SIDE BY SIDE
CHARTER SCHOOL

Board of Directors Meeting
March 29, 2023
APPROVED Minutes

Present: Nell Conroy, Matt Nittoly, Britnee Hnderson, Colin Konkel, Larry Cafero, Sally Davids, Stephanie Cecio, Ewa Derlukiewicz, Adam Norris
Absent: Kim Grimm

Meeting began at 5:19 PM.

February minutes approved by Amanda and Todd.

Presentation by PKF O'Connor Davies re: Tax Audit

PKF presented their findings from the 2021 tax audit. The board asked clarification questions but brought up no concerns with the findings. There was discussion of the expected budget deficit and the historical deficit the school has run, which eats into the endowment a bit each year. In some previous years there had been major deficits but controls were put in place to prevent this and they have been working well. At the current pace it will be about 9 years before this becomes a serious concern, but the board agreed to have further discussion of how to fundraise for the endowment and how urgently.

We also discussed further research into additional grant options, which are important part of our funding. Much of our funding comes from the state for charter schools, but inflation continues to rise and the funding increases do not match the pace of inflation. Larry pointed out that need here is for further lobbying to the legislature in concert with other charter schools.

The board requested of PKF that they summarize the historical deficits and funding trends so that we can strategize and forecast better.

Director Update:

I. **Proposed 2023-24 School year calendar:**
- **SBS calendar always modeled after NPS due to transportation**
- **Differences: November 22 School Closed at SBS/ ED at NPS**
- **Full week recess in February and April**
- **181 days of school with tentative end on 6/13/24**

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II. Teaching & Learning Update:

March has been a busy month! Middle school teachers attended the New England League of Middle Schools conference in Springfield MA and explored new research around advisories and student engagement. All ELA teachers in grades K-8 received professional development in scientifically research-based reading instruction from Margie Gillis of Literacy, HOW. This module they focused on comprehension.

Teachers and students are busy preparing for the Smarter Balanced and Next Generation Science Assessments to be administered in April and May. This year, the science test will be computer adaptive like the math and reading assessments, so that question difficulty will adjust in order to measure students' "just right" proficiency levels.

III. Side by Side enrollment lottery 2023 (important dates)

- Mon 4/3 lottery applications due by 4pm
- Wed 4/26 LOTTERY at 5pm

IV. Proposed nominations for Community Seats on SBS Board:

- Chiara Askew-Oliver and Deborah Whalen have submitted their interest in becoming new Community Members on the SBS Board

Finance committee update:

Adam reviewed the current balance sheet. We remain in our expected position at this point in the year.

The board reviewed and accepted the form 990 tax return for 2021. Motioned to acceptance made by Nell and seconded by Todd.

There was discussion of potentially splitting some funds across an additional bank to ensure FDIC protection (up to 250k in each banking institution). The Finance Committee will investigate and discuss further.

Fundraising:

The Booster Thon fun run is scheduled and the contract has been signed. Todd is working with the Booster team to get materials ready for the event and to solicit donations for tee shirt sponsorships.

Amanda is continuing to work with Spinnaker to secure a date for our spring rooftop fundraiser. The roof's opening date was pushed back to April 1st. We hope to target about 120 people and find a date in the second half of May.

Nell and Amanda have made progress researching outdoor space improvement options. They surveyed the staff about which issues and benefits to prioritize and there was general agreement on a few items. The playscapes are old and in need of repair or replacement. Several people requested shade for the sunny days. There is a possibility of a grant from the American Dermatological Association (more research needed). We discussed perhaps getting rid of the mulch and exploring alternative ground cover options. We have asked a few companies to have preliminary conversations around options and pricing.

Matt also pointed out that much of our fundraising in the past has gone toward the Field Trip Fund, which primarily benefits the older students. The outdoor playspace updates would primarily benefit the younger students, but the two initiatives are balanced across the classes.

Parent Forum Discussion

Todd brought some feedback to the board from parents that there is a desire to re-embrace Side By Side's community outreach roots. We have agreed to schedule a parent forum in May to bring the discussion to a further audience. The primary goal is to inform the community that SBS would like to re-invigorate our community outreach efforts. Family and parent involvement is crucial and required, so we would like to solicit ideas and ask for volunteers to organize activities. This is an open discussion to steer our future direction in this area and any initiatives should likely be planned for the next school year.

Todd also brought up some questions regarding use of the Sono Public Library as a school resource. There has been discussion between the school and the library to bring classrooms in more often, but the current challenge is that the south branch near the school does not currently have a children's librarian. They are trying to fill the position. Individual teachers are currently making their own plans as it fits with their curriculum.

Therapy dog follow-up

Colin discussed the use of therapy dogs at Scott's Ridge Middle School (Ridgefield PS) and provided a synopsis of their experiences. It has been a successful SEL initiative for them. There are 5 dogs in the district and the dogs generally are owned by and live with staff members. When the dogs are at school they are stationed in of the office of the owner and are available for visits. They are

intentionally in a place without a lot of people and traffic most of the time. They are often used for bus greeting in the morning. They are great for some students in crisis or for helping them to deal with a bad day and re-focus their mental space in a positive way. For many students without exposure to dogs this has been helpful to deal with phobias.

Addressing some of the concerns: Each individual is responsible for taking out an umbrella insurance policy. Allergies have never been a major issue but we would like a more detailed discussion of how it's handled. How to determine who is allergic and what about students who have never been exposed to dogs? Nell suggested asking for a copy of the communication to families about this program.

Action items:

- Next official meeting will be on Tuesday, April 25, 2023
- Outdoor space committee to research companies that have renovated other play spaces in Norwalk to get some ideas for SBS and an idea of potential costs (no update from last meeting)
- Approval of next year's calendar at the April board meeting
- Potential action item of approving new board members
- Scheduling a parent forum

Meeting adjourned: Todd and Adam motioned to adjourn at 6:57 PM