CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 2014 – 6:00 P.M.

Board Members Present: Liz Coenen, Kristen Campbell, Andrea Galdames, Juliann McDermott, Marjorie Nitz, Jane Reilly, Julie Richards, and Liesl Taylor
Board Members Absent: Eve Lo, Melissa Santrach,
Other Attendees: Chris Bewell

AGENDA

Meeting called to order by Board Vice Chair, Liz Coenen, at 6:06pm

Public Comment Period: No public comments were offered.

Introduction of New Procedures
Liz referenced Dr. Charles Speiker's Board Observation Report, which Dr. Speiker wrote after attending the August Board meeting, and said that we would be implementing two new procedures at the beginning of each meeting: Declaration of any Conflict of Interest and the Approval of the Agenda.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Per Dr. Charles Speiker's suggestion, Liz explained that before each meeting, Board members will be asked by the Chair of the meeting to declare any conflict of interest they may have with any agenda items to be discussed.

- Liz asked if any Board members had any conflicts of interest with the agenda items to be discussed during the evening: No declarations of conflict of interest were made.

Approval of Agenda

Liz explained that we were adopting another procedure – the approval of the evening's agenda at the beginning of the meeting.

- This allows us to address things that are, perhaps, on the annual calendar to be discussed at a specific meeting but will not be discussed as scheduled.

KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THIS EVENING'S AGENDA AS PUT FORTH; ANDREA SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Acceptance of Minutes

- Liz asked if anyone had changes to the August minutes; none were offered.

KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE AUGUST 26, 2014, REGULAR BOARD MEETING; JULIE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Head of School Report – Liesl Taylor
See report from Head of School; additional comments/actions follow:

- Liesl distributed the Vital Signs report and offered the following comments:
  - The numbers for the Race and Ethnicity that appear on the chart don't add up due to a glitch in the spreadsheet, however, the student community continues to be very diverse. Our diversity is multifaceted when compared to other schools. Many schools have a majority of students of one race/ethnicity but Cornerstone has many students of many races/ethnicities. The numbers should be as follows: American Indian/Alaskan Native – 1%; Asian or Pacific Islander – 13%; Hispanic – 22%; Black, not Hispanic origin – 28%; White, not Hispanic origin – 36%.
  - Liesl has been visiting the classrooms and has observed the Great Lessons being presented. Liesl reported being thrilled with what she is seeing. The children are having a wonderful experience and it is leading to them doing Great Work.

    - In addition to the academic work, Liesl recounted several beautiful exchanges that showed that social/emotional growth is also happening. For example, a little girl was having difficulty entering the classroom so Liesl initiated a conversation with the girl who started crying and said "Why do I always get in trouble?" Two children explained to the girl, who was new to Cornerstone, that "we learn from our mistakes and that when you make a mistake it doesn't change Liesl's high opinion of you." The girls then said that they were teasing the newcomer and that they had to take responsibility for that.
    - Liesl also offered the observation that the children are moving around a lot! Some of the children who benefit from doing physical work are carrying the cots back and forth. She also noted that the toddlers are most happy when doing their work but that their transitions are emotionally intense.
  - With regard to community engagement, some children are playing soccer after school, and John has agreed to be their coach.
    - The relationship with Buttermilk Farm continues to grow.
    - The greenhouse is being used to connect with the neighborhood and Liesl is continuing with conversations about doing a community picnic. Liesl explained that some of their closest neighbors don't really know what they are providing at the school.
  - In being accountable to the children and families, Liesl made it a priority to know all parents' and children's names and she is making sure to spend time in each classroom at least once a day.
    - Liesl reported that staff is doing a really great job using a common language around behavior support so that the students experience a high level of consistency in staff response to various behaviors. Liesl also reported that many fewer children are coming out of the classroom to be with Liesl for behavior support.
    - Liesl reported that she continues to be available at every drop off and pick up. She commented that some parents are still surprised that she is sitting down and talking with them during these times. It has proven to be a great way to connect with families.
    - The weekly folders have started going home and the children are helping to pack the folders. Chris commented that the children are very aware of the folders and are attentive to bringing them back!
    - In the coming months when the reading assessments have been completed, some of the reading support materials – such as the specific skill cards that support specific books – will be sent home as well. Test prep practice may also go home, but staff is still thinking about this. If that does occur, the children will have a presentation explaining the materials.
  - In being accountable to staff, Liesl noted that the calendar is working well – it has really helped ensure teaching staff members are getting the breaks they need and have time to coordinate with each other.
    - There is still some work to be done to have the Special Education staff in place.
    - Liesl commented that the staff is amazing!
  - In being accountable to our governing agencies, Liesl said the review from the Department of Human Services, which provides oversight for the preschool, has concluded and went well.
    - Liesl noted that It had been weighing on her mind since she took on the role of Head of School.
    - Liesl commented that the evaluator visited the school twice: the first visit was all business, but during the second visit, the evaluator was very lovely and had lots of nice things to say about the school.

- Liesl also reported on the following areas:
  - With regard to the MCAs, there is a summary is in the Annual Report that says all that needs to be said about the scores. Liesl offered the following additional reflections:
    - The staff definitely saw improvement this year in some areas.
    - At some point in the future, it would be interesting to look at the results based on race and ethnicity but we will have to wait until we are fully enrolled. If we did such a report now it would likely identify specific children's results.
    - Math scores are not strong yet but there is a plan in place this year to address that.
      - For example, staff are using "I can" statements that bridge the language differences between the MCA testing language and the Montessori method nomenclature.
  - Liesl presented her 2014-15 Professional Development Plan
    - The plan will be approved in conjunction with the timeline and process for evaluation so that the two are well coordinated. If anyone has comments, please let Liesl know.
    - Liesl explained that to develop the plan, she chose one item to address in each area and, in response to the HOS evaluation committee's suggestion, identified a specific activity that could be done to support that area.
      - Liesl explained that the retreat with Betty Spruill referenced in the Staff section came out of having a really tough winter/spring. In preparation for the retreat, Liesl has spent time reflecting about that time and writing the story of the spring so that the trainer can be well prepared for the retreat.
      - Liesl also commented that the MACS seminar referenced in the Board section will be a significant investment of time but after talking to others about the training she believes that it will be well worth it. The training is structured so that participants first learn about specific skills then go away and develop them on their own. Later they return to be evaluated.
      - Liesl also mentioned that since she will be doing the MACS seminar this year, she has decided not to join the Montessori Administrators Association (MAA). She may join MAA next year.
- Liesl presented the Parent Handbook to the Board for approval.
  - Liesl pointed out that they will be adding language regarding background checks, which will indicate who would have a background check done and under what circumstances.
  - Once the procedure is clearly defined it will be added to handbook and posted on the website.
    - Chris commented that this is something VOA is wanting all the schools they authorize to get this in place.
    - Liesl noted that Melissa emailed her the state statute and so she can focus on it soon.

    MARJE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE PARENT HANDBOOK WITH THE CAVEAT THAT THE BACKGROUND CHECK INFORMATION WILL BE ADDED; JULIE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.
- Liesl presented the Employee Handbook to the Board for approval.
  - Liz asked if anyone had questions; none were asked.

    KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK. MARJE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

<u>Director of Business Operations – Chris Bewell</u>

See report from Director of Business Operations; additional comments follow:

- Chris reported that the bus plan is going well. She rode the bus the 2nd day to make sure it went smoothly. Some families are making different transportation choices so the routes are still somewhat in flux.

- As in years past, staff hit the ground running.
  - Chris noted that it is great to have Adam on staff. He is very quick with new things and is 100% there to support everyone and all that needs to be done.
  - With Adam doing such a great job, both Liesl and Chris are finding they can get more done.
- Chris offered the following comments regarding enrollment:
  - One family with 2 children left the school so we are at 124 students. Since attrition was anticipated and we planned to be at 124, it was good to begin the year with 126 students. Chris will prepare an ADM report for the Board in the coming months.
  - We currently have 18 kindergarteners. We had 20 but 2 left late in August so those on the waitlist had already committed to other schools. There was also room in the 2 Lower Elementary classrooms so more 1st graders were added, which has resulted in a small bubble.
  - It is fine to let people know that CMES has spots available for kindergarteners and Upper Elementary students.
    - Liesl commented that if we continue to have 18 kindergarteners that would be OK too since we have a healthy number of 1st graders.
- Liesl thanked Chris for all she has done to ensure a smooth start to the school year as she continues to support her, staff, and families – she is fantastic!
- Chris noted that a draft of the Annual Report was submitted to VOA and their suggestion were incorporated. The final draft was included in the packet and is ready for Board approval.
  - Liz offered a huge thanks to Liesl and Chris for the preparation of the Annual Report. It is a beautiful document that is well worth reading.
  - Liz asked if Board members had any changes; none were offered.

JULIE MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE 2013 – 2014 ANNUAL REPORT; JULIANN SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

<u>Board Chair Report – Presented by Liz Coenen on behalf of Melissa</u>

See Board Chair Report; additional comments/actions follow:

- Liz commented that Melissa was sorry to miss the meeting.
- Liz referenced the report Melissa included in the packet from Dr. Speiker regarding his visit to the August Board meeting and noted that the report acknowledged a well-run meeting and suggested a couple of procedural changes.
- Liz asked if anyone had comments or questions. None were offered.

<u>Governance Committee Report – Presented by Liz Coenen on behalf of Melissa</u>

See Governance Committee meeting minutes; additional comments/actions follow:

- The Governance Committee talked primarily about embedding governance training in the monthly Board meetings.
  - This is done with regard to Finance topics and could help Board members gain a better understanding of the charter world and deeper understanding of Montessori pedagogy.
  - Several topics were considered and we will start putting them on coming agendas.
- In spring of 2013 the Board spent some time with Rob Davis, a marketing consultant, looking at who we are and how we speak about who we are.
  - The staff wasn't included in the conversation so before moving forward, Board members believed that the Board and staff should spend some time together. We also were in the process of transitioning to a new Head of School so it wasn't the right time to pursue this.
  - Liesl commented that we have since met together with the staff and are in a better position to continue this work.

- Liz explained, for the benefit of new Board members, that we had a full Board/Staff retreat for a half day. One goal of the retreat was to build relationships and share conversations about what's next for CMES.
- Chris commented that even the physical space is seeming more complete and full – with all the buildings, sidewalks, and landscaping in place it feels like it's all pulling together.
- Board members agreed that we are in a better place now to continue the work of talking about who are.
- Liesl also mentioned that we now have all the classrooms named – the new room is Forest so we have Garden, Pond, Marsh, and Forest.

<u>Parent Involvement Committee Report – Presented by Marjorie Nitz on behalf of Eve Lo</u>

See Parent Involvement meeting minutes; additional comments/actions follow:

- Marjorie noted that they have met with Mary Poul to discuss the September 30th Parent Involvement kickoff event.
  - They will have a large group dinner, then divide the large group into 4 small groups to discuss 4 areas: diversity, outreach, development, and education/training.
  - Participants will be welcome to migrate to more than one interest area during the small-group activity. After the small group idea sharing, the group will come back together to prioritize the identified tasks.
    - The coordinators will then consolidate the information gathered and present recommendations to the Board about what goals to pursue.
    - Marje said the committee wants to be sure that their work supports the school. To that end, they will have guided questions for each of the small groups.
  - Regarding Development, Marjorie noted that they have talked with Liz about how parents can support/help fundraise without stepping on toes. They would like to have specific guidelines to give to parents and will work with the Finance Committee to do this.
    - Some things the Parent Involvement Committee members have talked about supporting financially include CMES providing summer programs like 3M's STEM curriculum and supporting the Going Out activities of students. Another thing to fundraise for might be headsets to provide simultaneous translations during parent events.
    - Liz suggested that the Finance Committee would discuss the items relevant to that committee and that Liesl could respond to any pedagogical/curriculum questions.
      - Liesl mentioned that having parents fundraise for the Going Out program or suggesting destinations is not exactly the type of support parents would offer in a Montessori environment. She pointed out that the way the bread baking was done was a good model for how parents can support Going Out. Liesl also suggested that parents could drop off brochures about places of interest to start building a resource library for the students to consult.
      - Liesl also commented that how the Going Out program works in Montessori might make a good topic for a Parent Education evening since it is different from the typical field trip model.
      - Marje concurred that Going Out would be a good topic for a Parent Education event.
  - Regarding diversity, Marje suggested that some parents may have some discomfort in diverse communities and she wondered if we could provide training for parents around that. She clarified that it's not that parents aren't sensitive, but that we sometimes just get tripped up when in unfamiliar circumstances.
    - Liesl suggested that in the spirit of partnership we will also want to pay attention to what can parents teach us.

- Marge agreed that it would be great to gather information about parents' areas of expertise. For example, Marje used her expertise to make bread!
  - Board members discussed ways the community could establish a resource library and gather information from parents about the skills/expertise they would be willing to share with the community. The information gathering effort would also try to understand what volunteering looks like for each person. Comments about how to do this include the following:
    - ✓ An online survey could be done to develop a parent resource directory of both skills and expertise as well as the time/days parents are available.
    - ✓ There may have been a form like this already established so we may just need to dig through the files.
    - ✓ However the information is gathered, we must be sure to have the questions available in other languages and if it's available online, it should also be available by paper.
- Liesl commented that parents currently are very responsive to calls in the newsletter for volunteers. She noted that she also needs to keep promoting this to the teachers so they are generating To Do lists.

- Liz concluded the conversation by thanking everyone for their ideas and commented that this is a very exciting development that couldn't have been done a couple of years ago since we didn't have the history together to make it happen.

Treasurer's Report – Liz Coenen

See minutes from Finance Committee meeting; additional comments/actions follow:

- Liz reported that the crisis of School Business Solutions (SBS) going out of business was short-lived.
  - The Finance Committee signed a contract with Sandy to continue the services that were to be provided by SBS.
  - One concern was the need for back-up should CMES have an emergency and Sandy is unavailable. Sandy said that her former colleagues have established a network of mutual support to serve as backup for each other.
  - Liz noted that we are very fortunate to have Sandy's years of experience, especially in the areas of Special Education financing and charter school finance .

- Financials are not yet ready for approval because Sandy is currently taking the budget we have and building it with codes and adding more line items so there is a more precise understanding of how money is spent. She is also preparing for the audit.
  - Liz commented that there isn't anything of concern, especially since we are still in the early months of the school year.

- Liz asked if anyone had any questions.
  - Kristen noted that the Finance Committee minutes indicate that CMES, because it is a small employer, is not bound by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Kristen commented that it is was her understanding that schools are covered by the FMLA regardless of size.
  - Liz indicated that she wasn't at the Finance Committee meeting so would defer to Chris to respond.
    - Chris noted that the Committee is in the process of gathering information about what the school is required to provide so that it is in compliance. Chris also said that Jenny Pine has recommended someone who can provide this expertise to the Finance Committee. Chris indicated that they want to be sure they are providing everything they must but also want to look at what other things they can provide.

- Chris also clarified that what was is in the Finance Committee minutes represented the discussion held by the Finance Committee and that it is not a statement of policy. She also indicated that the Committee is still in the process of gathering information for the Finance Committee to discuss and that they will likely have a fuller report at the October Board meeting.

Other Business

Liz noted that Julie Richards will be forming a task force in October to look at what it would take for CMES to provide programming beyond the core school day.

- Julie currently works with St. Paul Public Schools on their out-of-school programming so has the background to coordinate this task force. She said she is very excited to do this and has been working in this field for 16 years.
  - Julie noted that she has begun talking with Liesl about what she is looking for and will continue to learn more about what the school needs. Julie will also find out more from parents about what they are looking for and about such things as transportation, licensing and training for staff, potential partnerships, nutrition offerings, and the possibility of service learning.
  - Liesl said they had a very eye-opening conversation about this. Liesl also wondered if this could be brought up at the Parent Involvement evening.
    - Julie said that yes, it would be a good place to do a survey of parents and Marje said they could definitely make that happen.

Suggested Agenda Items for Next Month

- None

Adjourn

KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:42 PM; SECONDED BY MARJE. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The next meeting will be on October 28. The CMES Board will meet first in a joint meeting with the Montessori Training Center at 6:00 pm; the regular monthly meeting will begin at 7:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Jane Reilly, CMES Board Secretary