

Meeting Minutes for the Board of Directors
The Experiential School of Greensboro
Tuesday, October 12th, 2021
5:30pm
Virtual/Zoom

Meeting ID: 856 6568 3740
Passcode: 222690

Present: Leila Villaverde, Jay Hawkins, Greg Bush, Travis Laughlin, Roy Carter, Joanna Lower, Fred Adams

Guests: Beth Meyer, Samantha Mcleod, Amanda Davee Lomax, Kristen Low, Kirsten Kevorkian, Janina Austin, Kerri Clavette, Caroline Kernahan, Rachel Morton, Florence J., Robyn Mykytyn, Sari

Leila Villaverde called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Approval of Agenda

Leila Villaverde called for a motion to approve the agenda. Jay Hawkins motioned to approve the agenda, Greg Bush seconded, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously.

Approval of September Board Meeting Minutes

Leila Villaverde motioned to approve the September board minutes. Travis Laughlin motioned to approve the minutes from September, Jay Hawkins seconded, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously.

Public Comment: K. Kevorkian, A. Davee Lomax

Leila Villaverde transitioned to public comment indicating that Kristen Kevorkian and Amanda Davee Lomax requested to speak. She explained that each person had three minutes to comment.

Kristen Kevorkian commented as follows:

Dear TSEG board members, staff, and families: As a parent and a teacher, I am deeply concerned with the level of turnover in both staff and students in the past few months. Since the 21/22 year began, there have been many families who have left the school. Every family that I have talked to has said that they love the TSEG philosophy and that the teachers are amazing. Why would a family leave if the school pedagogy and the mission align perfectly with what they believe? When talking with them, their reasons never include COVID or being back in person, as has been reported.

Alarming, families are pulling their children because of staff turnover and lack of support for the staff; lack of communication from the Board and the administration; and not allowing parents to be involved- resulting in the absence of community. In fact, when families show concern about the school, they are given a withdrawal form from administration, instead of a solution, as if their family and their student are not an important part of the TSEG community.

The school and Board need to do better. All of these concerns can be improved by the Board, but so far there has not been concrete evidence that these issues are being addressed. The Board needs to show families that their concerns matter. They can do that through more frequent and responsive communication; more transparency within the Board and its decisions; and allowing parent-elected representation on the Board.

Of equally problematic concern is staff turnover. In Board and school meetings, COVID and family issues have been blamed for the number of staff leaving. Yet neither of these causes would lead to teachers seeking employment elsewhere and continuing to work in education. Since the end of the summer, there have been many teachers who have left in the ⅔ House. We have lost multiple lead teachers, as well as substitutes within the House. In the Kindergarten House, 2 assistant teachers left over the summer and we lost a lead teacher after school started. We have lost multiple people in the EC department. We have also lost multiple teachers before they even began at TESH. This is in addition to teachers who left last year. The majority of these teachers were experienced. Many of them have worked for years in education. Like the families who left, they believed in the philosophy at TESH. But they also decided that despite their love of the students, the families, and the mission, TESH is not a positive or supportive place. It is crucial that the Board provide support to our staff. This includes listening to the teachers when they tell you their needs, such as returning to having two assistants in kindergarten; asking for volunteers to assist during the day; or giving them solutions for behaviors in the classroom. The teachers are the reason our school is still surviving and they deserve more of a voice with regards to school structuring decisions.

I urge the Board to consider what is causing families and staff to leave at this rate. It is not COVID. The pandemic may have made everything more difficult, but it is not causing the exodus that we are seeing at our school. If things continue as they have been, the school's reputation will continue to decrease within the Greensboro community, making it harder to find quality staff. There are many people who love this school and want to see it succeed. But advancement can only happen if the Board and administration allow us to work together to improve TESH by permitting collaboration and input with parents, students, and staff.

Leila Villaverde thanked Kristen Kovorkian and transitioned to Amanda Davee Lomax.

Amanda Davee Lomax commented as follows:

When we arrived at this school 2018, TESH leadership was outspoken about the importance of the whole community in creating a child centered school. However, over the last four years, it feels as if our school community has gone from a place where all voices were heard and considered to a top down system where concerned parties are performatively allowed to speak into the void for 3 minutes never to have their concerns noted or addressed-in fact, your bylaws prohibit it-and so many families would rather work together to find their own solutions through Facebook than bring them forward to the people with the power.

I loathe confrontation or making people uncomfortable, but I'm concerned about this school and the flood of teachers and students leaving it. We encourage our children to use their voices to speak truth to power in hopes of changing the world we live in and encouraging leaders to shift the balance of power-that's why they go to school here. So I'm leaning into my discomfort today in hopes that you all might help to weave our community back together like many of your brilliant educators have.

During the last remote school year, Jessica Edwards showed up at every single playground date so her students could experience community with her. She also found a way to integrate Ninjago, Minecraft, and Lego into writing and math to help my child feel connected while he sat alone in front of a computer screen-and she did the same thing for every other student using their special interests.

In TESH's genesis year, Hayley Blauert documented all her kindergarteners' experiences and stayed up into all hours of the night to make an individual scrap book for each one of them so every family could enjoy their children's milestones with them. Jennifer Smith found a way to coach running online and has given several of her weekends so that her students could find ways to extend their community beyond

the digital classroom. And a few weeks ago, Beth Meyer gracefully found a way to make the dark space of a lock down drill less scary by shining a light on the ceiling, so that a child didn't realize the magnitude of what they were practicing, or the sacrifice Mrs. Meyer was willing to make to protect them if that practice ever became reality.

Board members, I'm speaking tonight to ask you to step into this community. From April to August of 2021, only 23% of your meetings were open. Our charter states that The Board will strive at all times to be an active and effective representation of the school's key stakeholders. To do this, there will be at least two parent representatives serving on the board at all times. I know I don't only speak for myself when I say, we don't really know you. I know some of our children are in school together, but I don't see you at Collaborative meetings, parking lot play dates, or talking to students and their families about their school experiences. As you make your future plans, I encourage you to consider organically seeking parent representatives-even if they don't have a PhD in education and while certain conversations are not for an open context, I challenge you to consider having difficult conversations where everyone can hear them. Challenge one another, ask for more information when reports are given, survey the students, families, and teachers with open ended questions to see how they think things are going, and show our children that healthy conflict can move us into places we didn't know were possible.

Leila Villaverde thanked Amanda Davee Lomax and transitioned to Samantha McLeod, presenting on behalf of the Community Collaborative

Presentation by Community Collaborative

Samantha McLeod shared that she was excited to speak with the board and was the communication liaison of the community collaborative, on the communications team. There are 5 wonderful teams including fundraising, social justice, staff appreciation, outdoor beautification, and communication. She noted that the collaborative had worked with Dr. Tiffanie Lewis-Durham and Dr. Silvia Bettez and that this year's focus was on family engagement and support of staff. Since TESS was remote last year, there is a sense of community missing, so they were working to re-establish that with the other goal supporting staff. Samantha McLeod shared that they started the year with Mrs. Shaw and Mrs. Smith with the implementation of the TESS Amazing Race which was a great success. There were new and veteran families, and it was a great way to see them explore downtown. It was a hot day but, a nice opportunity to see each other. Also, families saw where their children will get to go throughout the year. The collaborative is also working with Dr. Lewis-Durham in the creation of a survey to see what parents want from the group, for example the kind of family activities they would like to see. The collaborative is also planning to meet with Mrs. Shaw to talk about a fundraiser to support staff needs, outdoor materials/outdoor learning. They are working with Mrs. Shaw on creating a family directory and establishing room or house parents. Once it is safe, they are hoping to be able to volunteer to support staff in the building and host in person whole collaborative meetings. Samantha McLeod shared this Friday that the collaborative is treating staff with breakfast from Savor the Moment and thanked parents that had donated to make that possible. She shared that all the families love the teachers.

Leila Villaverde thanked Samantha for providing the update and opened for questions. Joanna Lower asked about contributing to the staff breakfast, that she had not seen anything about that. Samantha McLeod indicated that it had come about organically and was posted within an unofficial private facebook group. Joanna Lower noted that all TESS families could be a part of this if we shared with the whole TESS community in the Friday school newsletter and on the official school facebook page. She indicated if we received excess funds those could be carried over to other breakfasts or teacher appreciation efforts.

Samantha McLeod indicated that she would share the information with Mrs. Shaw to be shared out to include the whole TESSG community.

Joanna Lower asked about the timeline for the fundraiser mentioned, the reason being TESSG has their annual giving campaign in November aligned with Giving Tuesday, the global initiative. She indicated we would want to be sure the timeline supported both initiatives. Samantha McLeod noted that the Coordinating Committee was meeting next Tuesday and they could discuss with Mrs. Shaw then to coordinate timelines.

Leila Villaverde asked about participation at the Amazing Race. Samantha McLeod indicated that it was good. She also noted that anytime there is an ask for things is when there is the most participation. When talking with K families, getting them connected with the newsletter is a first step. There is not a lot of people on the advisory or coordinating committee of the community collaborative. Leila Villaverde indicated that information may be included in every Friday newsletter, as well as House level newsletters in the case families are more apt to read one over another. Leila Villaverde also shared that the district schools are being mindful about not having volunteers in the building due to Covid and that we are aligned with this. Leila Villaverde thanked Samantha McLeod for her efforts and leadership with the Community Collaborative.

Report from Executive Director

Tracy Shaw that the current enrollment is 318. She noted that a student moved to California and another chose to home school so we are down two students from last month. Tracy Shaw noted that teachers have a Professional Development word key on Friday with Peaceful Schools NC focused on restorative practices.

Tracy Shaw shared that most students have completed MAP testing. K-2 is not complete due to tech issues but, those are being resolved, results are pending for 5/6 House because two students still need to be assessed, and 7/8 still needs to complete the reading test. Results that are available at this time indicated that the majority are performing very well in reading. This is contrary to the BOG results but, Tracy Shaw indicated she believes the MAP assessment to be better evaluation. Tracy Shaw indicated that the 4th grade math scores were below the median, equivalent to 3rd grade EOG scores and we are aware math is an area to work on. Teachers will be able to utilize the MAP data to bridge growth from the last 1.5 years.

Attendance for the month is 90.5% and there were 2 suspensions.

Social Emotional Learning lessons are beginning with Ms. Oliver and Mrs. Brown. Mrs. Oliver teaching about bullying. Lunch bunch groups have also begun to support students.

Mrs. Shaw noted that it has been a trying month for all the students and staff. She shared that there have been a significant number of resignations, teachers needing leave due to personal health or family health, subs not showing up, COVID related issues, phones not working, internet not working, copiers down, etc. Tracy Shaw also noted that in general (not just TESSG) teachers are expected to be counselors, behavior specialists, social workers, health professionals and on top of this educate students. The teachers are working very hard to maintain the community, mission and philosophy of the school. It is very challenging, but we are working together to ensure we stay united and stay strong for our students. Tracy Shaw emphasized that our teachers are working extremely hard, and we too would like to have parents in building. The reason we are currently not allowing parents in the building is because of Covid, because the contact tracing is difficult, and more people makes it harder. We are eagerly waiting

for numbers to drop and children to be vaccinated to protect students and protect our families. Tracy Shaw also thanked the Board for allowing for the remote day and helping to locate replacements. Leila Villaverde thanked Tracy Shaw for her report.

Standing Committee Reports

- Curriculum Committee report – no report; Leila Villaverde noted that they were planning to gather with the Curriculum Facilitator Team to see how plans were progressing.

- Finance Committee report – no report; Leila Villaverde noted that there was a Finance Committee meeting this evening to discuss the annual Giving Campaign.

She also noted that there will still not a state budget and we are waiting on the state to see if schools will be held harmless for ADM. Local schools are not paying their invoices because everyone is waiting on the state budget. We have gotten grants and we continue to focus on fundraising. Hopefully a state budget will be passed soon.

- Grievance Committee report – no report

New Business

1. Monthly mask mandate vote

Leila Villaverde indicated that we must vote monthly on the school mask mandate and called for a motion to require masks at TESG. Joanna Lower motioned for requiring masks at TESG, Roy Carter seconded, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously.

Leila Villaverde explained that the next motion would take us into closed session. She thanked parents, commenters, and the community collaborative for sharing this evening. She indicated that once we were entered closed sessions individuals would need to either leave or go into a waiting room until we came out of closed session.

2. Closed Session

Leila Villaverde called for a motion to go into closed session to consider the qualifications, competence, performance, or condition of appointment of personnel in accordance with N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(6). Roy Carter motioned to go into closed session for the reasons stated, Travis Laughlin seconded, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously. We entered closed session at 6:07 p.m. and exited closed session at 6:59 p.m.

Announcements

Fred Adams was congratulated for being appointed as Forsyth District Court Judge.

Leila Villaverde indicated she would follow up with Tracy Shaw and Samantha McLeod about all TESG communication being shared out with the entire school community. She also noted that she hoped to be able to send us an updated budget soon once the state budget is passed.

Leila Villaverde called for a motion to adjourn. Roy Carter motioned to adjourn the meeting, Fred Adams seconded, all were in favor, and the motion carried unanimously. Leila Villaverde adjourned the meeting at 7:00 p.m.