

**CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
TUESDAY JULY 21, 2015 – 6:00 P.M.**

Board Members Present: Liz Coenen, Kristen Campbell, Andrea Galdames, Eve Lo, Jane Reilly, Julie Richards, Melissa Santrach, and Liesl Taylor

Board Members Absent: Juliann McDermott

Other Attendees: Chris Bewell (left at 6:45)

AGENDA

Meeting called to order by Board Chair, Liz Coenen, at 6:07 pm

Public Comment Period: No public comments were offered.

Approval of Agenda & Declaration of Conflict of Interest

Liz asked if there were any changes to the agenda. None were made.

MELISSA MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE EVENING’S AGENDA; JULIE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Based on the approved agenda, Liz asked if anyone had any conflicts of interest with the evening’s agenda. None were disclosed.

Acceptance of Minutes

Liz asked if anyone had changes to the June meeting minutes.

EVE MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE JUNE MEETING; KRISTEN SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Head of School Report – Liesl Taylor

Liesl’s report was distributed to the group (the Vital Signs report is not given when school is not in session); additional comments follow:

- Liesl reported on the planning and preparing for the 2015-16 school year:
 - o A new component is being added to the reading program: At 1:45 p.m. each day everyone will stop what they are doing and read! This is intended to make the statement that reading is really important – to everyone. It will also give the literacy specialist time to observe staff with their students and learn how best to mentor them. Liesl noted that the teachers have wanted something like this to help students as they are learning the Montessori approach to reading.
 - o Liesl and the staff are working to develop more for parent involvement based on what the parents indicated in the Parent Satisfaction Survey they valued at Cornerstone. Perhaps parents who expressed an interest in more fresh vegetables would be interested in supporting a community garden at CMES.
 - o A social media policy is being developed by the Governance Committee to guide the use of things like Facebook pages and Twitter accounts if they are used to promote school activities and connect families with each other.
 - o The handbooks are being revised and updated to reflect current practices and policies and will be ready for Board review at the August meeting.
 - o Liesl introduced Tess (from MonTESSori), a puppy Liesl is training to be a therapy dog for Cornerstone. Tess, a cross between a white standard poodle and a white English golden retriever, attended the Board meeting and stayed near Liesl throughout – perfectly behaved. Liesl shared a handout that explains when/why/how Tess will be at Cornerstone. The information will be sent out to families also.

- Liesl described how a therapy dog can be used in an elementary environment as well as the procedure for training/certifying the dog to be in the school. The certification process will likely be completed by next May, and Liesl envisions the children helping to get Tess ready for certification. The process includes knowing basic obedience, having exceptional health, not being easily startled, and being very well socialized.
- Liesl noted that she will be keenly aware of others' sensitivities toward dogs and make sure the community is comfortable having Tess school. Liesl shared several anecdotes about how the summer CMES community has been responding to Tess's presence and she is already becoming well-loved!
- Board members discussed the benefits of having a therapy dog at CMES as well as possible downsides, such as the insurance implications.
 - Liesl indicated that she is looking into the insurance questions and will provide more detailed information about that. She also recommended that Board members who are interested could visit the Therapy Dogs International website for more information on this and other things related to therapy dogs.
- Liesl invited Board members to volunteer for National Night Out, which will be Tuesday, August 4th from 5 – 7 pm at the Boys and Girls Club. Similar to last year, Montessori materials from the classroom will be available as well as balloons! Call Adam to volunteer for a ½ hour shift!
- With regard to hiring for 2015 – 16, Liesl reported the following:
 - o A second person has been hired for the special education staff. She will be a great complement to current staff, however, an application for a waiver is needed. The waiver has been applied for and no problems are anticipated in getting it.
 - o Other waivers that are needed have also been applied for and no problems are anticipated in getting them.
 - o All hiring is complete for 2015 – 16 based on enrollment to-date. Additional assistants will be hired in late August if needed based on final enrollment numbers.
- With regard to staff support, Liesl has been looking into the topic of staff care as a way to sustain staff to continue to do the work they do.
 - o She has looked at several resources already, many of which discuss it in terms of mindfulness.
 - o Liesl also noted that she wants to do something that connects staff on both the elementary and preschool sides. Up to now, the elementary side has been focusing on growth, and that will be slowing down so it seems like a good time to reconnect.
- Liesl commented that the AMI consultation for all four classrooms will happen in the coming year.
 - o Liesl has requested Carol Hicks do the review. Liesl believes Carol will have especially good insights about how to solidify the programming at CMES.
 - o Nadiya is working on the materials, which is a key component.
- With regard to our authorizer, VOA, Liesl noted that in a recent MDE contract renewal evaluation, VOA was put on a corrective action plan. Stephanie Olsen, our VOA representative, explained the details and said that VOA is already addressing the issues identified in the evaluation.
 - o Liz commented that she has reviewed the report and saw no issues of concern that will affect CMES.
 - o Liz will forward the report to all Board members for their review. If, after reviewing the report anyone has questions or concerns, please contact Liz.
- Liesl noted that she has talked with a parent who is interested in serving on the Board and will let her know the next step is to touch base with the Governance Committee.

- Liesl reviewed the results of the Parent Satisfaction Survey completed by families at the end of the school year. The survey was done online and is anonymous. Liesl indicated that the comments were very constructive overall; she offered the following highlights and observations about how to address the concerns:
 - Communication between the classroom staff and families continues to be a concern. Liesl and the staff are working on this over the summer to arrive at a sustainable practice that gives parents what they are looking for but doesn't overburden staff.
 - Parents were very positive about administrative staff – they mentioned, for example, how much they value being greeted when they arrive.
 - Food was a reoccurring theme. Some families want CMES to use locally grown food; others would like CMES to grow some of the food used at school. Others want a place to heat up a lunch brought from home.
 - Liesl commented that we have changed our food vendor, which may reduce the need for children to bring meals from home. With regard to sourcing of food, Liesl thought perhaps some families could support this through volunteer efforts. She also mentioned that we are looking at being a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) drop site.
 - Chris also noted that we will be receiving the fresh fruits and vegetable grant this year, which has been very popular in the past. Chris also mentioned that our new vendor does source some of the ingredients they use locally.
 - A comment was made that CMES needs a better-developed curriculum. Liesl said that the Montessori curriculum is very thorough, well-developed curriculum but that we need to communicate that better to parents.
 - Liz asked whether families requested more about the Montessori method/classroom environment or if they want more about their own child's academic growth.
 - ♦ Liesl said they wanted both and acknowledged that we need to provide new Montessori parents with much more so they know what to expect and how to talk with their child about what they do at school. For example, parents who are used to asking about what worksheets their child did need to know the language around the Montessori works so they can know what it means when their child responds saying they worked on the bead frame or grammar box.
 - Liesl and Board members discussed several approaches to getting this information to families including doing a Silent Journey.

Director of Business Operations – Chris Bewell/Liz

See report; additional comments follow:

- Jane asked on what enrollment number our budget based. Chris noted that it is based on 130 students and we are currently at 134. Chris noted, too, that there are always fluctuations as the year begins but we have a good waitlist.

Board Chair Report – Liz Coenen

See report; additional comments follow:

- Liz distributed the Conflict of Interest statement and asked everyone to complete one and return it to Chris.
 - Liz noted, too, that Dr. Speiker commented on the text of policy that was included in the packet. The Governance Committee will discuss Dr. Speiker's recommendation.

- Liesl and Chris are working to prepare the annual report and need to have each Board member's training or continuing education information as soon as possible. Also, if anyone attended a mandatory Board training, please make sure Chris has a copy of the certificate.
- Liz noted that we have several actions that require Board approval in July and asked for motions for the following: waiving the reading of the Pledge of Allegiance, designating a financial institution for depositing funds, authorizing persons to do funds transfers, and designating the MDE external user access authorizer.

o Pledge of Allegiance

MELISSA MOVED THAT FOR THE 2015-16 ACADEMIC YEAR, CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WILL WAIVE THE REQUIREMENT, AS PERMITTED UNDER MINN. STAT. 121A.11 SUBD. 3, TO RECITE THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE ONE OR MORE TIMES EACH WEEK BECAUSE THE MONTESSORI LEARNING PROGRAM IS NOT ORIENTED TOWARD LARGE GROUP RECITATION. STUDENTS WILL LEARN ABOUT THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE AND ITS HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE THROUGH THE SCHOOL'S CURRICULUM; KRISTEN SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

o Official School Depository

KRISTEN MOVED THAT THE SCHOOL ASSIGN BMO HARRIS BANK AS DEPOSITORY FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015-16; EVE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

o Electronic Funds Transfer Authorization (for payroll, TRA/PERA, benefits, and some vendor payments)

MELISSA MOVED THAT THE SCHOOL DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO THE CMES TREASURER AND CMES BOARD CHAIR OR THEIR DESIGNEE TO MAKE THE ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSFERS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2015-16; KRISTEN SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

o MDE External User Access Recertification System (for MDE secure websites)

KRISTEN MOVED TO DESIGNATE THE CMES HEAD OF SCHOOL AS THE AUTHORIZER FOR USER ACCESS TO MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE) SECURE WEBSITES. EVE SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

- Liz reminded everyone that the CliftonLarsonAllen Annual Charter School conference is next week and suggested that anyone who wants to attend could contact Chris to coordinate registering.
- Liz noted that Dr. Charles Speiker is providing Charter School Board member training at various sites in Minnesota, including one in Richfield on December 12th. The training will be a good refresher for anyone whose Board training is a few years old. Since VOA is our authorizer, there is no fee for CMES Board members to attend. If anyone is interested in going, let Liz know.

Governance Committee Report – Liz Coenen

See Governance Committee minutes; additional comments follow:

- Liz asked if anyone had any questions about the minutes. She noted that the committee is working on developing a social media policy but wants to first review the greater landscape and get samples together to see how other schools are handling it. This will be discussed at the August Governance meeting.
- The topic of forming an Advisory Board will be discussed further in the coming months as well.

Development Committee Report – Julie Richards

The Development Committee did not meet in June

- Liz reported that we did not get invited to submit a proposal to the Frey Foundation and recommended that the committee look more closely at funders who support education on St. Paul's East side.
- Development Committee members will be setting up a meeting with MCM development staff in the coming weeks to talk more about supporting each other's development efforts.

Treasurer's Report – Melissa Santrach

See Finance Committee minutes; additional comments follow:

- Melissa presented the preliminary June Financials and offered the following comments:
 - o We will have a larger fund balance. It was projected to be \$12,500 but it will likely be closer to \$70,000. Some of the funds will be used to make improvements in the multipurpose room.
 - We will continue to work toward a 20 – 25% fund balance
 - o The audit pretesting occurred last week and the audit will be the week before school begins.
 - o Our Lease Aid has been approved for 2015-16.
 - o An adjustment is needed for the food service line; this was anticipated.
- Melissa asked if anyone had questions; none were asked.

MELISSA MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE PRELIMINARY JUNE 2015 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS; JULIE SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

Other Business

- Julie reported that she and Liesl met recently with the Sanneh Foundation to discuss after-school soccer for this Fall. The cost is very reasonable (\$35/session) and typically includes 8 sessions. They provide all the equipment needed! They also will put on single events like a one-day tournament.
 - o Board members expressed much appreciation and enthusiasm for this opportunity!

Next month's agenda

- Regular items on Board Calendar. The reports on testing and the special education program, however, will be in September.

Adjourn

KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 7:36 PM; ANDREA SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Respectfully Submitted by Jane Reilly, CMES Board Secretary

Next meeting: August 18 at 6 p.m.