

**CORNERSTONE MONTESSORI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
JULY 15, 2014 – 6 PM**

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

Board Members Absent: Marjorie Nitz, Julie Richards

Other Attendees: Chris Bewell, Sandy Schmidt (School Business Solutions)

AGENDA

Meeting called to order by Board Chair, Melissa Santrach, at 6:07 pm

Public Comment Period: No public comments were offered.

Acceptance of Minutes

- Melissa asked if anyone had changes to the June minutes; none were offered.

EVE MADE A MOTION TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES FROM THE JUNE 17, 2014, REGULAR BOARD MEETING; ANDREA SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Welcome to New Board Members

- Melissa welcomed the new Board members and invited them to introduce themselves and say a little about their connection to Montessori.
 - Andrea Galdames noted that she is a parent of children at Lake Country and is currently a student in the Montessori Training Program. She is interested especially in Montessori in the public domain and in expanding Montessori to communities not yet served.
 - Juliann McDermott mentioned that she has just finished her 25th year as a Montessori guide and is excited to see Montessori growing in the world of public education.
 - All other Board members briefly introduced themselves by stating their role on the Board, their years of service on the Board, and their inspiration to serve on the CMES Board.

Introduction of School Business Solutions

- Melissa introduced Sandy Schmidt, president of School Business Solutions (SBS), our new financial services company. SBS was started in the 1990s, and Schmidt has worked there since 2003. Her previous work was in the area of insurance. While at SBS she has worked with many K-12 charter schools as well as co-ops.
- Schmidt distributed sample financial reports and reviewed the format with Board members. She will go over each area more fully during a Board training this Fall with actual CMES financial documents.
 - Schmidt noted that SBS follows UFARS (Uniform Financial Accounting Reporting System), which is a modified accrual accounting system that is required by MDE. She will explain more about this as well in the Fall Board training.
 - SBS has recently been gathering information from clients about reformatting some of the reports so they may do some changes but if they do, they will give plenty of notice to clients.
- Schmidt has been working with CMES staff and Board members to put various procedures in place and this is going well, as evidenced by the successful issuance of the first payroll with Paychex.
- Schmidt concluded her remarks by saying the SBS staff is excited to work with Cornerstone; Liesl responded that CMES is very glad to be working with SBS.

Head of School Report – Liesl Taylor

See report from Head of School; additional comments/actions follow:

- Liesl reviewed the Vital Signs report and added the following comments:
 - Kindergarten students are showing signs of being ready to do the work of an elementary environment; and though they like to do big work, they have not yet begun to do it together. They have also been enjoying labeling things in the outdoor environment.

- The children are planning a clean-up day in the community.
- Liesl noted that staff is looking forward to National Night Out, which is August 5th and will again be held at the Boys and Girls Club.
 - Melissa asked if it would be a good activity for Board members to attend; Liesl said “yes”! Chris will forward the details as soon as they are available.
- With regard to enrollment efforts, Chris has updated the flyer with the upcoming open house information.
 - The flyers were distributed last weekend at the Boys and Girls Club during their free dental check-up event.
 - The newest pod, being closer yet to the street, is getting even more attention than the installation of the previous buildings so more neighborhood families are stopping in to see the school.
 - Chris will discuss more about enrollment in her report.
- Liesl commented that she is very excited about the possibility for CMES to be included in to a grant to extend some of the testing being done by Dr. Steven Hughes to the elementary environment; it is currently being done in the preschool environments.
 - One feature of the testing Dr. Hughes is doing is that it tracks not just deficits but strengths also.
- Liesl mentioned that the school’s relationship with Buttermilk Falls (Philadelphia Farms) continues to grow stronger.
 - We currently get a CSA share and are looking at becoming a drop site and perhaps offering scholarships for more shares for families.
 - Buttermilk Falls, located in Osceola, Wis., is also very welcoming to school groups – Liesl wondered if it could become a mini land school for CMES!
- Liesl reported that the summer school program is going very well.
 - Children are at school from 8:30 am – 12:30 pm for the program, which includes breakfast, lunch, and 3-hour work period.
 - This summer there are 5 students in Pond and there will likely be more next year.
 - To qualify for the program a student must show likely regression over the summer months.
- Liesl noted that she is looking into establishing a Before Care program and will discuss this with Sandy of SBS, school staff, and the Finance Committee at the end of July.
- Liesl reported that she is continuing the weekly newsletter to families.
 - A template is being developing to be used each week. The newsletter may be sent on Thursday rather than Friday.
 - A calendar is also being developed so that families have plenty of time to plan for upcoming events. Liesl noted that she wants to have many opportunities to connect with families at school events that are not focused on addressing behavior concerns.
- The 3-part lecture series for parents has been well attended and well received.
 - The second session focused on assessment (both formal testing and observation) and explored what it looks like and what its role is in an elementary Montessori environment.
 - One goal of the second session was to give parents more concrete information about assessment, which they asked for in both the Head of School Evaluation and the Parent Satisfaction Survey.
 - The third session will focus on the Minnesota curriculum standards and discuss how the standards are explored by children in a Montessori classroom.
- With regard to staffing, Liesl reported the following:
 - A meeting schedule has been put in place a for the coming academic year.
 - The job description for the new administrative assistant is being developed so that it truly reflects the role the person will play as the first point of contact for CMES.
 - This staff person is employed by the training center and contracted to CMES for .25%.

- Much of the work for this position is very detail oriented so it requires good organizational skills and the ability to manage the funding scenarios for the private preschool.
- Liesl commented that she is especially excited about the new Special Education Director, Cori Wahl of EdVisions, who will be able to provide more tailored services to CMES. She will spend part of her time supporting the development of the Special Education program.
- Interviews are occurring for a new elementary assistant, and Liesl said she is well on the way to finding someone great!
- In terms of staff development, Liesl reported that although the year that just concluded was very good in many ways, it was also challenging in some ways. She is planning a team building day for staff that will be led by a trainer who is known to be good at facilitating a “get-to-the-heart-of-things” type session in a no-nonsense, productive way. In order to do this when staff is settled in, it will likely occur during MEA (mid-October). This will likely be paired with a fun, physical activity.
- With regard to accountability to the Board, Liesl reported the following:
 - Liesl is preparing her Head of School (HOS) Professional Development Plan/Goals for 2014-15 and will submit them by August 15 to the HOS Evaluation Committee.
 - Liesl would like to see that parents have the opportunity to serve on committees established by the Board.
 - The Teacher Evaluation has been submitted to VOA and some positive feedback has been received but more editing is needed.
 - Liesl is considering whether CMES should become a member of MACS (Minnesota Association of Charter Schools).
 - We have been a member of CSP (Charter School Partners), but MACS also offers support for teacher licensure renewal. Schools within larger districts receive such support from their districts, but since charter schools are their own district, they don’t have the same resources to be able to provide the same level of support. As more CMES teachers need re-licensure, it may make sense to become a MACS member.
 - Liesl will keep the Board informed about the when a decision needs to be made about this.
- Liesl offered the following comments about the results of the Parent Satisfaction Survey:
 - The survey results didn’t present any surprises. Parents expressed a desire to be kept better informed about what’s going on in the classrooms and about how their children are progressing. The 3-part lecture series was developed in part as a response to this concern, which was also expressed in the Head of School (HOS) evaluation.
 - Parents also wanted both teachers and administrators to be more available for conversations. This, too, started being addressed in March, since a similar sentiment was expressed in the HOS evaluation. Liesl is now available to parents at pick-up and drop-off and she is developing a weekly communication that will be sent to all families.
 - There were also some comments about the meal service so Liesl is going to have Mary Hahn from Done Right Food offer a presentation to families.
 - On a related note, Chris mentioned that the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables grant was not renewed (we fell below free and reduced cutoff). Chris said the children really liked learning about a variety of foods, so the concept may be continued but paid for from our budget.
- Liesl presented the results from the NWEA Testing (the MCA scores are not yet available) and offered the following observations:
 - Staff uses the testing results as a tool to see what’s working and what’s not; for example, staff can and get a class report from the NWEA website that groups the students in different score ranges. This shows which children need support in specific content areas.

- While this is helpful, it must also be kept in mind that the class sizes are small and that all the classes have students of different ages. The numbers will be more meaningful when the school is fully enrolled.
- The reading scores have improved, which indicates the supports put in place such as Orton Gillingham and the reading tutors are helping. On the other hand, the math scores show that more needs to be done to bridge the gap between the types of questions NWEA uses to test math and how math is experienced in the Montessori environment. VOA has said our students can use Montessori math materials during the testing to address this.
 - Staff is working on developing “I can” statements for the state math standards to help students translate the Montessori math work into the language used in the testing modules.
- The MCA reading scores will likely show improvement but they won’t be available for a while.
- When compared to area schools, CMES scores aren’t too far off. Liesl is projecting that CMES students will grow 7 percentage points each year going forward.
- Board members asked if the NWEA data is shared with parents and/or our authorizer.
 - Liesl responded that the scores are reported to VOA but not typically given to parents. During the third information session Liesl will discuss NWEA testing so that parent know what it is and how it used by staff. She will also let parents know that they can meet with her individually to see their child’s results and to get a fuller understanding of what is being measured as well as their own child’s change over time.
- Liesl noted that VOA no longer requires NWEA testing so CMES could choose not to administer it going forward.
 - Liesl commented that currently the NWEA testing is done in the fall and spring. It could also be done in the winter but that seems like it would be too much testing since we are now required to do the OLPA (Optional Local Purpose Assessment) testing for 3rd years and older in the winter to prepare for the MCAs.
 - Melissa commented that the NWEA results do serve as a useful diagnostic tool for the younger students though Liesl may find something that works better and is more meaningful in the future. Liesl agreed and said NWEA will continue to be used as long as the results are helpful to staff.
 - Liesl and Chris both noted that many of the students actually seem to like the testing!
- Board members also asked how the testing is perceived by current and prospective parents.
 - Liesl said it’s very mixed and that it seems to be more on parents’ minds as their children get older. She added that there are 4 or 5 parents who regularly ask about their children’s test results.
- Melissa thanked Liesl for the presentation.

Director of Business Operations – Chris Bewell

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

- The transition to School Business Solutions has gone very smoothly.
- Chris noted that summer time is a good time to make sure all the necessary reporting is finalized. She also noted that the MARSS reporting that happens in August and September is very important since it takes a while for the numbers of enrolled students to be finalized. Occasionally a student spends summer time in a different district and it takes a while to get sorted out.
- With regard to enrollment, Chris reported the following:
 - An application is currently pending. We aren’t fully enrolled yet and there are always shifts in enrollment as the beginning of the year gets closer. We do have children on the waitlist for some levels but are waiting to see if we will get more 4th and 5th graders, which is where we would like the enrollment to increase. A number of students from the preschool who didn’t get in would happily enroll in the lower elementary.

- Liesl noted that a district in Ohio just approved public funding for preschool charter schools and that she and Molly are paying attention to this.
- We are continuing to promote upcoming open houses, which are happening on July 29th and August 14th, with flyers around community; Chris distributed flyers to everyone to post wherever they could.

Board Chair Report – Melissa

See Board Chair Report; additional comments/actions follow:

- Melissa noted that it is time for the Annual Report to be prepared and asked Liesl and Chris if anything was needed from Board members.
 - Chris noted that she needed each Board members' list of trainings attended and that she would request other items as needed.
 - Melissa asked that a draft of the report be provided in the August Board packet.
- Melissa mentioned that she has registered to attend the one-day charter school seminar on July 29th being presented by CliftonLarsonAllen and asked that other Board members who are interested sign up on their own or ask Chris to place the registration. The fee can be reimbursed if needed.
- Melissa is working on the final Walton grant financial report and will have it finished by the end of the week.

Governance Committee Report – Melissa

See Governance Committee Meeting Minutes; additional comments follow:

- Melissa noted that the committee has been reviewing the policies we have passed to ensure they reflect our practice and that our practice is in compliance with our policy.
 - Most of the policies need no changes, however, some changes will be made to the Handbook to ensure parents/family members have the necessary information about the policies. Also a Grievance Form for policy #522 – Student Sex Non-discrimination will be created and made available in the office.
 - Policy #524, Internet Acceptable Use and Safety, will be reviewed by Liesl to see if changes are needed.
- Melissa explained that though not currently under review by the Governance Committee, the Conflict of Interest policy (210.1) was included in the July Board packet because it is the time of year when Board members affirm that they have no conflicts of interest or disclose any conflicts that may exist. Upon reviewing the meeting packet distributed by Melissa, Dr. Charles Speiker suggested the following sentence be added to Section 3 a. of the policy: "An individual is prohibited from serving as a board member if an immediate family member is an employee of the school."
 - Melissa commented that the inclusion of the sentence made the policy very strong and clear.

LIZ MADE A MOTION TO AMEND THE POLICY TO INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING SENTENCE IN SECTION 3 A.: "AN INDIVIDUAL IS PROHIBITED FROM SERVING AS A BOARD MEMBER IF AN IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER IS AN EMPLOYEE OF THE SCHOOL." KRISTEN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

- Melissa asked the Board members in attendance to review, complete, and return to her the Conflict of Interest Statement. Melissa will follow-up with Julie and Marjorie who are not in attendance.
- Melissa noted that each member of the Board who was serving on the CMES Board as of June 30, 2014, also needed to sign and return the Related Parties Questionnaire. Chris distributed the form and all those in attendance signed and returned the form. Melissa will follow up with Patty Bachmeier, Ben Moudry, and Amber Hanson whose terms ended June 30, 2014.
- Melissa noted that each year CMES must take action to acknowledge the school's approach to the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. Since CMES does not have large group instruction, the Board has in the past waived this requirement.

ANDREA MADE A MOTION THAT FOR THE 2014-15 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; JULIANN SECONDED THE MOTION. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

Head of School Evaluation Committee Report – Jane

See report from HOS Evaluation Committee meeting; additional comments follow:

- Jane asked if anyone had any comments; none were asked.
- Jane noted that an August 15 date was given to Liesl for the articulation of goals for 2014-15.

Treasurer's Report –Liz Coenen

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

- Due to the transition from BKDA to SBS, Liz noted that the June financial reports were not yet available for review at the July board meeting. Both June and July financials will be presented at the August meeting.
- One of our annual duties as a Board is to assign a depository for funds, which will be BMO Harris; we also need to authorize Board members to make transfers.

LIZ MADE A MOTION TO DELEGATE AUTHORITY TO THE CMES TREASURER AND CMES BOARD CHAIR OR THEIR DESIGNEE TO MAKE THE ELECTRONIC FUND TRANSFERS FOR FY2014-2015; JULIANN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

LIZ MADE A MOTION TO ASSIGN BMO HARRIS BANK AS DEPOSITORY FOR FY2014-2015; JULIANN SECONDED THE MOTION. THE MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

- Liz asked if there were any questions; none were asked.

Other Business: None

Suggested Agenda Items for Next Month: None

Adjourn

KRISTEN MADE A MOTION TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:13PM; SECONDED BY EVE. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

The next meeting will be August 26 at 6 PM

Respectfully Submitted by Jane Reilly, CMES Board Secretary