

Howard Gardner MI Charter School Public Board Meeting

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

The Howard Gardner MI Charter School (HGMICS) held a Public Board of Trustees virtual meeting via Zoom on Tuesday, February 16, 2021. 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 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, Laila Kane, Stephanie Westington, Laurie Cadden, Sam Ceccacci, Susan Hennemuth, Dr. Clarence Lamanna, Aaron Nivert, Dr. Fran Langan, and Dr. John Ruddy (who left the meeting early.)

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

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

I. Minutes

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Susan Trussler presented the January 19, 2021 Board of Trustees meeting minutes and asked if there were any corrections or additions. With no corrections or additions, a **MOTION** to approve the January 19, 2021 Board meeting minutes, as submitted, was made by Dr. John Ruddy, and seconded by Laila Kane. At this time, 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 began her report by thanking all the staff for their committed work. Dr. Trussler acknowledged the work of the Board Committees who are meeting on a monthly basis and have established a meeting schedule for the balance of the school year. She announced that the construction project is progressing, and further updates will be provided in the CEO's report.

III. Finance/Facilities Committee

Stephanie Westington

Stephanie Westington reported that the Finance/Facilities Committee last met on February 9, 2021 and was introduced to Mike Gavigan, CPA who is preparing the monthly Financial Report, in Chuck's absence. The Committee reviewed the budget development calendar for Fiscal Year 2021-2022. Facility updates were provided as well as updates on the financing and timetable for the construction project.

1. January 2021 Financial Report

In the absence of Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager, Stephanie Westington reported revenues are \$10,740 over budget for January 2021. The increase is directly related to tuition which reflects this year's increase in student population. Expenses are \$19,479 above budget for January 2021. The instructional costs are \$43,525 above budget primarily due to COVID-19 salary and benefit costs due to remote instruction. The cafeteria costs are below budget by \$4,187 due to remote learning educational days. The Net Operating Revenue for January 2021 of \$8,698 was below budget by \$8,739.

The School had \$1,018,412 in cash at the end of January 2021. This is \$6,608 less than December 2020. This represents 134 days cash on hand, which places the School in a positive solvency position. There is \$333,050 remaining on the FNCB loan at a fixed rate of 3.35%.

Stephanie Westington asked if there were any questions at this time regarding the Financial Report. Laila Kane asked for clarification about the increase in instructional costs which included payment to the NEIU for student therapy services. Dr. George explained these periodic payments to the NEIU are invoiced periodically throughout the year and not on a monthly basis. With no further discussion, the **MOTION** to approve the Financial Report through January 31, 2021 as reported and submitted was made by Susan Hennemuth and seconded by Dr. Fran Langan. All Trustees present voted in favor of approving the Financial Report as submitted, with one Trustee, who had departed early from the meeting due to previous engagement, absent.

IV. Academic Committee

Dr. Fran Langan

Dr. Fran Langan reported that the Academic Committee met on Tuesday, February 2nd. The two major topics of discussion were the status of the Mandarin Chinese language for the 2021-2022 academic school year and Title I opportunities.

Dr Langan stated that the School will take a hiatus for another year in offering the Mandarin Chinese language. The decision was based on not being able to determine if it would be possible to engage a teacher given the current travel restrictions that are in place and uncertainty of a partner to support the housing and health insurance costs. In deciding to take a hiatus, a task force will be established to examine best practices for second languages and mechanisms for integration of languages into the curriculum. The task force will also consider student preferences, specific interventions, as well as the frequency of instruction that has the greatest impact on student learning.

The second topic for discussion was the Title I, Schoolwide opportunities for the 2021-2022 school year. Currently, only eligible students that qualify for Title I are receiving services, however the need is greater than what can be provided in the current Targeted Title I program. Moving to a Title I Schoolwide program will allow all students to receive support in basic subject areas as well as tailored areas designated by the School.

V. Development Committee

Susan Hennemuth

Susan Hennemuth reported the Development Committee will meet on Tuesday, February 23, 2021. The Development Committee has scheduled a series of monthly meeting from now until June 2021. Susan acknowledged the approval of the Howard Gardner MI Charter School Foundation Board members at last month's meeting. The Development Committee will discuss at the February meeting grant policies and guidelines. Once the grant policies and guidelines are developed, they will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval, what grant opportunities might exist to support aspects of the construction project, e.g., the security system and plans for the annual fund.

VI. Nominating Committee

Laurie Cadden

Laurie Cadden reported that the Nominating Committee met on Wednesday, February 10th. The main topic of discussion was the need to provide potential board candidates in light of the departure of Dr. Trussler and Dr. Langan as they approach the end of their term on June 30, 2021. The Nominating Committee is in the process of forming a list of possible candidates for the vacant positions; however, the task to replace Dr. Trussler and Dr. Langan are "big shoes" to fill.

The Nominating Committee has drafted an updated rotation schedule for the Board of Trustees and will discuss and move forward following input from the School Solicitor, who is scheduled to attend the Committee's next meeting.

The Nominating Committee has set-up a schedule over the next several months for meeting dates. This will allow the Committee to continue working on viable nominating tasks and to continue to ensure proper candidates are selected to fill open positions on the Board of Trustees.

VII. Personnel Committee

Dr. Susan Trussler

Dr. Trussler reported the Personnel Committee met on Tuesday, February 2nd. Several items of importance had been discussed. One item that came from the Academic Committee's discussion was the Schoolwide approach to Title I.

The main focus of the meeting was regarding benefits for faculty and staff. The Committee felt that enhancements for the tuition reimbursement or scholarship for faculty and staff to take college courses needs to be addressed. At this time, there has not be a resolution, but a lot of ideas are being considered. Also, the cost of family coverage of health care for employees needs to be addressed. Currently health care coverage for families of employees is substantially more expensive compared to individual coverage. A meeting with the School's benefit broker is scheduled in March 2021, to discuss various options for family member coverage.

Dr. Trussler added that the 2021-2022 Budget Cycle is underway. Preliminary discussions regarding salaries and budgeting for the up-coming year are being compiled. There has been nothing voted upon and there are no major changes to personnel at this time. The Personnel Committee has also set a monthly schedule to meet.

VIII. School Matters

1. Principal's Report

TreeAnne McEnery

TreeAnne McEnery, Principal reported the following:

- Title I Schoolwide Program – TreeAnne stated that the Title I Schoolwide Program was highlighted in the Academic Committee report. TreeAnne stated that the administration received support from the Academic Committee to submit an Intent to Apply for Title I Schoolwide. Title I Schoolwide is a comprehensive reform strategy designed to upgrade an educational program. Offering Schoolwide Title services will allow the School to integrate enrichment and intervention services across all disciplines for all students, not only to operate with a targeted program where only certain children are eligible for assistance. This is an innovative opportunity for the School to continue to support its mission by teaching the whole student population.
- Schoolwide Instructional Schedule Adjustment – a consistent reflection and request from the ELA, Math, and Science teachers is the need for additional time to deepen their curriculum/lessons. TreeAnne is currently looking at the schoolwide schedule aiming to identify how to lengthen their class periods for the 2021-2022 school year.
- Black History Month – the School has been celebrating and honoring Black History Month schoolwide for the first time at HGMICS. Morning announcements include a biography describing the accomplishments of an African American. The Newsletter after school enrichment program is researching and designing a Newsletter on Black History Month, and cultures classes are engaged in research. This experience has been inspiring for both the staff and the students. TreeAnne was happy to announce this tradition will continue.
- Acadience Assessment Schedule – The second Acadience benchmark assessment is currently underway. TreeAnne will report on the results at next month's Board meeting, however growth is evident for now. There are approximately 60 students that qualified for Title I services that were well-below the benchmark. Both TreeAnne and Jeri McNulty, Special Education teacher look forward to seeing how many students have progressed.
- Teacher Effectiveness – whether teachers are assigned to formal observation or differentiated supervision, they are expected to identify year-long goals and develop an action plan. There is a Mid-Year Self-Reflection for teachers to complete. TreeAnne was happy to report that the teachers have engaged in self-reflection: articulating progress and results and considering whether modifications are necessary. TreeAnne stated as Principal, receiving the teachers' self-reflection has been so motivating.
- Curriculum and Professional Development Committee – the three sub-committees of the Curriculum and PD Committees are formed and moving forward. Each Committee identified a chair, a meeting timeline, and have begun to investigate their three topics: Written K-2 Curriculum, Competency-based Learning, and the Professional Development Plan that will form from the CPC. Each Committee is active and engaged and are moving forward with their goals. TreeAnne thanked them for all their hard work.

TreeAnne asked if there were any questions. With none being heard, the meeting proceeded.

2. CEO Report

Dr. Marie George

Dr. George began her report by announcing it was great to have teachers and students back in the building as they return to in-person learning. While this month has been challenging with response to snow and bad weather days, the Continuity of Education plan allows us to seamlessly return to all-remote learning when needed. Dr. George reported on the following topics:

- **Construction Project Update** – Bi-weekly meetings are held to keep abreast of the construction plans, contracts, and potential timeline. Final building plans will be received this week and then forwarded to FNCB, our lender for the \$4.5 million loan. The School received good news from FNCB that the loan's interest rate is now reduced from 3.63% to 2.99%, which results in considerable savings over the life of the loan. Our contractors indicated a nine-month construction timeframe with possible groundbreaking in April 2021. The interplay of this tentative timeline with the School calendar is currently under discussion. A revised 2021-2022 School Calendar will be presented to the Board of Trustees for approval at a later date.
- **Update on Grant Funds** – last month Dr. George announced that the school would be the recipient of the recent CARES Federal Relief Act with an anticipated award of \$379,544. This week the School was notified that we are once again eligible for another federal Small Rural School Achievement Award in the amount of \$20,000. This would be the third year receiving this grant with the previous two awards in the amounts of \$13,000 in 19-20 and \$15,000 in 20-21.
- **School's Response to the Pandemic** – we are anxiously awaiting information about the availability of vaccinations for the staff. The School has registered with Geisinger and other local providers. Staff in the 1A category are independently pursuing providers to obtain their vaccinations and the school is reaching out to nearby providers as well.
- **CDC Updated Guidelines** – both state and federal guidance are recommending schools re-open, especially for the elementary students. HGMICS has, from the start of the school year, followed this path providing in-person learning through a hybrid model and adherence to our health and safety plan. In order for the School to consider moving from the hybrid model to all students attending school each day, the allowable social distancing would need to be reduced to 3 feet instead of the 6 ft currently required. Dr. George announced that there has not been any community spread within the school. Some area school districts are considering have all students return for five days each week.
- **Comprehensive Plan** – the Comprehensive Planning Committee has 14-members comprised of stakeholders who represent faculty, staff, parents, trustees, and the local community. The Committee is developing a 3-year plan for 2021-2024 that must be approved by the Board and then submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE). Requirements include a needs assessment, goal setting, action steps and related plans for professional development and communication. The Committee's work is on track to have a draft plan prepared for fall 2021 with time for public review and comment and Board approval prior to its required submission on November 30, 2021.
- **Re-Enrollment and New Enrollment** – re-enrollment for current students, including siblings was recently completed that allows the School to know the number of seats available for each grade. New enrollment applications are being submitted until February 26th. An Open House was held on January 28th for interested new families and was extremely well attended. The School provided a program that presented an administrative overview of the School, the enrollment process, academic and students

support services. Presentations from faculty and two students were well received. The Public Lottery will be held virtually on Tuesday, March 9th at 10 AM.

- Parent Information Sessions – the first of three Parent Information Sessions entitled “Student Mental Health During a Global Pandemic” will be held on February 25th at 6 PM virtually. The first session of the Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning series will be conducted by Jade Volchoff, School Counselor, Colleen Coolbaugh, School Psychologist, and Joanna Lopez, Friendship House behavioral therapist. Families are already signing up to attend.
- Governor Wolf’s Budget for 2021-2022 – the recently announced state budget includes funding cuts for charter schools in an effort to reform Charter School law. Two specific areas cited are special education funding which would affect our special education allocation to some degree, with an estimated savings of \$99 million. The second area is a flat tuition rate for cyber charter schools with an estimate saving of \$130 million, which would not affect our school. It is a controversial budget that includes tax increases and considerable push-back, not only from charter schools, is occurring.
- Stock Market Challenge – Dr. George announced that Dr. John Ruddy will be making a presentation on Thursday, February 18th to the Upper class on the “Stock Market Challenge”. The Upper-class students led by Barbara Ainey, will once again be participating in the Stock Market Challenge. Last year they were finalists in terms of making the most money they invested in the Challenge.
- Update – Dr. George announced that Chuck Wallinger, Business Manager, is doing well following his recent surgery. Chuck was discharged from the hospital last Thursday and is anxious to get back to work.

Dr. Susan Trussler stated that this was good news.

VIII. New Business

Dr. Susan Trussler.

At this time, with no new business from the Trustees, Dr. Trussler asked if there was anyone in the audience who wished to voice any additional concerns. Without hearing any Dr. Trussler called for a motion to adjourn.

Adjournment

At 7:37 PM, no further items of business or comments were raised. A **MOTION** to adjourn was made by Laurie Cadden. Adjournment was accepted by ten of the Board of Trustees present.

The next HGMICS Public Board meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 7:00 PM.**