

# **Howard Gardner MI Charter School Public Board Meeting**

Tuesday, January 21, 2020

The Howard Gardner MI Charter School (HGMICS) held a Public Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2020. The HGMICS facility, located at 1615 East Elm Street, Scranton, PA was the location for the public meeting. Dr. Susan Trussler, President, called the meeting to order at 7:13 PM and then subsequently presided over the meeting. Dr. Trussler led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance and then took roll call for the board members and administrators.

The following Trustees attended: Dr. Susan Trussler, John Ezbiansky, Laila Kane, Stephanie Westington, Laurie Cadden, Sam Ceccacci, Susan Hennemuth, Aaron Nivert and Dr. Fran Langan. Absent: Dr. Clarence Lamanna and Dr. John Ruddy.

Also, in attendance: Dr. Marie George, CEO; Maria Rozaieski, Principal; TreeAnne McEnery, Assistant Principal; Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager; Janet Kania, School Secretary; and Kimberly Kost Scanlon, Esq., School Counsel.

Dr. Susan Trussler announced at this time any visitor may comment or ask questions pertaining to items listed on the January agenda. At this time, the visitors in attendance had no comments or questions regarding the agenda. The meeting proceeded.

## **I. Minutes**

**Dr. Susan Trussler**

Dr. Susan Trussler announced that the December, 2019 meeting was cancelled due to inclement weather and presented the November 19, 2019 Board of Trustees meeting minutes and asked if there were any corrections or additions. At this time, there were no corrections or additions. A **MOTION** to approve the November 19, 2019 Board meeting minutes, as submitted, was made by Laila Kane and seconded by Susan Hennemuth. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the minutes as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

## **II. President's Report**

**Dr. Susan Trussler**

Dr. Susan Trussler introduced and welcomed the newest Board of Trustee Member Sam Ceccacci. Susan thanked Sam and the three other recently appointed Board Members for their commitment. Susan also said that pictures of the four new Trustees were recently published in the Scranton-Times Tribune.

Susan announced that Howard Gardner MI Charter School will be hosting our first Open House on Thursday, January 30<sup>th</sup>. Since the December meeting was cancelled, all agenda items from that meeting will be addressed at this meeting.

## **III. Finance Committee**

**Stephanie Westington**

Stephanie Westington informed the group that the Finance & Facilities Committee met on December 10<sup>th</sup> to discuss aspects of the progress made on the Master Plan as well as a Capitalization

Policy and Budget Revisions for Fiscal Year 2019-2020. The budget revision and Capitalization policy are on tonight's agenda.

## **1. Financial Report**

**Chuck Wallinger**

Stephanie Westington deferred to Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager who presented the report. Chuck Wallinger reported revenues are \$6,166.62 above budget for December 2019. The Tuition revenue was above budget by \$14,389.33; this was based on an increase in Special Education students, 36 actual enrollments compared to 23 budgeted. Revenues from the federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) was below budget by \$6,472.08. The SIG grant is no longer available to the school because we are no longer a Designated Focus School, which is a result of improvement in students' academic achievement. Expenses were \$6,172.51 above budget for December 2019. The Food Services costs were above budget by \$1,051.03. The IT costs were above budget by \$2,397.78 due to the purchase of a replacement Smart board for the Senior class and a Laptop for the new Psychologist. The Net Operating Revenue for December 2019 of \$20,822.51 was on budget. The budgeted Fiscal Year Net Operating Revenue is expected to be reached. There is 171 days of cash on hand, which presents a strong solvency position for the school. There is \$414,602 remaining on the FNCB loan at a fixed rate of 3.35%. The July through November 2019 School District billing was paid by Unipay in December 2019 for \$255,577.79. A payment from Abington Heights SD was received for the months of October, November and December, which now has that school district current with its payments. Redirection fees have been stopped pending further notice from PDE.

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Financial Report through December 31, 2019 as reported and submitted was made by Dr. Fran Langan and seconded by Sam Ceccacci. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Financial Report as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

## **2. Fiscal Year 2019-20 Budget Revision**

**Stephanie Westington**

Stephanie Westington presented the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Budget Revision to the Board of Trustees for approval. Stephanie explained the need for the budget revision included an increase in the per pupil rate that was announced after the original budget was approved and the adjustment for expenses related to building renovations ( Phase I of Master Plan). With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Budget Revision as presented was made by Laurie Cadden and seconded by John Ezbiansky. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Budget Revision as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

## **3. Capitalization Policy**

**Chuck Wallinger**

Chuck Wallinger presented the Capitalization Policy to the Board of Trustees for approval. Chuck explained that the policy is timely in light of the building addition project. The policy addresses purchases greater than or equal to \$2000. Further all capital items will be logged in an inventory system. The **MOTION** to approve the Capitalization Policy was made by Susan Hennemuth and seconded by Dr. Fran Langan. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Capitalization Policy as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

#### **IV. Academic Committee**

**Dr. Fran Langan**

Dr. Fran Langan informed the group that the Academic Committee meets monthly and is reviewing academic policies. Once reviewed, policies will be presented to the Board for approval.

#### **V. Development Committee**

**Susan Hennemuth**

Susan Hennemuth informed the group that the Development Committee continues to meet to discuss ways to raise funds for the School. Two consulting firms' proposals for Capital Campaign consultation are under review but of this effort may need to be re-examined. The Committee is also discussing the formalization of the Board for the Howard Gardner Charter School Foundation.

#### **VI. Nominating Committee**

**Laila Kane**

Laila Kane informed the group that the Nominating Committee assisted in finalizing all recent trustee appointments and will now begin reviewing possible candidates for two vacancies anticipated for July 2020.

#### **VII. Personnel Committee**

**Dr. Susan Trussler**

##### **1. Reaffirm Interim Intermediate I Teacher**

**Alyson Eckler**

Dr. Susan Trussler stated that with the departure of the Interim Intermediate I Teacher in December, the position of Interim Intermediate I Teacher had been on the cancelled December Board agenda and therefore the Board conducted an electronic vote to approve an interim teacher appointment. The Board will now need to reaffirm the appointment of Alyson Eckler to the position of Interim Intermediate I Teacher effective January 2, 2020. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to appoint Alyson Eckler for the balance of the 2019-2020 school year at a prorated salary based upon the annual salary of \$36,920 with estimated benefits not to exceed 30% or \$11,076 for an estimated total of \$47,996 was made by Stephanie Westington and seconded by Susan Hennemuth. All Trustees present voted in favor of appointing Alyson Eckler as Interim Intermediate I Teacher, with two Trustees absent.

At this time, Pamela Kobierecki, parent from the Mid-Valley School District asked for permission to address the Board of Trustees. Permission was granted. Pamela stated that her concern is regarding teacher retention. Pamela stated that recently her son's teacher left her position in the middle of the year; which could have an adverse effect on both Pamela's son and the other students in the class. Pamela asked the Board of Trustees to please consider retention issues seriously. Dr. Marie George stated that the Personnel Committee has been addressing the retention issue. Dr. Susan Trussler added that specific cases cannot be discussed publicly but are handled through proper protocol.

#### **VIII. School Policies**

**Dr. Marie George**

##### **1. Privacy Policy**

Dr. Marie George presented the Privacy Policy to the Board of Trustees for approval. Marie informed the group that this policy was developed by Michael Abballe, IT Specialist and reviewed by Kim Kost Scanlon, Esq. The policy will be located on our website to ensure that all postings on the

School's Website are appropriate. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Privacy Policy was made by Dr. Susan Trussler and seconded by Susan Hennemuth. All Trustees present voted in favor of the Privacy Policy as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

## **2. Meal Charge Policy**

Dr. Marie George presented the Meal Charge Policy to the Board of Trustees for approval. Marie briefly outlined the policy, which ensures compliance with federal reporting requirements for the Act 55 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code. The meal charges will include full pay students, free meal benefits, reduced meal benefits and assisting families who may qualify for financial assistance. The policy states that any child without a meal will be provided one with financial assistance provided to parents as needed. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Meal Charge Policy was made by Laila Kane and seconded by Dr. Fran Langan. All Trustees present voted in favor of the Meal Charge Policy as submitted, with two Trustees absent.

## **IX. School Matter**

### **1. CEO Report Dr. Marie George**

Marie reported on December and January items. Several changes as well as new projects will begin in 2020 as noted below:

- **Plans Underway for Building Addition:** Two design meetings were held that involved architect, Laura Gillette-Mills and engineer David Johns with Maria Rozaieski, TreeAnne McEnery, Bryan Kerns and herself. Civil engineers are conducting infiltration testing and a site survey. Meetings with all staff affected by the building addition also occurred in late December and will continue to be fine-tuned in January.
- **Tax-free designation:** On January 16<sup>th</sup> Marie and Bryan Koscelansky, Esq. met with the Scranton-Lackawanna Health and Welfare Authority in a public hearing seeking approval for a Tax-Free Loan. The Authority members asked many questions about the school and enthusiastically approved the resolution. City and County applications will follow and final approval is expected by April, 2020.
- **Student Enrichment Program via Grant Funds:** The Scranton Educational Improvement Organization (SEIO) presented the School with an additional \$11,000 to conduct a Literacy Improvement Program free of charge for HGMICS students. Coupled with a grant from the Small Rural School Achievement (SRSA) program (\$13,000) the School will be able to offer literacy and math enrichment programming free of charge for HGMICS students. This newly designed Enrichment Program will begin in February 2020 and be coordinated by TreeAnne McEnery, Assistant Principal. Additional student support through the Ready to Learn Grant (\$7,249) is also available and can be used for tutoring and other needs.
- **Employee Health Benefits:** recently the school changed its health care provider from Highmark to Geisinger, effective January 2020. The School's benefits broker, Jeff Haudenschild (Benefits Group) coordinated the change and presented information to employees about the change in carrier. This change is a result of an 11% Highmark increase in contrast to Geisinger's proposal that would bring no increased cost. Geisinger health care coverage would continue with two PPO options similar to what the School had with Highmark. Geisinger's coverage includes a greater network of providers. The vision and dental coverage with Guardian continues at no increase. Re-enrollment is currently underway for those employees who participate in the school health benefits.

- **Personnel:**  
Interim Intermediate Teacher: Michele Wall Lesnefsky, tendered her resignation effective December 20, 2019, which was a month's notice thus allowing for a smooth transition of her duties to the classroom Teacher Aide, Alyson Eckler. Alyson, a qualified teacher, has served as teacher aide in the Intermediate I classroom since fall 2018 and was approved by the Board of Trustees earlier in this meeting as the Interim Intermediate I Teacher for the remainder of this school year. Parents were notified of Michele's departure date and that time transition planning was underway. Carol Dunn, a certified teacher with 15 years' experience, has been performing substitute duties for the School this year and has agreed to serve as Interim Aide in the Intermediate I class for the balance of this year.  
The School's full-time psychologist, Colleen Coolbaugh, began her duties effective January 6, 2020. Prior to January 6<sup>th</sup>, Colleen visited the school several times to begin on-boarding. We are looking forward to Colleen joining our team and introducing a greater role for the duties associated with a school psychologist. The School bids a farewell to Rita Williams, Ph.D. who has served as our part-time School Psychologist since 2012. In addition to her thorough evaluation of students, Rita was a staunch advocate for student learning and provided expert advice when developing intervention strategies and Individual Education Plans (IEP's) for students. A gift of appreciation was presented to Rita prior to her departure on December 19, 2019. Rita plans to enjoy her retirement years and spend more time with her grandchildren.  
Jaci Sandercock announced her retirement at the end of this school year. Jaci is a long-serving former pre-school and currently Kindergarten teacher. Jaci is a credentialed and expert Montessori teacher who is beloved by all her students and in some cases a second generation of students! A retirement party will be planned and Jaci is encouraged to continue her connection to the school.
- **Fall 2020 Enrollment:** January of each year marks the beginning of the enrollment cycle. Re-enrollment forms for current students and enrollment forms for new students are being distributed. The Lottery will be drawn in March. For the first time, the School is hosting an Open House on January 30, 2020 from 6 PM – 7:30 PM for interested prospective parents/families. The timing coincides with the enrollment cycle and National School Choice Week. A billboard advertising the Open House was donated from King Outdoors and is located on the North Scranton Expressway for the January 10-30<sup>th</sup> timeframe. Three additional billboards were donated by Fidelity Bank and will be displayed at several of their locations in the Scranton and surrounding communities.

## 2. Principal Report

**Maria Rozaieski**

Maria stated that her report would touch on school happenings, grade reports and parent conferences, the Winter Holiday Celebration and committee meetings. They were:

- The first trimester ended on November 21<sup>st</sup>, report cards were distributed on December 6<sup>th</sup> and parent conferences were held on December 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. All went well. New this year is a system to recognize students in 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade that have an average grade of 90-100 in Math, Science, Cultures and English Language Arts. These students qualify for Honor Roll in two categories: Grades ranging from 90-95 are in the Honors category; grades ranging from 96-100 are in the Distinguished Honors category. Students will be recognized at the student-of-the-month assembly. It was recommended by Laurie Cadden that these names be submitted to the Scranton Times to be published. This would also spotlight the School.
- The Parent Forum hosted an annual Winter Holiday Celebration at the school on Saturday, December 7<sup>th</sup>. Children were able to make and take a few different craft items suitable for gift

giving to family members, Santa was available for pictures. There was a guest appearance from Steve Kurilla, Music Teacher and students playing the recorder. It was fun for all and nicely attended.

- The Professional Development Committee and Curriculum Committee have established a regular meeting schedule to discuss and plan for future professional development and curricular needs of the school and faculty. The Professional Development Committee will map out plans for the rest of this year as well as 2020-2021 and even into the future. As the committees overlap they have agreed to have a joint meeting once a month to inform the faculty with updates.
- The Parent Forum hosted the annual Cookie Event to show their appreciation for faculty, staff and administration on December 18<sup>th</sup>. On behalf of the faculty, staff and administration a heartfelt “Thank You” to the Parent Forum that does so much for our school. A reminder that the Parent Forum is hosting the annual Family Friendly Bingo on Sunday, January 26<sup>th</sup>. Proceeds from this event help fund classrooms and at this time the event is sold out.

## **X. Educational Presentation PSSA Comparison Data**

**Michael Rescigno**

Michael Rescigno, Senior Math Teacher presented the 2019 PSSA Comparison Data to the Board of Trustees and audience. Michael began by explaining his educational background, years of teaching and teaching experience and various clubs and school activities that he is the club leader. Michael stated that scores are made public and reflect the overall achievement of a particular school, region and statewide averages. Students from across the state in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are tested in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. Students from across the state in 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades are also tested in Science. Michael compared the HGMICS PSSA scores with local charter schools, local school districts and the PA state averages. Michael’s comparison of scores used in this presentation came from the 2018 and 2019 PSSA test results.

Michael found that HGMICS consistently outperformed the state in ELA achievement. HGMICS students consistently outperformed every Scranton school in ELA achievement. Achievement started to drop in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, though the score was still respectable. Math scores are typically lower than ELA due to the degree of difficulty of the standards. HGMICS still consistently scored near or above the state average in most grade groups. In addition, HGMICS students consistently outperformed almost every Scranton school in the Math Achievement. Michael said that 4<sup>th</sup> grade Science has remained a huge strength for HGMICS over the years. 8<sup>th</sup> grade Science increased in proficiency by 50% over the past year. Once again, HGMICS students outperformed Scranton schools and the state in Science achievement.

Michael also compared the 2018 and 2019 PA Future Ready Index by percentage of local schools (both charter and public). Here he found that HGMICS students outperformed these schools in all three areas of testing. Michael stated that future expectations are to have more HGMICS students attain the advanced level in all subject areas. Currently, students are consistently performing at or above half of the local schools in Proficiency and Advanced levels across all subject areas year to year. Also HGMICS students compared to other charter schools indicated that our students consistently outperform other local charter schools in ELA and Math. Science is not as high, though still a respectable percentage.

In closing, Michael stated that the HGMICS students could do better but are doing well overall,

especially in comparison to Scranton School District, local Charter Schools and state averages. Improvement is needed in ELA, since scores have slightly decreased in general over the past few years, indicated by the test score results. Improvement has been attained in Math, as scores have gone up recently across the board. Science has been consistently good for many years. Questions were invited.

John Ezbiansky asked Michael what indicators or factors may contribute to the drop in scores for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Michael stated that there is no particular indicator or factor other than developmental changes from a child to a teenager. Dr. Fran Langan added that research documents the “middle school slide”, Dr. Susan Trussler, asked Michael if there were any data to compare the performance of students who came up through the HGMICS educational system from Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, to students who had transferred in from another school district. Michael stated this had not been examined in this way but could be interesting to pursue. Maria Rozaieski, Principal added that these questions came up in conversation with the faculty and will be further researched to identify those students who were at the school from 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and those who entered in 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and up.

## **IX. New Business**

At this time, there was no new school business that needed to be addressed. Dr. Susan Trussler asked if there was anyone in the audience who had any school-related topic to discuss. The following two parents in the audience asked to address the Board of Trustees:

### **Second Public Hearing of Visitors to any school-related topic(s).**

| Name / Home School District                           | Topic / Issue                                 |
|---|---|
| <u>Pamela Kobierecki – Mid Valley School District</u> | <u>Teacher Retention Issue</u>                |
| <u>Rosemary Bohenek – Scranton School District</u>    | <u>Honor Roll Publication/Health Benefits</u> |

Pamela Kobierecki began by stating that teacher retention is an issue and is also a national problem. She said she feels that HGMICS is not keeping up with teacher compensation set by the National State Standards. She also stated that Public-school teachers are allowed to participate in a union where as Charter School Teachers do not have a union to protect them. She went on to say that within a union environment there are checks and balances to ensure teacher retention; however some of these checks and balances have pros and cons. Pam added that when Vince Rizzo was the head of Howard Gardner School he initiated the development of this charter school and attempted to work with the teachers to try to ensure a comparable pay rate and retention.

Pam went on to ask the Board of Trustees to come up with solutions for retention. Pam also asked the Board to try to come up with a way to be a model for Charter Schools and Schools in general regarding the retention issue. Pam recommended conducting a Teacher Satisfaction Survey in order to better understand the issues they have encountered.

Rosemary Bohenek questioned if the benefit switch to Geisinger resulted in additional cost to the employees. Dr. Marie George answered Rosemary’s questions by stating there was no additional cost and there was an improvement in the provider network now available to employees. This is the second

year in a row that improvements to health benefits, including vision and dental, were made at no additional cost to employees.

Rosemary Bohenek added that the PA website lists Fell Charter and HGMICS as the two lowest paid charter schools in the state by \$20,000. Rosemary stated the compensation might be where the Board needs to focus, which she feels will help with the retention of employees.

Dr. Susan Trussler stated that over the past 3-5 years substantial raises in faculty salaries have been given. Marie stated the teacher salaries increased on average 8% in 2019-20 and 13% in 2018-19. Prior to 2018, long-serving teachers were given significant salary adjustments based on their years of service. Susan briefly explained the methodology used establishing teacher salary step scales. Our school salary step scales were targeted to quickly bring salaries to the average of the Scranton and Abington Heights School Districts' scales. Susan also reviewed the recent actions taken to respond to teachers' needs – tuition reimbursement, additional teacher aides, support for professional development and significant salary increases. However, if teacher morale and satisfaction is low, the Board takes this very seriously and certainly does not want to lose good teachers. Therefore, the Board's Personnel Committee is addressing teacher retention and satisfaction and invites teacher input directly to the Committee.

Rosemary Bohenek also said that it would be nice of the students who achieved Honors and Distinguished Hones have their names printed in the newspaper. Rosemary said she felt this would be a good way to publicize the education that students are receiving at HGMICS.

## **Adjournment**

At 8:24 PM, no further items of business or comments were raised. A **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Susan Hennemuth and accepted by all Board of Trustees present, with two Trustees absent.

The next HGMICS Public Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, February 18, 2019 at 7:00 PM.**