



September 17, 2015, 5:30 p.m.
Fort Collins Montessori School Board
Meeting Minutes

Present:

Board Members - John Sanderson, President; Lorie Federman, Vice President; Eric Danielson, Treasurer; Nicole Sizemore, Secretary

Ex Officio Members – Frank Vincent, Head of School; Amber Nipp, Faculty Representative

Community Members – Abbie Eaton & Spouse, Ryan Hanon, Oceanna Engen, Garrett Ayers, Xuejin Wang, Andrew Knight

5:30 – 5:35 Welcome and Reading of Vision, Mission and Values

Mr. Danielson read the vision, mission and values and decided to emphasize the following value: 'We love and dignify children by listening to them, valuing the whole child, honoring their inner guide, and providing the most optimal environment for them to become empowered, inspired, and engage.' Mr. Danielson chose this value because he feels that in most schools children are expected to listen and at FCMS it is the other way around.

5:35-5:40 Consent Agenda

- Approve agenda

Recommended action: *Adopt the agenda for the September 17, 2015 FCMS Board meeting.*

- Adopt meeting minutes from August 20, 2015 Board meeting

Recommended action: *Adopt the minutes from the August 20, 2015 FCMS Board meeting.*

- Emily Paris MacNiven resignation from the FCMS Board

Recommended action: *Accept Emily MacNiven's resignation from the FCMS Board.*

Motion: I move that the Board approve and adopt the recommended actions for the items on the consent agenda.

Motion by: Mr. Sanderson **Seconded:** Ms. Federman **Discussion:** none

Vote: All in favor, motion passes unanimously

5:40 – 5:50 Community Comment

This is an opportunity for parents, teachers, and other community members to let the board know what is on your mind. This can be a complaint or a concern, or it can be a comment on something we are doing well. Both types of comments are welcome and appreciated.

Mr. Ayers has three children of different ages. He is happy that the children are able to come back to a known routine. They are aware of what they are coming back to and that is a big positive. Teachers here don't take for granted what they do. The people, which are the most important element are here. Parents choose to come here – they're not here because it's a neighborhood school – there's an intention here that he appreciates. He received good feedback from Ms. Hanon, a collaborative act trying out things that worked with his oldest child. He expressed his enthusiasm regarding the new allergy policies. He believes that his children now have to make conscious decisions regarding the items they will bring to school. Cause and effect, choice, intention, he appreciates that.

Mrs. Sizemore spoke as a parent during the community comment. She is very happy with the photos she receives during the week. She believes it is great for preschool parents that may be uneasy about how their child/children are doing. It puts parents at ease. She is also very excited about the e-mails she is receiving from the elementary teachers explaining what has been worked on during the week. She is able to continue learning at home with her daughter because she knows what has been discussed in the classroom. Great addition.

5:50 – 6:05 Financial Report

Status and timeline for audit

Mr. Danielson reported on the status of the audit: Audit will hopefully come back by the end of September or early October and revenues and expenses will be adjusted (timing with CDE grant). Ms. Sarah-Gennie Collazo was getting additional information to auditors. Some things will get pushed into the 2015-2016 year. Audit is going well.

Mr. Vincent added that he was there during the audit and there was some discussion about accounting issues, but nothing major.

Mr. Sanderson asked what we could expect the audit to look like, we never received a briefing of what the end product looked like.

Mr. Danielson explained that typically you get a report back, an outline of what the auditors have done. They're not going through every single line item. The auditors will make recommendations if anything needs to be changed. It would be, Mr. Danielson guesses, a high level summary of what they have reviewed, recommendations or needs for changes, and their

approval. Mr. Vincent mentioned that we are required to have an audit and it must be done by someone outside of the school. Mr. Sanderson added that these must be done annually.

End-of-FY15 status, and current FY16 status

Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Danielson discussed the financial document that Mr. Danielson sent over for clarification. Mr. Danielson explained that this does not come straight out of the accounting system. Mr. Sanderson would like to see that 'cleaned up' when we finish FY15 because it is important to know our unrestricted reserve balance. Mr. Sanderson is anticipating more needs for facilities and other items. Mr. Sanderson believes we need to have a clear eye – we need to end with a positive fund balance. Mr. Danielson will work to get it 'cleaned up' and have all the accurate dates there.

Plan for revising Financial Policy

Mr. Sanderson sent Mr. Danielson some examples of financial policies from other school he has been reviewing. Mr. Danielson would like to know what the auditors have to say about our current financial policy. Mr. Danielson believes our financial policy is not as robust as others and he would like to tighten that policy up. Mr. Sanderson asked what the revision of the financial policy would look like – if they would bring it back to the board in November. Mr. Danielson does not believe there is a need for a huge hurry on this item, sooner rather than later would be nice. Mr. Danielson would like to have it done by the end of the year. Mr. Sanderson would like to aim for the November board meeting.

Repayment of Loans

These loans were projected to be paid back last year. In talking with Ms. Sarah Gennie Collazo they need to get together to figure out repayment. Paying all in a lump sum would put a strain in the cash flow. The loans are currently accruing interest. Repayment schedules are not specified in the loan documents. The auditors commented that those loans need to be repaid and there was nothing spelled out about the procedure for repayment.

Mr. Sanderson asked if there were any comments. Mrs. Sizemore suggested having future similar documents notarized to avoid questions from auditors or any other party.

Mr. Danielson asked if we would need to amend the motion. Mrs. Sizemore suggested making a repayment schedule and then bringing it back to the board for approval. Mr. Danielson explained that the terms are not the same because the loan should've been repaid already. Mr. Sanderson suggested Mr. Danielson have a conversation with Ms. Sarah Gennie Collazo and then communicate with Mr. Sanderson and Ms. Federman. It was agreed that Mr. Danielson will contact Ms. Sarah Gennie Collazo and then speak individually with Mr. Sanderson and individually with Ms. Federman.

6:05 – 6:20 Board President's Report

PSD Bond Measure – Charter School Engagement

Mr. Sanderson reported: PSD is having a bond measure on the 2016 ballot and the estimate was 260 million dollars for the bond measure. PSD will be spending a lot of the money on

facilities and of course that is a big deal for us at the moment. We have no money yet beyond our fund balance to put toward our facility and that fund balance won't get us very far down the road at all. Ronnie Estelle attended a meeting with PSD about a month ago and they were informing charter schools what was happening.

Patrick Albright, the vice chair of Liberty Commons, called Mr. Sanderson and suggested that all charter schools band together to get included in that bond measure. PSD will have one seat reserved for charter schools in the bond committee. Patrick Albright should take that seat as he is possibly the best suited. Mr. Albright wants to establish a charter school committee to meet monthly and create the charter school needs. Mr. Danielson will attend the first meeting this coming Monday. Mr. Danielson will send the rest of the FCMS a report of this first meeting. Mr. Sanderson believes it will either be Mr. Danielson or himself attending these meetings.

Pharos fund

Mr. Danielson inquired with Bohemian Foundation. Pharos needs us to be a 501c3 and we cannot use the CO League of Charter Schools 501c3 status. Pharos will not fund items such as architect costs, contractors, etc. They also decline to fund scholarships for PreK and K. They believe the need is too large.

501(c)3 status

Mr. Sanderson is meeting with Lori Nitzel tomorrow to understand the needs she has for the 501c3.

Colorado League of Charter Schools Annual Finance Seminar

Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Vincent attended this seminar last Friday. Both came away with a few things. More than anything, it's a chance to network. The big concrete take away Mr. Sanderson had was a series of financial metrics and best practices. Mr. Sanderson pointed out that when we seek a loan, lenders will want to know some of these metrics.

Search for new board member

Mr. Sanderson reported: Emily Paris McNivon has resigned from our board. We need another community member for our board. Mr. Sanderson believes following are good areas: a practicing lawyer, a contractor, a builder.

Mrs. Sizemore asked if that could turn into a conflict of interest, if we had a builder or contractor on the board. Ms. Federman suggested reaching out to retired contractors or builders. Mr. Sanderson think Ms. Federman and himself are still the nominating committee. We need another board members and it cannot be a parent.

Upcoming community picnic

Mr. Sanderson reminded all of the upcoming school picnic: October 3rd, Edora Park, 10am-1pm. Mr. Sanderson encourages all to go.

6:20-6:30 Head of School Report

Enrollment

Mr. Vincent reported: Mr. Vincent read the current numbers of enrolled and wait listed. They contacted 3 year olds and were now contacting 4 year olds. They are hoping 3 year olds come forward and have e-mails out to 4 year olds. The elementary program is currently 1 student over the max – that is 48 students.

Mr. Vincent sent out a parent letter to help parents understand the October count. It is not only on October 1st, it is 11 days surrounding that day. Mr. Vincent attended a meeting at PSD to find out exactly how the student count is done.

Mr. Vincent reported that PSD offered the possibility to use their data system for students. What that means to us is that instead of Mr. Vincent spending 3-4 hours a month back and forth with student information, it is all online and available to PSD. Mr. Vincent mentioned the other advantage is that we saved approximately \$4K because it was offered to us at a really good price. He commented that the other charter schools at the meeting said they wished they had that. The name of the program is Synergy. All the information goes in there (all the information parents will out) and it is a secure data system.

Mr. Sizemore asked for clarification on enrollment. The document Mrs. Sizemore had from the April 2015 meeting had numbers next to each preschool age group. Mr. Sanderson read the motion passed at the April 2015 meeting and explained that there are not enrollment caps on pre-K (age 3 and 4).

Highlights of the first two weeks of the school year

Mr. Vincent mentioned that we have students with significant allergies this year. They came up with a plan so teachers are able to keep students that are allergic to something away from the food they are allergic to. Mr. Vincent said these were very substantial allergies. He believes it has worked out well.

Mr. Vincent reported: On the website where is a link for financial transparency. As of July 1st it is required by the state that every school has this information posted. Mr. Sanderson mentioned that the Financial seminar they attended last week reminded them of this.

Mr. Vincent reported: We will have our 3 year Charter School Support Initiative visit in February and they will audit the whole implementation of our Charter school. The auditors will speak to everyone, visit classrooms, review policies, etc. Mr. Vincent thinks it will take 3 days. Auditors will talk to parents, board members, teachers, staff, all. Mr. Vincent will need to double check but he believes it will take place February 15, 2016. Mr. Sanderson clarified it would be the Colorado League of Charter Schools doing the audit February 16-18, 2016.

Mr. Vincent reported that our accountant has started Specialized Data Systems (SDS), which will make our financial system more "real time" so we can retrieve up-to-date reports on bank accounts, expenses, etc. rather than waiting for the monthly reports. Mr. Vincent reported on Kinderlime: Mr. Vincent thinks it has been very helpful to monitor student attendance. Check in and check out can be done with ipads and he believes it has been great. The program gives

us the opportunity to securely send pictures, Last year they were not able to send out pictures.

Mr. Vincent reported: They heard parents' desire last year for a more diverse set of opportunities. Mrs. Knight put this together. Mr. Sanderson mentioned we had agreed to have a review of the extra curriculars during our October meeting. Mr. Sanderson believes we need to do some outreach to parents to see how this is working: how many kids are participating? Are parents happy with it? Mr. Sanderson believes he and Mr. Vincent can talk about this.

Mr. Danielson left the meeting following this item.

6:30 – 6:40 Enrollment policy and implementation

Mr. Sanderson reported: After our last board meeting, Mr. Sanderson spent many hours investigating and making sure he fully understood what was happening. Mr. Sanderson sent a memo to summarize what he had done. Mr. Sanderson explained that we are in a federal grant right now and we are in the 3rd year of that grant. While on the grant, our enrollment policy and practices must be consistent with federal laws and rules. The core principle for enrollment policy is that it has to be equitable. Once we move off the federal grant we'll have more flexibility to meet our pedagogical desire, e.g., we can say we will not take in a 3rd grader without Montessori experience because it makes sense from a pedagogical standpoint.

We have 2 enrollment periods, an open enrollment and then we do a lottery and then we have continued enrollment after that lottery. We learned from our attorney, who has spent a lot of time working with our attorney general's office in particular with Montessori schools because it is particularly unusual for Montessori schools, that the principle that must underpin the enrollment policy is equity. Mr. Bethke said that the thing we need to make certain we do going forward: (1) the policy has to be as unambiguous as possible. (2) the policy must be implemented consistently, and (3) implementation has to be clearly documented. Turns out that our policy contained some ambiguity, leaving some areas that were open to interpretation. In the case of ambiguity in the policy, it is the Head of School's responsibility to make a reasoned judgment as to how to proceed with implementation of the policy.

Mr. Sanderson said Mr. Vincent, in making his interpretation, was acting on the direction given by the board in April regarding enrollment caps. The need for interpretation will be lessened by revising the enrollment policy. Ms. Federman wants to know how we will do that. Mr. Sanderson said he will work our lawyer, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and Mr. Vincent to revise the policy. He has kept a tally of all the issues that have arisen and he will take the existing policy and share it with Mr. Vincent and go back and forth with it, then reach out to PSD and then CDE as well and he will bring a proposal for the October board meeting. Mr. Bethke has suggestions about that. There are a lot of ways to do this and we just have to decide which way to do it.

Both Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Vincent admitted making a couple of mistakes with regard wot enrollment. Mr. Sanderson made a mistake by making what he thought was a minor decision about modification of enrollment numbers in response to a request from Mr. Vincent. This decision superseded a board prerogative, and Mr. Sanderson has pledge to be more cognizant of and respectful of decisions that have been or need to be made by the board. Mr. Vincent did made a mistake by leaving one 2nd grade spot open, thus not fulfilling board direction.

After this mistake came to light, Mr. Vincent enrolled an additional 2nd grader, acting on what was adopted in by the board in April. Mrs. Sizemore felt that what had been done to reconcile the mistake still made things unfair.

Mrs. Sizemore asked about language discrepancies on the website regarding founding families and application being mailed in or brought in. Mr. Vincent said PO Box was not receiving mail properly so that is why they changed the mailing address to Taft Hill Road. Mr. Vincent said families in the school said that they were mailing applications and they weren't receiving them for a couple of weeks, so they changed the text to give the schools street address rather than a PPO box. Also, there were some changes made to clarify enrollment priority, after the Mr. Vincent clarified that priority with Mr. Sanderson. Mr. Sanderson commented that the text on the web site should be fixed over time, reflecting the most currently approved enrollment policy. Ambiguous points in the policy will be clarified in the coming revision.

When Mrs. Sizemore said she was concerned about the situation, Mr. Sanderson commented she could make a motion if she wanted to see something done.

Motion: *I Move that next year, should we have the capacity to accept more Kindergarteners, we extend an offer of enrollment to preschoolers who applied for Kindergarten this year during open enrollment but were turned away because they did not make the lottery.*

Motion by: Mrs. Sizemore

Second: Mrs. Federman (seconded because she wanted to have a discussion on the item)

Discussion: Mr. Sanderson has a few problems with the motion. He's inclined to not go that route because we've already made a plan to address the ambiguities in our current policy. He is also concerned that this motion would be illegal, because it would explicitly give enrollment preference based on their current enrollment in our tuition-based pre-school. This kind of preference is not allowed under federal law while we are receiving federal dollars from our start-up grant. Ms. Federman is wondering if this is a motion that we can table while we do some research. Ms. Federman says that although no actions around enrollment were done to intentionally slight anyone, and it feels like we need to talk about it more.

Motion is tabled – Mrs. Sizemore asked Mr. Sanderson to be part of the enrollment policy revisions noting that she has spent many hours researching all the enrollment language in the documents (charter, bylaws, grants, website) and has noticed the areas where things are inconsistent. Mr. Sanderson agreed. Mr. Sanderson will send out what he has and we will all see what he has worked on.

Ms. Sizemore would like to be part of the enrollment policy revisions. Mr. Sanderson will send out what he has and we will all see it.

6:40-6:50 Annual Report

Mrs. Sizemore discussed the two bids she received from Graphic Design Companies. One was within budget, the other wasn't. Mr. Federman asked if the bid from Mrs. Croft was within budget. Mrs. Sizemore commented that LEKS Creative, Mrs. Croft, was within budget, the other bid was substantially more. Ms. Federman thought we should go with that bid.

Mr. Sanderson commented that the annual report is the Head of School's responsibility. The

Head of School can decide who he wants to design it. In fact, the board is working with the Head of School on this. Mrs. Sizemore expressed that we could either contract a graphic designer to work on the document or we could do it in house and make it a simple one page document – the bids were there and the Head of School can proceed as he sees fit.

Mr. Sanderson asked Mr. Vincent how he wanted to proceed. Mr. Vincent explained he does not think the annual report is a marketing tool. He mentioned that the reports Mrs. Sizemore had shared were from private schools. Mrs. Sizemore clarified that there were both and that she wanted to show that charter schools were following the examples of private schools. Mr. Vincent believes this is more of a historic document – how far we've come. The annual report is, in his mind, the end of year comment. Mr. Vincent's perception is that in private schools, the annual report is more of a marketing tool and in charter schools, annual reports are more data, more related to growth and need. Mr. Vincent will put together some things, get those things to Ms. Croft and see what she can do with it.

Mrs. Sizemore asked that, following the discussion, it appears her work regarding the annual report was done – she provided the bids and the Head of School will contact Ms. Croft. Mr. Sanderson and Mr. Vincent both agreed that was the case. Ms. Federman will send information regarding parent satisfaction surveys.

6:50-7:00 Annual Goals

The School Accountability Committee has completed the summary report of last spring's parent satisfaction survey. Based on the results of this survey and other input, we need to create annual goals for our Head of School and for the Governing Board of Directors.

Ms. Federman explained the teachers are working on a document. The SAC would like a summary of the parent satisfaction survey to go on the website. They would like to follow that closely with goals. Mrs. Sizemore pointed out that during the survey, parents could only take the survey once – it was not allowing Mrs. Sizemore to go back and do one survey per student – she tried accessing through two different e-mails. A community member commented that you had to use different browsers in order to allow for the survey to be accessed again. For the next survey, we should address this issue.

Mr. Sanderson said he would like to see the first page of survey report provide an executive summary of the results. Ms. Federman will work on the executive summary and then we can post it online. Ms. Federman will send the document to Mrs. Sizemore and she will post on the website.

7:00 – 7:15 Facilities

Mr. Sanderson gave a report on facilities: He mentioned that Ronnie Estelle and her team continue to work very hard on facilities and we continue to look at a commercial space where we would lease and purchase of land and building. Mr. Sanderson mentioned that facilities is the number one issue of charter schools. We are unlikely to be granted a loan during our first three years of existence because we do not have a financial track record. Purchasing land and building is estimated at roughly 4 million dollars. That would be for a PreK-9 facility. Mr. Sanderson said they are talking to a property owner about buying land and/or a couple of

choices including an existing building, however retrofitting that building would cost about 1 million dollars. Mr. Sanderson said that we would almost certainly not qualify for grants because we don't have enough free and reduced lunch population. Purchasing land and building is off the table for next year. That leaves us with other primary options. An architect has looked at an existing building and is figuring out costs. They are also communicating with PSD regarding the facility. Mr. Sanderson believes the best place to land is on a temporary facility; another facility like the one we are at right now, but, less ideally, we could be in two different places where primary environment would be in one location and the elementary environment would be in another location. We need more space and the facilities committee is looking for options. The facilities committee has spoken to almost fifty different churches and the conversations with a couple of churches is fairly far along. Larger churches are harder to work with because they typically have numerous groups to whom they lease space. The facilities committee has approached our current church to see if we could stay there another year and their church council is open to talking about it. Mr. Sanderson likes the temporary option because it doesn't lock us in. A commercial lease would probably require a 5 year or more like a 10 year deal. Temporary space is most likely another church. We would buy ourselves more time to work towards a permanent option.

A parent asked about proximity to cellphone towers. Mr. Sanderson and Ms. Federman explained they had already looked into that for the previous year – they had turned down facilities because of proximity to high-tension power lines.

A parent asked about the location. Mr. Sanderson said the search is fairly broad but it's always been the school's intention to be in middle to north Ft. Collins.

7:15 – 7:25 Board Member Open Forum

This is an opportunity for any Board member to comment on what they see going well, to raise questions or concerns, and to suggest items for upcoming agendas.

This item was tabled. If members have ideas for items they would like to put in the upcoming agendas, they are to contact Mr. Sanderson.

7:25-7:30 Conclude meeting

Motion: The FCMS Board moves to adjourn the August 20, 2015 board meeting.

Motion By: Ms. Federman

Seconded: Mrs. Sizemore

Discussion: None

Vote: All present in favor (Mr. Danielson had exited meeting prior), motion passes.