

**The Genesee Community Charter School
Board of Trustees
Education Governance Council
Meeting Minutes
March 11, 2020
Held at RMSC Cunningham House, 657 East Avenue**

Board Members Present: Michelle Burack, Michele Hannagan, Marcia Joy, **Cheryl Moeller**, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, **Elizabeth Pietrzykowski**, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland, **Traci Terrance**
(Bold: BOT non-voting)

Board Members Absent: Nolica Murray-Fields, Annemarie Wess

Educational Governance Council Members Present: Becki Mason, Maggie Deutschbein, Shannon Hillman

Legal Counsel Present: George DesMarteau

Invited Guests Present: Maureen Milke, Keri Gonzalez (Kindergarten teacher)

Meeting called to order by Michele Hannagan at 5:30PM

Teacher Presentation

Kindergarten teachers Maggie Deutschbein and Keri Gonzalez presented. Inspired by forest bathing and identity work at staff retreat, teachers established a class culture of “wonder watching” to tap into kids’ innate curiosity. They continued the tradition of using the “Great Stone” as a storyteller, for example telling stories about “Who lived here?” at different times in the expedition blocks (long ago sea creatures, hunter-gatherers in the current expedition), asking questions about how they lived, what they ate, etc. (A teacher provided feedback that her child, now a fifth grader, still re-tells stories from the Great Stone from when he had Ms. Gonzalez. A board member inquired about the storytelling culture at GCCS; this is another ingredient cultivated by Steven Levy.)

Students met tree guides at Ganondagan on the Mother of the Earth trail; these guides interpret the trail for families and visitors. The Ganondagan collaborator for the expedition invited the kids to learn about the trees and become tree guides. Exhibition day is planned on site at Ganondagan, with 2 tours led by kindergarteners (first for families, second for public (11:30AM.) on Saturday March 21. Kids are learning details about each the tree, including how the Seneca people long ago used them, as well as uses today. Kindergarteners watched GCCS Tour guides to learn techniques (e.g. using index cards for notes). They have been practicing their tours on the back 40 with tree models. There is a “Dress rehearsal” planned on Back 40 for GCCS tour guides and families with accessibility issues.

A board member asked about how expedition final products are determined each cycle (is it deliberately left open, or did a prior plan get displaced?). The teachers clarified that it is not pre-specified, that they follow the “Most awesome idea” for identifying an expedition final product.

Minutes

Motion 031120.1

Upon motion of Mark Schiesser, and duly seconded by Tracy Terrance, RESOLVED, that the minutes of February 12, 2020 be approved.

Voting in the affirmative: Michelle Burack, Marcia Joy, Cheryl Moeller, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland

Voting in the negative: None

Abstaining: Michele Hannagan (who was absent from the Feb. meeting)

Motion 031120.1 passed 8 to 0

Finance Review

Reviewed known variances, which have been discussed in detail in previous meetings (RCSD per-pupil revenue; instructional benefits expense). Reviewed variance in substitute teaching budget. Long-term subs for sabbaticals and maternity leave were budgeted for. Flu season this year was worse than usual, and one teacher was out for 3 weeks with an ill parent; these may account for the higher-than-expected costs. Will investigate whether the outsourcing for daily sub staffing is allocated correctly.

Reviewing investments, because we are conservatively invested with a high fraction of bonds, the recent market drop did not result in significant reduction in our holdings.

School Leader Updates

Exhibition Nights:

Several this week:

Monday: 3rd grade -- Students served as docents at RMSC for the First People's exhibit, and recited poems. RMCS board representative attended. The museum has been very pleased with the collaboration.

Tuesday: 2nd grade -- "Pushing up the sky" (4 Board / EGC members had children in this performance). Students compared arts from different First Peoples cultures.

5th grade: Performed 2 Voice Poems about People who were here, people who came in, as well as a dance performance with themes of relationship dynamics (give & take, push & pull)

Thursday (tomorrow): 5:45PM 1st grade -- recorded "Por Qua" stories

7PM 4th grade: invented a collaborative game about exploration, as well as a drama performance and arts exhibit.

Board members were encouraged to attend, as a tangible way to execute their role of monitoring the School Leader's performance.

Covid-19

In response to Governor Cuomo's announcement of a State of Emergency, SL sent an email to families, as well as an email to staff about cleaning protocols. Emails included preventive strategies as well as reactive interventions. Particular attention was paid to high risk times e.g. food distribution (TA's are good about using gloves, handwashing, etc), with additional attention to other high-risk areas to minimize germ spread.

One class was observed to be playing “tag” with Coronavirus as the consequence of getting caught. Teachers educated students why it might not necessarily be appropriate to joke about the virus in this kind of game, and provided some facts and debunked myths using Brain-pop video and class discussion.

An email from the State commissioner outlined advisements for schools including consideration of suspension of travel / trips, and the requirement that if we have a single case, we close school for 24 hours for health department evaluation. Per local health department official Dr. Mendoza, if a case is found to be positive, school will be closed for a minimum of 6 weeks, and everyone in the building quarantined (cannot enter any other public building) for 2 weeks. This policy is subject to change.

The School Leader shared several what-if scenarios for further consideration, particularly if we get closed for 2 weeks or more:

Instruction: She has been brainstorming ideas with teachers re: how to ensure minimal missed instruction, but no definite plans have emerged. Resources include iReady for math & reading instruction; some teachers are also assigning home learning. The goal is to provide a schedule for each topic, including movement breaks (with resources). SL will also be investigating what is Westchester County doing.

Considerations for families who don’t have internet access have also been discussed. SL is planning to inquire re: device and internet access for access to instructional materials in the next few days. The impression is most families do have internet access. With respect to devices, 4th-6th grade have Chromebooks, but they don’t go home. Restrictions are configured for the wifi access point in the school, not on the individual devices. Hence there are concerns about inappropriate use if they are sent home. Documents can be loaded onto the devices for use without internet access. A board member inquired whether it would be feasible for IT specialist to configure the devices with restrictions on inappropriate use, proactively. Feasibility of locking down use was discussed (e.g. need to use YouTube for some content delivery would make it challenging to restrict other use.)

Teachers are also working on putting together a Golden jewel-type packet or work to send home.

Food insecurity

We know who qualifies for FRL, but otherwise don’t know who is going to be adversely impacted by school closure from a food standpoint. SL is meeting with FA officers tomorrow to review and consider solutions for families. Considering a survey that includes not only device and internet access but food access as well. RCSD is discussing providing food at certain centers, analogous to the summer food program. School leader is following RCSD for other possible resources as well. Charter school network may be another resource.

Travel & Gatherings

Professional development travel and 6th grade 4 cities trip were completed last week. Jean Hurst is often offsite and travel restrictions may impact her work. Implications for fieldwork remaining this year include:

Boston trip (scheduled for the last week of April: 27th - 30th):

There is another board meeting before the trip. Financial implications of losing hotel deposits. (Bus company we will get a credit because we use them so often.) Can return fees paid by families but school

portion may not be recovered. Lisa O'Malley will investigate whether it is possible to shift to the end of May.

Settler simulation (week of May 18th): Webster park, 2 day overnight. One possibility might be to do the simulation without the overnight.

Additional discussion around current advisements re: "no unnecessary large gatherings" as they impact our school expeditionary learning culture:

Field studies will be suspended until further notice.

Kindergarten Exhibition on March 21 -- it is outdoors, and can be done in small groups. (e.g. to ensure we adhere to the threshold # for "large gatherings" we can cancel the public portion.)

Community circle -- effective Monday and until further notice: suspended for families; will hold in-classroom event for kids.

Chess club is suspended.

SL is calibrating her actions in the context of other public entities in the community. Every action we can do that is aligned with community guidelines to protect elders in our community is a priority. E.g. according to Regent Norwood, the upcoming Regents meeting has been cancelled. This calibrates the scope of our cancellations. SL has also been in communication with RMSC president and preschool director. RMSC is using sterilizing apparatus for all exhibits. She is unsure if quarantine protocol applies to both GCCS and preschool, or if they are considered independent buildings. The plan is to have the Executive Committee meet for strategic decisions if school closure occurs before the next board meeting. Safety committee will review these plans too. Next board meeting may be virtual (Michele H and SL will decide 1 week prior, depending on contemporary recommendations).

Sick Kid protocols:

Fever of 99.5 or higher and cough, immediately sent home, child quarantined in the office until picked up. Schools are required to monitor attendance and reasons for absence. Sharon has protocols from Dept of Health re: reporting.

RMSC Partnership

SL had lunch with RMSC president. They reviewed recent security issues including coronavirus as well as a school emergency last Monday with a missing child which involved the entire campus. The Safety plan worked exactly as it was supposed to. They also discussed general partnership, and overall the RMSC President was very open and collaborative. Fiscal sustainability of RMSC is a priority, and collaboration with GCCS is viewed as a win-win. They are now planning to have monthly meetings going forward.

Committee Updates

Advocacy

Letter of support from families, signed by FA officers, as well as a letter of support from EL, are both on the way to the Board of Regents. Deb Hanmer will be working with the advocacy committee soon on next steps.

Discipline

Sixth graders will be reporting to Jessica and Nolica tomorrow, and will provide them documents including codes of conduct and restorative practices collected from the various schools they visited. They will be collating this information (with guidance from the Discipline Committee) into recommended revisions to the school code of conduct, for board approval at the June meeting. Sixth grade exhibition night is planned for Thursday 7-8PM after our June 10th board meeting (which starts early at 5. Typical activities for this meeting include receiving the School Leader's Annual report, electing officers, final approvals for personnel hires, and then the staff & board reception). Rearranging activities to accommodate all the activities and ensure a quorum at the board meeting to accept the code of conduct revisions, the plan is to move the reception to 4PM (earlier time can increase staff participation since they are already there for Professional Development), followed by board meeting, and then 6th grade exhibition, ending by 8PM.

Nominating

No new business

Personnel

Handbook revisions provided to the Board for review. However, the final version is still pending from HR consultant; SL will email the final version to the Board for review & approval at the April meeting.

Charter Renewal Update

There were delays for review of Benchmark 10, and the School Leader was called upon to address discrepancies and concerns on an extremely short timeline under extraordinarily difficult circumstances (from a hotel room while on the 4 cities trip with 6th grade). The Board President subsequently called Susan Gibbons since no followup had been received, and was informed that the Site Visit report was being returned that day, with response addressing factual corrections required within 2 days in order for GCCS to remain on the agenda for the Regents' April meeting. The School Leader drafted a response letter and we will have a chance to review and respond to the Final Site Visit Report once factual corrections have been incorporated. Concerns were expressed by several board members about the stressful impact of the short turnaround times to address inaccuracies in the Benchmark 10 review and Site Visit report. The Board concluded that there were no further actions to take at this time, pending review of the final Site Visit Report.

Personnel

Per Board mandate, the School Leader met with Lisa O'Malley and Maureen Milke to discuss a new personnel role that could offload some of the overwork. The consensus focused on resources that could mitigate the current reactive process for discipline issues, which often results in children in their offices (with attendant erosion of concentration and productivity). The 4 cities trip yielded a trove of information about models for intervention. The Board reviewed job descriptions for Social-Emotional Learning Coach and Restorative Practices Coach from another school. For our size school, the roles would constitute 1.5 FTE; this can be divided across 2 individuals focused on Proactive / Reactive, or could be divided for Teacher support (0.5 FTE) and Student support (1.0 FTE). Our social worker Lauren Grimm is incredible, doing many of these things, but only 0.75 FTE. Unknown if she can increase to full time.

Finance committee needs to clarify if Title 1 funding is a possibility for sustainable funding of these positions. A board member mentioned that parent education is also an important component of restorative practice, and there are grant funds that could help support this for parent engagement.

Space implications:

Basement is highly underutilized by the museum. SPED and social work are in this space, but cosmetically the space is uninviting and not sending the kind of message we want to send to kids. SL is working on a formal proposal for lease amendment and capital improvement. The RMSC president is very receptive. The plan is to renovate to create flexible spaces for recovery and breakout. (Currently Maureen Milke's office is the recovery space.)

Executive Session

Motion 031120.2

Upon motion of Michele Hannagan, and duly seconded by Marcia Joy, RESOLVED, that the Board move into Executive Session to discuss a personnel matter.

Voting in the affirmative: Michelle Burack, Michele Hannagan, Marcia Joy, Cheryl Moeller, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland

Voting in the negative: None

Abstaining: None

Motion 031120.2 passed 9 to 0

Adjourn from Executive Session

Motion 031120.3

Upon motion of Michelle Burack, and duly seconded by Michele Hannagan, RESOLVED, that the Board adjourn from Executive Session and return to open meeting.

Voting in the affirmative: Michelle Burack, Michele Hannagan, Marcia Joy, Cheryl Moeller, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland

Voting in the negative: None

Abstaining: None

Motion 031120.3 passed 9 to 0

Motion 031120.4

Upon motion of Marcia Joy, and duly seconded by Michelle Burack, RESOLVED, that Theresa Fitzpatrick transition from part-time (currently in job share) to full-time Teaching Assistant (taking on the other half of the job-share) for 2020-2021 school year.

Voting in the affirmative: Michelle Burack, Michele Hannagan, Marcia Joy, Cheryl Moeller, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland

Voting in the negative: None

Abstaining: None

Motion 031120.4 passed 9 to 0

Adjournment

Motion 031120.5

Upon motion of Michele Hannagan, and duly seconded by Mark Schiesser, RESOLVED, that the March 11, 2020 meeting be adjourned.

Voting in the affirmative: Michelle Burack, Michele Hannagan, Marcia Joy, Cheryl Moeller, Jessica Nordquist, Ryan O'Malley, Mark Schiesser, Allison Shultes, Kevin Sutherland

Voting in the negative: None

Abstaining: None

Motion 031120.5 passed 9 to 0

Respectfully Submitted,
Michelle Burack
Secretary of GCCS Board of Trustees
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