

Howard Gardner MI Charter School Public Board Meeting

Tuesday, October 20, 2020

The Howard Gardner MI Charter School (HGMICS) held a Public Board of Trustees virtual meeting via ZOOM on Tuesday, October 20, 2020. The HGMICS facility is located at 1615 East Elm Street, Scranton, PA. Dr. Susan Trussler, President called the meeting to order at 7:02 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 non-voting attendees.

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

Also, in attendance: Dr. Marie George, CEO; TreeAnne McEnery, Principal; Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager; Joe Ross, Director of Facilities and Security; and Janet Kania, School Secretary. Absent from the meeting: Joshua Pollack, Esq.

Dr. Susan Trussler welcomed visitors and asked if any visitor had comments regarding October's agenda items. At this time, the visitors in attendance virtually had no comments or questions regarding the agenda. The meeting proceeded.

I. Minutes

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Susan Trussler announced that there are two sets of Board of Trustees meeting minutes for the month of September to be brought forth. Dr. Trussler then presented the September 15, 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 September 15, 2020 Board meeting minutes, as submitted, was made by Susan Hennemuth, and seconded by Aaron Nivert. At this time, all Trustees present voted in favor of approving the minutes as submitted, with one Trustee absent.

Dr. Susan Trussler presented the September 23, 2020 Special Board of Trustees meeting minutes and asked if there were any corrections or additions. With no corrections or additions, a **MOTION** to approve the September 23, 2020 Special Board of Trustees meeting minutes, as submitted, was made by Stephanie Westington, and seconded by John Ezbiansky. At this time, all Trustees present voted in favor of approving the minutes as submitted, with one Trustee absent.

II. President's Report

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Susan Trussler updated the group on the current situation regarding Lackawanna County's "substantial community spread" status according to the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Dr. Trussler stated that the meaning of "substantial" status indicates that there is a community-wide spread of COVID-19 in a specific area. The Pennsylvania Department of Education has been meeting with school officials within the county, via Zoom, to discuss the necessary steps that will need to be taken to ensure a downward curve of the spread. The PDE will monitor the number of reported cases in the county for a two-week period. If Lackawanna County remains in the status of "substantial", it is recommended by PDE that all schools in the county move toward an "all-remote" environment. Dr.

Trussler stated that we are currently in our first week of “substantial” status and an update from PDE and the health department will be given to school officials on Friday, October 23rd. In the event Lackawanna County remains in the “substantial” status, action plans to move our learning environment to an “all-remote” program would take effect Monday, November 2nd. This will be an ongoing situation and will be updated on a regular basis.

III. Finance/Facilities Committee

Stephanie Westington

Stephanie Westington reported that the Finance/Facilities Committee met on Wednesday, October 14th. The Committee went over the status of the Master Plan and Phase II plans, in addition where we stand with value engineering and the Prime Contractors agreements. The Finance/Facilities Committee also discussed facilities management. Joe Ross, Director of Facilities and Security had prepared a preliminary deferred maintenance report that he presented to the committee listing the priority projects. This was a very informative presentation. The Committee also went over the Financial report for September.

Stephanie Westington asked that Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager present the Financial report for September and deferred to Chuck’s presentation.

1. September 2020 Financial Report

Chuck Wallinger

Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager reported revenues are \$33,629.53 above budget for September 2020. The CARES ACT-ESSER Grant revenue was above budget by \$10,000; this revenue was not budgeted. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency COVID Grant revenue was above budget by \$30,000; this revenue was not budgeted. The LEA activity club and field trip revenue was below budget by \$3,000 due to COVID. The Tuition revenue was below budget by \$2,462.65 due to 2 less Special Education students compared to budget.

Expenses are \$7,114.61 above budget for September 2020. The Instructional costs were above budget by \$24,458.15 due to COVID reopening. The Debt Service was below budget by \$7,519.41 due to the delay in the \$4.5 million dollar loan from FNCB. The Net Operating Revenue for September 2020 of \$22,667.42 was above budget by \$46,514.92.

The School had 135 days of cash on hand at the end of September 2020, which places the school in a positive solvency. The FY 2020-2021 Unipay redirection and direct school district payments of \$538,263.41 were paid in September 2020. There is \$358,359.74 remaining on the FNCB loan at a fixed rate of 3.35%. The Federal Grant CARES ACT-ESSER was paid in September 2020.

Stephanie Westington thanked Chuck for his report. Stephanie Westington asked if there were any questions at this time regarding the Finance Report. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Financial Report through September 30, 2020 as reported and submitted was made by Sam Ceccacci and seconded by Dr. Fran Langan. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Financial Report as submitted, with one Trustee absent.

IV. Academic Committee

Dr. Fran Langan

Dr. Fran Langan reported that the Academic Committee has no pressing issues this month and did not meet this month. At this time, there is nothing to report from the Academic Committee.

V. Development Committee

Susan Hennemuth

Susan Hennemuth reported that the Development Committee met to discuss opportunities for pursuing a recently received five-year federal grant by the Pennsylvania Coalition for PA Charter Schools (PCPCS) for PA charter schools. At this time, there are not enough of details for the committee to make any recommendations.

The Development Committee has decided to postpone any formal fund-raising efforts until February, 2021. In the interim the Committee will be updating the data base, reviewing an existing brochure that was relevant to past fund-raising events to determine if still applicable, and writing a new letter for the February fundraising efforts.

Susan also reported that the Committee has discussed the Foundation and Dr. George has been in contact with Joshua Pollak, Esq., Solicitor regarding the next steps needed to establish a Founding Board for the Howard Gardner Charter School Foundation. Board members are being considered for the Foundation which will act as a separate fundraising entity in support of the Howard Gardner Multiple Intelligence Charter School. Further information to follow.

VI. Nominating Committee

Laurie Cadden

Laurie Cadden reported that the Nominating Committee was not able to meet because of changes in meeting schedules. Laurie reported that this year all Trustee members will remain the same; there have been several candidates recommended to the Nominating Committee whose applications will be reviewed when the Committee meets. The Committee will be prepared to present candidates to the Board of Trustee at such time when Trustee positions are made available for nomination.

VII. Personnel Committee

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Trussler stated that the Personnel Committee did not conduct any formal meetings in the past month because there was no urgent need to meet. Dr. Trussler presented the Monthly Personnel Report, which lists and explains two position changes. A recently hired Teacher Aide submitted her resignation after having obtained a full-time teaching position with another school district. At this time, the Aide position will not be replaced. Also, one Teacher Aide who was reassigned to a teaching position in the “all-remote” program has now moved back to her previous Teacher’s Aide position. No substantial change and no need to hire any additional staff.

At this time, Dr. Trussler asked the Board of Trustees to accept the Personnel Report for the timeframe of September 17th through October 20, 2020 as presented. A **MOTION** was made by Laurie Cadden and second by Dr. John Ruddy to accept the Personnel Report as presented and submitted. All Trustees presented voted in favor of accepting the Personnel Report, with one Trustee absent.

VIII. School Matters

1. Resolution

Dr. Marie George

Dr. George presented the Resolution to approve the terms of the Confidential Settlement Agreement and Release, and Third-Party Special Needs Education Trust Agreement in the matter of Student File No 143-20. The **MOTION** to accept the Resolution to approve the terms of the Confidential Settlement Agreement and Release was made by Dr. Clarence Lamanna and seconded by Sam Ceccacci. Dr. Trussler called for a vote, all Trustees presented voted in favor of accepting the Resolution to approve the terms of the Confidential Settlement Agreement and Release, and Third-Party Special Needs Educational Trust Agreement in the matter of Student File no 143-20, with one Trustee absent.

2. Principal's Report

TreeAnne McEnery

TreeAnne McEnery, Principal stated the 2020-2021 Reopening CoE Program guided by the School's Health and Safety Plan is going well.

- The hybrid schedule allows us to offer live instruction five days over a two-week period, which is more than regional schools are currently offering; the staff reflects that the alternating A/B cohort schedule is successful. Attendance for remote day learning has improved, and students are completing assignments with more fidelity.
- The administration made two subject-level staffing adjustments in the all-remote program in early October. Both science and math are now taught by the at-school pod-level teachers, which positively impacts student learning.
- Tutoring and Enrichment grant-funded programs for the first trimester began on October 13th. The School is offering a literacy enrichment program for grades 1-2 & 3-4 with our Title teachers Jeri McNulty and Terry Quinn. A music enrichment program is focusing on the ukulele for grades 3-6 with Steve Kurilla. The enrichment programs have 30 students in total attendance, tutoring for grades K-6 led by Nick DeConzo and Tara Fox, with 14 students registered for K-4, and 13 students grades 5 & 6.
- Annual Suicide Prevention Training offered by the LRJ Foundation was held on September 30th, as a full staff meeting. The LRJ Foundation is a Mental health and Wellness education organization proving engaging programs and services to schools and the community. The training was led by Maryellen Evers, who has been working with our staff for three years now.
- Benchmark Assessments are finalized. Due to this year's hybrid schedule and the overwhelming need schoolwide for Title support, Title services will be integrated class-wide as push-in support. Title teachers will support all students and address students who need intensive help to succeed in math or literacy. The following benchmark assessments have been administered for both at-school and all remote students:
 - ESGi is currently being administered to K-2
 - Acadience has been administered to K-6
 - CDT's have been administered to grades 3-8
- TreeAnne has met with the majority of instructional staff to review their 2020-2021 Teacher Effectiveness Supervision and Evaluation Plan and discuss either their formal observations schedule or differentiated supervision options. Formal observations will begin to be conducted on October 21st. TreeAnne's goal is to have all formal

observations completed by the end of the first trimester.

- Marie and TreeAnne hosted an open parent session for all-remote families on September 30th and at-school families on October 7th. A healthy turn out of about 24 families attended both sessions. Topics addressed ranged from:
 - Evolving a Hybrid Program (at-school Program / All-Remote)
 - Curriculum & Instruction
 - Special Schedule
 - Student Assessments & Benchmarks
 - Resources to Support Remote Education
 - Second Trimester
 - Enrichment and Tutoring
 - Schoology and Zoom Technologies
 - Student Pictures – October 15th and 16th

At this time, TreeAnne thanked everyone and asked if there were any questions, comments, or concerns. John Ezbiansky stated that TreeAnne had mentioned the percentage of submitted homework had gone up for students. John asked if TreeAnne had that percentage and whether there is anything in place to get the percentage up higher, or is there any indication why the percentage is not higher. TreeAnne replied by stating that some of the feedback that has been received indicates that students and parents need to know that remote days are a working school day, which is clarified by assignments that are scheduled through their teacher(s) and submitted by students. Teachers have been asked to be precise on the method of submission (examples: email, Google, etc.) but there are some inconsistencies. It is required that the student submit completed work for these remote days. At this time, TreeAnne did not have the data for the percentage of completed homework assignments but would look into it.

3. CEO Report

Dr. Marie George

Dr. George began her report by stating that the School is in its eighth week of the first trimester since Monday October 19th, and as TreeAnne had noted there now is a rhythm for the A/B hybrid schedule in place. We continue to support and engage our all-remote students, which are approximately 25% of our student population. As Halloween approaches a celebratory air exists enhanced by the positive reinforcements from student's morning announcements and weekly/monthly recognition of STAR student behavior. In addition Dr. George reported:

- Prime contractors, Mar-Paul, Joyce Electric and Scranton Electrical Cooling and Heating are now actively engaged in value engineering in collaboration with architects from Hemmler & Camayd, Engineers from GPI and Contract Manager, Sordoni Construction. The contractors agreed to extend their engagement as low bidders for an additional 45 days beyond the previous October 13th end date. School solicitor, Joshua Pollak, Esq. from McKenna Snyder LLC drafted contractor agreements based upon the recent board resolutions passed on September 23, 2020. Anticipation of the completion of the value engineering process is expected in late November or early December, which will push the project into 2021.
- COVID-Related and other Grants – the PEMA grant for \$64,000 was recently submitted, which requires considerable expenditure detail since this is a reimbursement grant. The timeframe for recovering expenses is from January 20th to September 14, 2020. Joe Ross, Director of Facilities and Security assisted in the detailed submission for the PEMA grant for a reimbursement amount of \$64,000.

- The annual submission of student health data, i.e. the SHARRS Report was submitted by the due date of September 30th. The Report is for the 2019-2020 school year and includes student health incidences, related financial expenses, and data regarding the school and its personnel providing student support services.
- Another CARES Act grant for which the School was allocated \$1,000 is the GEERS Grant (Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund), which is targeted for compensatory special education services and/or professional development to address special education services. The School's application is for professional development of staff in the area of social skills training..
- ESSER funds have begun to be received as reported in the monthly financial report.
- PCCD grant award monies will be received soon as well. These grants will provide considerable budget relief for the additional expenses required to operate the school within the current pandemic health environment.
- An Environmental Education grant possibility will be considered and is due December 1st. The required training was attended by the CEO and information determined that the School, if awarded a grant, would be a maximum of \$3,000.
- PCPCS New Leadership and Grant Award – a search has been underway to replace Ana Myers, former Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter School. The appointment of Lenny McAllister was recently announced. Dr. George read a brief description of his accolades and intentions from a press release. Another recent announcement from PCPCS is their award from the US DoE for a \$30 million grant for PA charter schools for the 2020-2025 timeframe. The first round of sub-grants will be awarded in 2021. The HGMICS Development Committee will be discussing this potential funding opportunities, along with other grant/foundation opportunities. More information will be forthcoming on the PCPCS Award.
- Friendship House Partnership for Behavioral Support Therapist – Dr. George announced an affiliation agreement/partnership with Friendship House is being negotiated to have a behavioral therapist provide part-time social skills/executive functioning services for our students beginning November 2020. Funding for this service is supported through the Title IV grant.
- PDE Guidance on Community COVID Data – Dr. George reported that previously PDE's focus was on re-opening schools for the 2020-2021 school year. Now the attention has turned to monitoring and adjusting, if needed, the type of instructional model (hybrid at-school and/or all-remote). To date, HGMICS has had no incidence of positive COVID cases among staff or students. At this time, it is likely that Lackawanna County may move from the moderate to substantial category due to a recent spike in COVID cases. Monitoring of COVID cases take place on a weekly basis and are tracked by both PDE and the Health department. Weekly update reports are given to school districts through virtual meetings by county. PDE recommends but does not require that when a county has a "substantial community transmission" status for a two-week period, the school district(s) should consider an all-remote educational plan. PDE guidance is expected to be released on Monday, October 19th while re-stating that decisions to change the instructional model is a local decision. We are prepared to move into an all-remote program on Monday, November 2nd based upon the substantial category but will monitor the situation closely to determine when students can safely return to school. TreeAnne will meet with all instructional staff tomorrow to begin preparation for the possibility to move to all-remote. As indicated in our CoE and Health and Safety Plan, all-remote students' families will be contacted to determine if they

desire to have their student(s) attend the at-school program at the start of Trimester II, which starts November 30th.

John Ezbiansky asked Dr. George if this is a requirement or a recommendation from PDE to move from a hybrid program to an all remote program because he has heard conflicting information. Dr. George responded by stating that the PDE always gives recommendations because every school district and/or charter schools are governed by their boards; other than the Governor mandating a closure. It was asked in the virtual meeting on Monday, since we are a small school with no cases of COVID-19 could we still adhere to our hybrid program. A representative of the Health Department spoke up and said that was not recommended at all if the county was in the “substantial” status because of the community spread can immediately enter into an environment and they do not recommend schools to be open in a “substantial” status. It was the case in September that the majority of the cases were in colleges; however this is not the case now, the virus is prevalent in people 25-45. Recent outbreaks have been in work places. It will almost always be a recommendation from PDE so as to not interfere with the governing responsibility of the Board of Trustees who are ultimately accountable for the school.

VIII. New Business

Dr. Susan Trussler.

At this time, Dr. Trussler asked if there was anyone else in the audience who wished to voice any additional concerns. John Ezbiansky reported that there had been a comment made in the chat box, it was from Deanna Leo, Dunmore School District. Deanna’s comment was that Nick DeConzo was doing a fabulous job with her sons’ education. John thanked Deanna on behalf of TreeAnne and Marie and added it was nice to hear a comment like that. Everyone agreed. Dr. Trussler once again asked if there was an additional new business or audience comments. Without hearing any Dr. Trussler asked for a motion to adjourn.

Adjournment

At 7:49 PM, no further items of business or comments were raised. A **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Dr. Fran Langan. Adjournment was accepted by all Board of Trustees present, with one Trustee absent.

The next virtual HGMICS Public Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, November 17, 2020 at 7:00 PM.**