the verbal review; AR, CES, CDS looking at new dates

Charter Renewal

- Looking to amend the Charter to include Science, Technology, Engineering, Art and Mathematics (STEAM) to our current Arts Integration focus.
- CM and PS will work on items as CDS, JW provide them input

Curriculum, Facilities, Strategic Planning - did not meet

Governance

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- MG continues to look at other candidates

- Patricia Allen to ask senior center if there are former educators who are interested/know people; AR to do the same with retired teachers organization
- Board interviewed new potential Board member, Alexis Goldstack - have received her letter of interest and letters of recommendation for her candidacy

AR motions to move into non-public session per RSA 91-A:3, II(d) at 7:20pm. PS seconds. All in favor.

CM motions to move out of non-public session and into public at 7:31pm. AR seconds. All in favor.

Vote to seal the minutes of the non-public session because *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: per RSA 91-A:3, II(c).* PS motions to approve, CM seconds. All others in favor. None opposed.

PS motion to approve Alexis Goldstack as a new Board member, BH seconds. All in favor.

Policy Reviews

January :

- None

February:

- TBD

PS asked if should we be voting as to whether policies apply to all school sponsored events either in school or off campus? EB says they reinforce school policies when on field trips. CDS and CES to discuss and propose language and where to post this decision.

DK motions to adjourn. AR seconds. All agree. 7:41pm meeting adjourned.