

The Autism Model School
Board Meeting Minutes
December 17, 2019
Location: Skylight Financial Group
Highland Meadows Room
7150 W. Central Avenue, Ste. 100
Toledo, OH 43617
5:30 PM

Attending: Isaac Demarest (late arrival), Toni Gerber, Mark Greenblatt, Lisa Marsalek, Bruce Weinberg, Linell Weinberg

Excused: Ed Cancio, Raj Parikh, James Rothschild

Also Attending: Mary Walters, Director; Catherine Moore, Administrator 2 /Recorder of the Minutes; Joel Vidovic, Behavior Management Director; Mary Cornell, Assistant Behavior Management Director; Luke Reed, Developmental Director; Amy Trautwein, Job Training Coordinator; Jessica Bair, Sponsor Representative - ESC Lake Erie West

Meeting began at 5:31 PM

I. Welcome and Public Comments

- Vidovic commented on the board meeting location, suggesting a larger room for future meetings; the board members agreed.

II. Minutes

- From the November, 2019 board meeting. Discussion and approval.

Motion to approve the November 19, 2019 minutes as written:

1. Linell Weinberg

2. Lisa Marsalek

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

III. Standing Reports

- a. Financial Report

- i. November, 2019 Financials—budget & variance reports.
 - Report, discussion, and motion can be found in § IV_{ii}, Old Business, below.

Motion to approve the November, 2019 Financials:

1. Lisa Marsalek

2. Toni Gerber

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

b. Sponsor Representative Report

- i. Bair updated the board regarding the ESC newsletter which included a revision to the technical assistance policy and the details of a board member training session in Cincinnati.
- ii. There were no red flags found during the monthly financial review.
- iii. Bair conducted the site visit on Thursday, December 12th. She intended to conduct parent interviews at that time, however, only one parent showed up of the five that were scheduled. The interviews will be rescheduled because she needs at least three interviews for her review. She was able to conduct the special education review as planned.

c. Policies and Procedures

- i. Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying policy
 - The board reviewed the Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying policy.

Motion to approve the policy, “Anti-Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying”:

1. Linell Weinberg

2. Mark Greenblatt

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

- ii. Suspension & Expulsion of Students policy
 - The board reviewed the Suspension & Expulsion of Students policy.

- B. Weinberg noted that the policy uses two different terms for Walters' position. Walters is both the Director and Superintendent; for our purposes the terms are used interchangeably.

Motion to approve the policy, "Suspension & Expulsion of Students":

1. Linell Weinberg

2. Toni Gerber

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

d. Director's Report

- i. The Board reviewed and discussed the November, 2019 New Hires and Resignations.

Motion to approve the November, 2019 hires and resignations:

1. Lisa Marsalek

2. Mark Greenblatt

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

- ii. Critical Problem: Hiring para-professional aides.
 - B. Weinberg met with Walters and Jeana Kirkendall and the hiring process issues have been addressed. The issue is now finding, hiring, and retaining staff.
 - Walters described the school's present situation to the board saying, "I cannot tell you how difficult it is to staff our classrooms."
 - Due to unfilled open positions and staff absences, we are missing 23-26% of the staff on any given day.
 - We have been unable to hire additional staff and fill our open positions because the wage does not attract a lot of people in today's employment market, and, if we find the right person, they still have to come up with \$65-120 before they walk in the door.
 - The candidates Walters interviewed in November were willing to work but unable to pay the upfront costs. Two of the candidates Walters interviewed this month were shocked by the starting wage.

- Staff retention is also an issue as people find better wages elsewhere. One such employee said that if she could make just \$2.00 more per hour she would have stayed.
- B. Weinberg stated that the upfront costs would be easy to address if we were willing to take the risk.
- L. Weinberg mentioned the thought of turning open positions into internships or filling them with parent volunteers.
 - Bair has a contact in BG that could bus college students in related fields to help out once a week; Greenblatt suggested covering lunches.
 - Walters said using volunteers has not been successful in the past, but that she would certainly be willing to try again.
- The board discussed the rising competition from “autism scholarship” program schools, like Hope Bridge Academy, who can offer more money to employees without paying the benefits, retirement, etc.
- Vidovic implored the board to take a look at the excessive absenteeism rate. Is there a way to reorganize paid and unpaid time off to curb absenteeism?
- B. Weinberg reined in the discussion of staffing by listing the three areas of focus: the upfront costs to new hires, the starting wage, and absenteeism.
- B. Weinberg addressed the upfront costs. Virtually everyone who pays for the background check passes it; we do not assume a lot of risk and we reimburse after the fact anyway. How can we cover that cost for new hires? Walters told the board that the ESC will bill us to fingerprint current employees; they should be able to bill us for new hires as well. Bair will look into it.

Motion for AMS to cover the cost of the required background check for employees accepting new para professional aide positions at AMS:

- 1. Mark Greenblatt**
- 2. Isaac Demarest**

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

- B. Weinberg asked Walters if the applicants pay for the test or if the school simply holds the money. Marsalek said, “This is an easy barrier.”

Motion for AMS to cover the cost of the required paraprofessional aide test for applicants who are offered the para professional aide position and who do not possess the course equivalent of an associate’s degree:

1. Lisa Marsalek

2. Toni Gerber

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, L. Weinberg

- B. Weinberg told the board, “We ought to do the math,” at which point Demarest arrived and did the math.
 - It would cost approximately \$90K out of the budget for wages by giving everyone an additional \$1.00 (plus an additional 14% for benefits). It would be half a million dollars to give everyone a five dollar per hour raise.
 - Demarest added that we are not balancing the budget now, even though we are not failing, as Dave Massa pointed out. There have been a half million dollars in increased costs with health care and only \$40K in salary raises. Even if 1000 people each donated \$100, we would still raise less than the cost of a \$1 pay increase.
- Walters returned to the idea of shutting down and reopening as an autism scholarship school as a potential idea among many that should be explored.
 - There would be no federal funding, but the overhead of paying into SERS and other required expenditures would be greatly reduced.
 - B. Weinberg wanted to know how many of our current students would be able to make the switch to a scholarship. Walters replied that it would not be all of the current students.

- Greenblatt asked what might happen if we did not expand the school as has been discussed in the past, but compressed it. If we were a smaller school with a smaller staff, could we be more efficient? Walters said that we would have to revise our sponsor contract and revisit our mission as a school. Walters said we might want to consider reducing the number of grades we serve and use a separate company to cover the rest using the autism scholarship.
- B. Weinberg refocused the discussion by stating that the board still needed to address wages and absenteeism. He then asked if we need a committee and if there was interest from the other board members in forming such a committee.
 - Demarest, Vidovic, Cornell, and Greenblatt agreed to work on the immediate and acute issue of paraprofessional pay via an ad hoc committee.
 - Walters, L. Weinberg, Gerber, and Marsalek agreed to form an ad hoc committee to evaluate the long-term viability of the school, with the addition of a lawyer, potentially Rothschild.
 - B. Weinberg will work with Kirkendall, Moore, and Vidovic to address absenteeism in an ad hoc committee.
 - The board discussed setting a time table for these ad hoc committees. The committees will meet in early January and report their structure and timelines to the full board during the January, 2020 board meeting.

Motion to establish three separate ad-hoc committees to address: 1. paraprofessional wages, 2. the long-term viability of the school, and 3. staff absenteeism:

1. Mark Greenblatt

2. Toni Gerber

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

- iii. Staff bonus/reward for agreeing to work in a classroom that is not their usual classroom.
 - Discussion and motion can be found in § IV_i, Old Business, below.

- iv. Update on School Improvement Grant Activities:
 - WTA (Warnock, Tanner & Associates, Inc.) has been hired for IT consulting services. Walters and Vidovic have had several meetings to work on the discovery phase from November 25, 2019 – December 8, 2019.
 - The school will spend about \$350K for their services through the grant. Parikh has been involved in the process and helped us screen the program applicants.
- v. The National Labor Relations Board has approved the withdrawal of the charge that had been filed against the Autism Model School.
- vi. ABAI Conference in May, 2020 – request for funds
 - Vidovic and Cornell will attend the 2020 Association for Behavior Analysis International Conference in Washington D.C. over Memorial Day Weekend. The projected expenses are outlined in the board packet.

Motion to approve up to \$4,000 for conference fees and travel expenses to attend the ABAI Conference in May, 2020:

1. Linell Weinberg

2. Lisa Marsalek

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

- vii. Update on Shumaker Advisors Activities:
 - Andy Herf recommends waiting for an appropriate bill to be in motion for this issue to be addressed – he believes this will happen in 2020.
 - Discussed changing his contract based on the timing of future events.
- viii. L. Weinberg asked for an update on the student who injured another student last month.
 - Walters informed the board that the student's mother agreed with and signed the new IEP. The student is now on an adjusted schedule for one hour a day when there are no other students present.

e. Transportation Director's Report

- B. Weinberg expressed appreciation for the updated report formatting; Walters gave credit to Moore for assisting the Transportation Director, Julius Walker, with the layout.

f. Development Director's Report

i. Fundraising Updates

- Partnership with Humane OH featured on 13abc news; afterschool program has collected several boxes of supplies for Humane OH
- School's "Giving 2s Day" Facebook fundraiser raised \$1,060 for special events/activities
- Contributions and donations for FY20:

ii. Special Events

- Dance Till U Shine – Tuesday, December 10th
- Enchanted Lands Prom – Friday, March 27th
- Autism Awareness Breakfast – Friday, April 24th
 - Reed informed the board that the school is expecting a strong turnout this year for keynote speaker, Dr. Peter Gerhardt, Executive Director, EPIC School, Paramus, NJ.

IV. Old Business

i. Staff bonus/reward for agreeing to work in a classroom that is not their usual classroom.

- Vidovic and Walters discussed the program with Massa and concluded that we can reinstate the initiative if we strictly fund it through the use of unrestricted donations.

Motion to reinstate the staff bonus initiative using unrestricted donations to fund the program:

- 1. Isaac Demarest**
- 2. Mark Greenblatt**

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

- ii. November, 2019 Financials—budget & variance reports.
- The Board reviewed and discussed the November, 2019 budget & variance report.
 - Walters and Demarest mentioned an Afterschool Program payroll anomaly that was found during the monthly finance meeting. The anomaly has since been corrected in the financial report.

Motion to approve the November, 2019 Financials:

1. Lisa Marsalek

2. Toni Gerber

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

- Board Meeting Location Change
 - The board members are very satisfied with the location of the building if there is a larger room available. Greenblatt will reserve the larger room, the Bistro, for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Motion to change the location of the Autism Model School board meetings to Skylight Financial Group, 7150 W. Central Avenue, Ste. 100, Toledo, OH 43517, in the larger room, for the remainder of the 2020 fiscal year:

1. Mark Greenblatt

2. Isaac Demarest

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

V. New Business

- Increasing Revenue Through Donations/Endowments
 - Greenblatt invited the board and the Development Director to look into increasing our donated funding.
 - Demarest asked Reed to block off the time to talk about how to increase revenue – he regularly asks for millions

of dollars for the Shriners.

- L. Weinberg reminded the board that we have a good story for asking.
- Demarest suggested that businesses would rather give supplies, and that the supply portion of the budget is \$80,000. An extra \$80K would certainly make budgeting salary increases look a lot easier. He then suggested finding some tax-smart ways to raise funds using donated IRAs and other financial products.

Motion to adjourn at 6:49 PM:

1. Isaac Demarest

2.

Vote – Yes – Unanimous: Demarest, Gerber, Greenblatt, Marsalek, Rothschild, L. Weinberg

The next board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at 5:30 pm at Skylight Financial Group, 7150 W. Central Ave., Ste. 100, Toledo, OH 43617.