

Howard Gardner MI Charter School Public Board Meeting

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

The Howard Gardner MI Charter School (HGMICS) held a virtual Public Board of Trustees meeting on Tuesday, April 21, 2020 that was live streamed to the School's Facebook page for public viewing and questions/comments. The virtual meeting was necessitated due COVID-19 Pandemic and mandatory school closure of the HGMICS facility that is located at 1615 East Elm Street, Scranton, PA. Dr. Susan Trussler, President called the meeting to order at 7:05 PM and then subsequently presided over the meeting. Dr. Trussler led those assembled virtually 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, Dr. Clarence Lamanna, Aaron Nivert Dr. Fran Langan and Dr. John Ruddy. No Board members were absent.

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 that the public is welcome to comment or ask questions on the April agenda items. Visitors must state their name and school district affiliation. Susan stated that the March Board meeting had been cancelled due to the state-mandated school closure. At this time, visitors in attendance had no comments or questions regarding the agenda. The meeting proceeded.

I. Minutes

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Susan Trussler presented the February 18, 2020 Board of Trustees meeting minutes and asked if there were any corrections or additions. With no corrections or additions, a **MOTION** to approve the February 18, 2020 Board meeting minutes, as submitted, was made by Stephanie Westington and seconded by Sam Ceccacci. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the minutes as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

II. President's Report

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Susan Trussler recognized the challenges faced by the School and commended its ability to quickly adjust the manner of educating. She further thanked everyone: students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators and Board members for their hard work, dedication and perseverance over the last month given the state-mandated closure of educational institutions.

Dr. Trussler indicated that there are two motions in response to the emergency school closure and immediate needs of the School that were approved by the Board of Trustees via electronic vote on April 4, 2020

1. Continuity of Education (CoE) Plan for Emergency School Closures Dr. Susan Trussler

The first motion is the "Continuity of Education (CoE) Plan for Emergency School Closures".

This motion reaffirms the electronically submitted approval on April 4, 2020 of the Continuity

of Education Plan for Emergency Situations that then was submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education, posted on the School's website and implemented for the duration of the current health crisis. Since its electronic approval on April 4th, two paragraphs were added to the CoE plan; the School's mission statement on the cover page and a paragraph on Teacher Professional Development that appears on page 6 of the Continuity of Education Plan (CoE).

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to reaffirm the Continuity of Education (CoE) Plan for Emergency School Closures, with stated amendments, was made by Dr. Clarence Lamanna and seconded by Dr. Fran Langan. All Trustees present voted in favor of reaffirming the plan as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

2. McKenna Snyder, LLC

Dr. Susan Trussler

The second motion was to reaffirm the electronic approval on April 4, 2020 to utilize McKenna Snyder, LLC; law firm during the mandated school closure due to their expertise and knowledge/experience in working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and PA Charter schools. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to reaffirm the appointment of McKenna Snyder, LLC Law Firm was made by Laila Kane and seconded by Susan Hennemuth. All Trustees present voted in favor of reaffirming McKenna Snyder, LLC as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

III. Overview of Continuity of Education during Mandated School Closure

Dr. Marie George, CEO announced that presentations for the Continuity of Education Plan (CoE) would be made by TreeAnne McEnery, Lower School Principal and Maria Rozaieski, Middle School Principal. Marie thanked the Board of Trustees for the continued support in this challenging endeavor. To recap, our preparation began well before the March 13th mandated closure to include staff training, additional sanitation of the building and cancelation of large gatherings. We researched the Continuity of Education Plan to see how it would be administered with little guidance from state or federal sources.

In order to expedite the plan and ensure effective and timely communication to all 26 lead teachers in a remote working setting, two principals were appointed. TreeAnne McEnery serves in the capacity of Lower School Principal, grades Kindergarten through 4 and Maria Rozaieski in the capacity of Middle School Principal, grades 5 through 8. However, as is always the case, the school remains unified in our goals, policies and practices. TreeAnne and Maria were then introduced and made the following presentations to further explain how the school proceeded to provide Continuity of Education to our students.

TreeAnne McEnery, Lower School Principal began her report by stating that the School has completed five weeks of closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic and now will offer planned instruction until June 5, 2020, which means our students will now be learning new material.

TreeAnne stated that preparation for potential school closure actually began with an emergency meeting called by Dr. Marie George, CEO on February 26th with the Safety Committee. The Safety Committee met again at their regularly scheduled meeting on March 4th. At that time, it was decided that a Technology Inquiry Form should be created and sent home to every HGMICS family to determine the feasibility and preparation for remote learning in the event the school had to close due to a local outbreak. At this time, all Academic Leadership updates to the staff began to include asking teachers to review their online curriculum programs to see how they would be able to provide instruction from home if the school had to close. Prior to Governor Wolf's announced the first two-week school closure, the

staff industriously switched gears and created enrichment packets to ensure that all students had immediate access to educational material.

For the first month of the school closure, teachers continued to plan and produce weekly communications and provided enrichment and review materials for their students. On April 6th, instruction began to be offered only through Google Classroom and Zoom. Review materials were not mandatory, so gradual transition to utilizing the online platform provided students a non-intimidating environment to explore the technology before mandatory assignments began. TreeAnne stated that at this time, we are happy to announce that as of Monday, April 20th, all HGMICS students are accessing new curriculum materials and will complete the school year via virtual learning.

TreeAnne explained that on March 19th, she and Maria established a K-8 CoE Task Force based on the information that was published in the PDE Guidelines. On that date, the Guidelines included that schools could offer new instruction to students, if they ensured a Free Appropriate Planned Education (FAPE). The Task Force met weekly and then began to meet independently as K-4 and 5-8 Task Forces to address how remote instruction would look at each of those grade levels. Over a three-week period, the Task Force met and helped ensure that their Pod colleagues were updated on the advancement and development of the K-8 CoE Plan. The Task Forces also consulted outside colleagues as well as Cyber Schools throughout the area.

As part of the support for teachers transitioning to remote instruction, Meghan Felliciani was hired as an Educational Technology Specialist to provide professional development. Meghan and Michael Abballe, IT Specialist, work closely together and are co-teaching in live sessions. They have presented Zoom Basics, providing an overview of the Zoom platform, settings, how to utilize the waiting room, co-host function, screen sharing recording and uploading virtual sessions and the importance of reporting any issues immediately to administration. This has allowed our teachers to become more comfortable with a virtual instructional platform. In addition, Meghan and Michael have provided a thorough review of Google Classroom, which is serving as a primary instructional platform for grades K-8. Topics discussed included the Classroom Tabs: stream, classwork, people, grades, google calendar functions, students submitting assignments and providing guideline on how to manage student work in this Google application. TreeAnne stated overall, teachers are happy with the training and feel more confident in utilizing these virtual tools to offer instruction in a safe educational environment.

TreeAnne went on to say that on April 14th, a nine question CoE Parent Survey was emailed to all HGMICS families. Questions ranged from families reviewing and accessing our Continuity of Education Guidelines and the FAQ to instructional topics such as access to technology and whether the online assignments have felt manageable. TreeAnne reported the survey was emailed at 5:00 PM on Tuesday, April 14th with a closure at noon on Friday, April 17th. She reported 72 responses had been received in 13 hours, with a total of 90 responses by Friday at noon. 95% of families have read the CoE FAQ document, 52% rated the School's communication throughout mandated closure as outstanding, with one person evaluating it as poor. 98.9% use school emails as their primary source of information, with Facebook being a second source, 53% rated that the Enrichment and Review materials posted to Google Classroom have been manageable, 89% of people have a reliable device and internet, 80% stated they have not had to utilize the Technology Support Desk, 62% do not think they

will participate in after school tutoring and 52% have accessed Jade's Counseling Corner. In early May (within the next two weeks), another survey to parents inquiring how planned instruction is going for families will be sent out. An update will then be presented to the Board of Trustees at the May meeting.

Maria Rozaieski, Middle School Principal, reported updates on school happenings after the March 13th school closure. Maria echoed TreeAnne's report of student instruction now implemented through on-line education with faculty kicking into gear and reaching out to students virtually.

Maria reported that Virtual Spirit Week was held March 30th through April 3rd. Students were encouraged to take a picture each day and upload it to our daily Facebook post. The week included Movement Monday (kinesthetic), Team Tuesday (interpersonal), Wacky Wednesday (visual-spatial), Throwback Thursday (musical) and Forest Friday (naturalistic). Also included were Mystery Readers online and March Madness which had a different theme each day.

Jade Volchoff, Guidance Counselor developed a webpage to add to our website called Jade's Counseling Corner. Resources for parents and students such as mindfulness activities, coping skills to use at home during COVID-19, guidance lessons and ways for students and parents to reach her if needed are accessible through this site.

March Student of the Month was also celebrated virtually. Teachers were able to nominate their students, even though school was on campus for only the first two weeks in March. Jade Volchoff, Guidance Counselor announced recipients virtually and certificates were mailed to the students.

The Positive Behavior Intervention and Support Team met on April 17th virtually. The team refined the original On-line Behavior matrix to better reflect the way our remote classroom instruction is being presented and student interaction with teachers is being conducted. The team is working on rewards and incentives for STAR (Safe, Trustworthy, Accountable and Respectful) behavior, a Virtual Monthly Blowout for students, and how to proceed with discipline infractions. In addition, a Virtual Talent Show and Career Fair is also being planned. Our nurse, Amy Ryan, is developing a Wellness Wednesday posting to our virtual world.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education continues to provide guidance during the school closure. For the 2019-2020 school year, the school continues to have the responsibility to perform teacher evaluations. Initially, this year's classroom teacher evaluations had been based solely (100%) on the classroom observation and practice, including each of the following areas: Planning and preparation (20%); Classroom environment (30%); Instruction (30%); and Professional responsibilities (20%).

Guidelines for Teacher Evaluation during the Continuity of Education have been developed to accommodate how teachers will be observed and evaluated during this time. The Draft Teacher Assessment Policy is in the process of being revised and completed.

IV. Finance Committee

Stephanie Westington

Stephanie Westington informed the group that Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager compiled and prepared both the February and March Financial Reports which had been presented to the Board of Trustees. At this time, Stephanie announced that Chuck would present a Year to Date

report and deferred to Chuck to present.

1. Financial Report

Chuck Wallinger

Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager reported revenues are \$2,640 below the budgeted amount of \$319,986 for the month of March 2020. The Tuition revenue was below the budgeted amount of \$289,704 by \$2,204 for the month of March, 2020; this was based on a decrease in enrollment to 273 students compared to the 275 students budgeted. The Food Service revenue was below the budgeted amount of \$2,778 by \$1,177 for the month of March, 2020 due to COVID-19. The NEIU 19 IDEA (Individuals with Disability Education Act) revenue was above the budgeted amount of \$20,000 by \$768 for the month of March, 2020.

Expenses are \$383 below the budgeted amount of \$280,640 for March 2020. The Cafeteria costs were below the budgeted amount of \$5,440 by \$833 for the month of March, 2020 due to COVID-19. The Zoom licensing costs, in the amount of \$332.43, were not budgeted for. The Net Operating Revenue for March 2020 was below the budgeted amount of \$39,346 by \$2,257. The Year to Date Net Operating Revenue was below the budgeted amount of \$81,467 by \$2,696. The Net Operating Revenue for Fiscal Year 2019-20 is expected to be reached.

The School had 162 days cash on hand at the end of March 2020, which places the School in a very positive solvency position. There is \$395,991 remaining on the current FNCB loan at a fixed rate of 3.35%.

The February 2020 School District billing was paid by Unipay in March 2020 for \$254,708. The five School Districts that pay us directly are up-to-date through February 2020. The Federal Grant Title I, Title II, and Title IV have been paid through March 2020. There has not been any interruption in cash flow due to the COVID-19 virus through the month of March 2020.

Stephanie Westington thanked Chuck for his presentation and reported that the Facilities/Finance Committee will be meeting virtually next week for their scheduled meeting. Stephanie asked if there were any questions at this time regarding the Finance Report. Laila Kane asked the question regarding the cost and length of time for the Zoom license. Chuck responded that the cost was \$332/month for the license through June. We purchased 35 licenses covering all teachers, 2 student support service personnel, and 3 administrators.

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Year-To-Date Financial Report through March 31, 2020 as reported and submitted was made by Dr. John Ruddy and seconded by John Ezbiansky. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Financial Report as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

2. Legal Services/Solicitor

Stephanie Westington

Stephanie Westington announced that in response to a Request for Proposals (RFP) and after review of proposals by the Finance Committee, the law firm of McKenna Snyder was being recommended to serve as legal counsel to the Howard Gardner MI

Charter School. McKenna Snyder has extensive experience in Charter School Law. Negotiations to determine whether costs will be charged by the hour or by an annual retainer agreement are underway and will be presented for approval later.

V. Academic Committee

Dr. Fran Langan

1. Curriculum/Academic Policy

Dr. Fran Langan informed the group that the Academic Committee has met to discuss the Curriculum/Academic Policy with the purpose of the defining the MI curriculum content, guidelines and leadership of the curriculum. The Academic Committee is now asking for a motion to approve the Curriculum/Academic Policy.

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Curriculum/Academic Policy as submitted was made by Laila Kane and seconded by Aaron Nivert. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Curriculum/Academic Policy as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

VI. Development Committee

Susan Hennemuth

Susan Hennemuth informed the group that over the last several months the Development Committee met with several consultants and decided that this is not the direction the Committee would like to go in at this time. The Development Committee also met with Dr. Marie George and staff who researched and identified several companies that would provide software to track gifts and contributions as well as annual and capital funds. A demonstration was presented to the Committee at their last meeting. A company has been hired and at this point, everyone who needs to be trained has been.

Susan announced that the Annual Golf Tournament, which is the biggest fund raiser, has been postponed. Last evening, the Committee discussed looking at other golf course locations and/or other venues for the event with the possibility of rescheduling in the fall. Susan will set a remote Development Committee meeting for this month to discuss how to move forward.

VII. Personnel Committee

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Trussler reported that prior to the abrupt closure the Personnel Committee had planned meetings with the staff and the faculty to discuss salaries, benefits and how we might fit things into the budget moving forward. Unfortunately, both meeting had to be cancelled due to the mandated closure. The Personnel Committee has begun meeting again and has scheduled its next meeting on April 23rd. The Committee is hoping to get feedback as the budget process moves forward and stays on track.

VIII. Nominating Committee **Bylaw Amendment**

Laila Kane

Laila Kane announced that the last report she gave was in January. In this report, Laila stated that a pool of candidates to be considered for appointment to replace the current Board Members who would be rotating off the Board was being compiled. Due to these uncertain times and the current building construction and renovations, the Nominating Committee is asking that an Amendment to the By-Laws for the Suspension of Term Limit of Trustees be brought forth. At this time Dr. Susan Trussler read the Resolution that allows for the suspension of term limits as the result of unforeseen circumstances, or

matters beyond the control of the Board of Trustees, and when the Board of Trustees determine it is in the best interest of the Howard Gardner Multiple Intelligence School to maintain order, continuity and stability.

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Bylaw Amendment Suspending Term Limits as submitted was made by Aaron Nivert and seconded by Stephanie Westington. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Bylaw Amendment Suspending Term Limits as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

IX. School Matters

Dr. Marie George

1. Policy: School Response to Internal and External Threat

Dr. Marie George reported that Safety Committee met during the school year and updated the Response to Internal and External Threats Policy and Procedures. The Safety Committee took advice from the local police department through training sessions and resources from the ALICE Training Institute of which we are a member. The policy outlines the procedures that are implemented in the case of any emergency or disaster as well as emergency drills. All drills are announced with the exception of fire drills. The policy outlines specific lockdown, lock-out and shelter-in-place alerts and procedures.

With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Policy: School Response to Internal and External Threat as submitted was made by Dr. Fran Langan and seconded by Dr. John Ruddy. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the School Response to Internal and External Threat Policy as submitted, with no Trustees absent.

2. CEO Report

Dr. Marie George reported that ongoing operations continue and the following items were reported:

- Immediately when the mandated closure was announced, there were various decisions and actions that needed to be in place in addition to the CoE Plan. This included identifying essential personnel who were given letters in the event they might be stopped by police, indicating that these employees had been identified as essential personnel. There is very limited access to the school and even access for essential personnel is limited.
- A post office box was secured, and postal mail continues to be received and addressed. All phone messages on the Main office line are remotely monitored by Patty and Janet. Payroll continues through ADP with Renee and myself, as authorizers. Chuck continues with payables, provides PDE reports as required, and is in close contact with our local school districts who continue to pay tuition either directly or through re-direction via Unipay.
- The Lottery for the 2020-2021 school year took place on March 5th. This Lottery was for admission of students to grades Kindergarten through 8th grade. There are 55 incoming students that have been admitted, with the bulk entering Kindergarten. There remain 106 students on the wait list, with 60 of these students being on the Kindergarten level.
- During the beginning of the school closure; a modified student lunch was provided (bag lunch) which was then replaced with the availability of more convenient locations provided by the Scranton School District. Marie wanted to thank Superintendent McTiernan of the Scranton School District who reached out and promptly replied to our request. Locations for the free lunch sites appear on the web page.

- On April 10th notification was received from PDE regarding the 2019-2020 school calendar. It stated that school would be able to conclude regular scheduled classes per the approved school calendar, even if the 180 days of school was not completed. Therefore, the final day of school will be June 5, 2020. Grade reports will be distributed to parents on June 12th. Students identified as receiving a “U” (unsatisfactory) academic grade can attend Summer School in order to properly prepare for the next grade level. This is the first time that HGMICS will offer a Summer Program to our students. Summer school will begin the week of June 15th and will be held for 4 weeks. Currently Tutoring sessions will be available to students at the beginning of May. Both tutoring and summer programming are offered free of charge.
- Budget development will resume next week. Budget requests from teachers and budget managers were completed in early March and now meetings with the Personnel and Finance Committees are scheduled to address major budget parameters. We are still hopeful that the 2020-2021 Budget will be presented to the Board of Trustees at the May meeting for approval.
- Phase II of the Master Plan has been moving slowly due to the mandated closure. The Architect and Engineers continue their work and several meetings and visits to the school continue. The bidding process has been delayed until municipal and other services can be open.

Adjournment

At 8:03 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 no Trustees absent.

The next virtual HGMICS Public Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, May 19, 2020 at 7:00 PM.**