

Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Meeting
Charter District 4152
January 27, 2009, 6:30 p.m.
1745 University Ave.
Saint Paul, MN 55104

Opening Remarks

Board Chair Dr. Michael Dorneich called the meeting to order at 6:30pm.

Board members Dr. Mary Zellmer-Bruhn, Dr. Michael Dorneich, Doug Franzwa, Dr. Stefan Knep, Dr. Andrew Oxenham, Rebecca Haut-Schmidt, and Scot Stephenson were present. Dr. Juergen Konczak and Gretchen Nessel arrived during the meeting.

School officials Judi Ingison and Marcy Zachmeier-Ruh were present

In addition several parents and teachers attended the meeting.

A. Approval of January 27, 2009 Agenda

Financial oversight moved to after Strategic Planning

Dr. Dorneich moved, Ms. Hauth-Schmidt seconded, that the January 27 agenda be approved as ammended. The motion passed 7 - 0.

B. Consent Agenda

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Knep seconded, that the consent agenda be approved. The motion passed 7-0.

C. Strategic planning I

a. Immigration information

DeAnne Hilgers, an attorney from Lindquist and Venum specializing in immigration law, made a presentation to the Board on the various options of recruiting and retaining teachers from overseas. Most teachers on a J1/Exchange program visa, are granted one year at a time, renewable for up to 3 years. The advantage is that an agency finds the teacher and lawyers' fees are avoided. The disadvantage is that there follows a 2-year home residency requirement, meaning that teachers must return to their home

country for 2 years before being eligible to work in the US again. It may be possible to apply for a waiver from this requirement, but that is fact specific, depending on the precise circumstances. If a waiver is granted, an H1B visa may be applied for.

The H1B Visa is for specialty occupation positions and is the most common temporary work visa in the U.S. Because it is so popular, it can be difficult to obtain, with many more applications than available visas. The total cost of such an application would be over \$5000, including lawyers' fees.

The final option is to apply for permanent residency. Costs are quite high (~\$7,000 – 8,000), and the process can be lengthy.

Gretchen Nessel arrived at 6:45 pm.

Dr. Juergen Konczak arrived at 6:55 pm.

D. Academic Oversight

a. Middle School Curriculum

Ms. Ingison provided an overview of the new curriculum documents, the program guide and the course description book. The program guide provides an overview of our middle school philosophy, pointing out our unique characteristics, with a grid at the back to show how things fit together. It can also be used as a marketing tool. The course description book is more detailed, providing information for board and teachers. A lot still needs to be fleshed out.

The documents have been circulating to expert reviewers (respected teachers in the respective subject areas) and have been adjusted based on feedback.

There followed a discussion on differentiation, and the difference between differentiation and ability-based tracking. Differing views were expressed, although there was general agreement that classes should avoid rigid ability-based tracking only. The Director of Curriculum stated that this was not the intent, and some suggestions for wording changes were made to avoid the impression of “differentiation” being used as a codeword for “tracking”. The teachers present pointed out that the current reading groups had been very successful in allowing the children to learn and interact in ways that helped them to progress.

Dr. Dorneich observed that the board was probably not ready to vote on the new documents. If the suggested changes could be worked on soon, it would be good to get revised draft to the Board soon so that it could be voted on at the next meeting.

b. Teacher/Staff evaluation plan

Ms. Ingison presented a model from Denver public schools for teacher/staff feedback. Peers are selected to review, with emphasis on support and advice, rather than official review. The Director and Director of Curriculum will begin doing evaluations starting next month. They would like to pilot a model. Frau Grimm stated that the teachers have the question of what drives the review: Is it mandatory by the state, just a school policy, and/or for salary evaluation? Ms Ingison stated that this goes back to the October faculty meeting. The idea of peer review is to establish a collegial environment. There is another part of the Denver model that is pay/merit based, but has not been discussed with Board or established in any way. Dr. Dorneich stated that the mid-year evaluations are not tied to compensation but are in place for feedback to the Board. We are trying to develop an environment for continuous improvement. Frau Grimm asked whether departing teachers need to be evaluated. It was thought that departing teachers would also take part, because this could add improvements within the school year. There is also a benefit for the reviewer just to see another colleague in action.

The question of when the Board would be taking up merit pay was raised. Teachers should clearly know of this well ahead of time, and the criteria should be clear. Offers for next year are made in April. Therefore if Board was doing something new, should be decided by March. Ms. Ingison thought these changes would be for next year. Some Board members had been under the impression that this would begin this year, after having been put off last year. It was suggested that Jason Shaw, a specialist in compensation and merit pay, could come and give a presentation on this next month. Dr. Dorneich will put this on the agenda for March. Ms. Zellmer-Bruhn noted that bonus pay might also be an option, as distinct from merit pay. Dr. Knep noted that such a scheme would need an agreed evaluation process, and that the finance committee would need to have input as well.

c. Mid-year staff reviews.

Board will be doing reviews for the Director, and the Board and Ms,. Ingison will jointly conduct the review of the Director of Curriculum.. Feedback from parents, staff, teachers and board members is being collected.

d. MCA Preparation plan.

This will be discussed next month. Ms. Ingison has been coordinating preparation with Frau Haeusler and Frau Hermann. The school may invest in a pre-test, although the costs need to be taken into account. Ms. Ingison will research these.

E. Strategic Planning II

a. Teacher Recruitment

Ms. Ingison presented a challenging situation. The school will experience a large turnover in teachers for a variety of reasons, including returning to Germany (3 teachers), and maternity (1 teacher). The school will therefore be acting vigorously to hire new teachers. Some local future teachers are close to having their licensures in place, but they will not be ready for the coming year. The school will be contacting the Association of German Teachers, but many are only licensed for high school. It was proposed that a small taskforce start work now to look into recruitment and the hiring process. It was suggested that the school should target districts that are cutting their foreign language programs.

Action Item: Ms. Ingison

Establish Teacher Recruitment and Interview task force immediately.

It was suggested that the school should also address the issue of retention, particularly as it relates to welcoming new teachers from abroad and helping them settle in. It was proposed to form a welcoming committee, who would put together a guide book, and various other programs for newly arrived teachers. Part of the welcoming could involve passing on furniture, advice on getting settled, getting driver's license, etc. Particularly for those teachers coming from Germany, there needs to be an introduction into the issues of special education, which do not arise in most German schools. Also in Germany, teachers are compensated more and done with classes earlier (1:30 p.m.) and have the chance to collaborate more. Because of these and other issues, Frau Grimm suggested that the school should place priority on looking locally first, as well as all across the U.S., as this would be more likely to provide the school with a stable base of teachers.

Action Item: Ms. Ingison

Establish a Teacher Welcoming Committee.

b. Hiring

Ms. Ingison requested permission to hire someone on special education for 2 hours a week. Normally this would be done via a contract, but the person in question would like to be a direct school employee.

Dr. Dorneich moved, Mr. Franzwa seconded, to give Ms. Ingison permission to hire a social worker as a part-time employee. The motion passed 9-0.

c. Board Nominations Kickoff

As secretary, it is Dr. Oxenham's responsibility to run the board elections. The school is still operating under a waiver on the teacher/board requirement. Mr. Stephenson, Dr. Dorneich and Dr. Knep are coming to the end of their terms. There is a need for legal expertise along with one or more teachers, and experience in immersion education. Suggestions for candidates should be sent to Dr. Oxenham.

d. Testing Advisory Committee Update

Mary-Fred Bausman-Watkins and Nancy Bostrom are getting together on this issue. The Germanic-American Institute (GAI) is interested in participating in this discussion. Guidance from the board was requested. Members discussed testing goals, and made it clear that teacher input would be very important. Another teacher-board meeting was suggested for the spring. Ms. Ingison stated that it was important for the school to set priorities and emphasis, making a conscious choice of what we will teach and what not. Frau Grimm asked what level of German proficiency we were aiming at. Input regarding the buy-in from the parent community is important here.

e. Staff Contract Update

Ms. Ingison presented a staff contract template. Mary-Fred Bausman-Watkins had recommended a review of the existing contract. Ms. Ingison highlighted major issues that should be examined by the Board. Currently personal leave and sick leave are interchangeable, giving staff greater flexibility, but currently they do not have a carry-over. Ms. Ingison felt that some carry-over should be implemented, but there was perhaps a trade-off between amount of carry-over and the flexibility of the leave. The school does not currently offer short-term disability or life insurance for its employees. The school cannot currently afford to pay for maternity leave. One model was to implement flexible leave with carry-over, but at the discretion of the director, so that the impact on the teaching would be controlled. Mr. Franzwa questioned the impact on the budget of adding benefits. Ms. Ingison thought that with the carry-over option, teachers would not feel pressured to use up their leave, and costs might actually go down. Other school models were mentioned, including more leave based on seniority. The wording on health benefits now stated that a percentage of health benefits would be covered, in contrast to the previous wording, where 100% was covered. Ms. Ingison stated that this wording provided the school with flexibility for later eventualities, and did not represent a reduction in the commitment of the school to continue providing full coverage.

F. Financial Oversight

a. Enrollment/Recruiting

Ms. Ingison reviewed the written report. The numbers are going in the right direction. The information sessions have been high in people of European backgrounds.

Typically, schools can count on a reduction of about 20% between registering and actual enrollment. The reduction in TCGIS numbers was higher than that last year, perhaps due to the move to the new building and/or the lack of busing.

b. 2009-2010 Budget Guidance

The school is not sure what the changes in state funding will be. A 1% increase had been budgeted, which is unlikely to happen, so priorities must be set. Small class sizes have been mission-critical, and the board expressed a commitment to keep the sizes where they were. Student numbers must factor in attrition. The board discussed the possibility of using grants creatively for sustainability in years ahead. New grant opportunities will be sought, but it is important to ensure that this does not add to the teachers' already high workload.

Ms. Hauth-Schmid left the meeting at 8:40 pm.

c. Treasurer's Report

Nothing stood out in December numbers. Cash is in a good position. Small amount of accounts receivable. Fixed assets are the same. Expenses in revised budget are only slightly above (2%) income, which is good for this time of year. The coding will be reviewed and reclassified. Ms. Ingison and SBS have met and are working on this. Cash flow projection has improved quite a bit from recent Finance Committee meetings. But if the hold-back percentage increases this year, this will have an effect on these numbers. It may be worth looking into Q-comp – a state-sponsored initiative to encourage higher teaching standards – but the risk is that the initiative may be a commitment that becomes unfunded in future years.

Action Item: Ms. Ingison

Establish a Q-comp task force to look into requirements, and report back to the board.

G. Other Business

a. Action Item list review – tabled.

b. Director Search Update

Ms. Ingison and Ms. Zachmeier-Ruh left the discussion. Mr. Stephenson reported that the director search committee had not been able to identify qualified candidates other than Judi Ingison. The recommendation from the search committee was to re-advertise.

The board considered this recommendation but felt, in light of the high teacher turn-over at the end of this year, that it would not be prudent to delay the decision any longer and risk having no director in place in September.

Mr. Stephenson moved, Ms. Nettet seconded, that the Board authorize the chair to enter into negotiations with Ms. Judi Ingison for the position of director. The motion was passed 9-0.

Dr. Zellmer-Bruhn presented a \$100 gift certificate to the school in gratitude for project that the board had undertaken with her doctoral student.

H. Adjourn

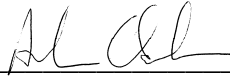
Dr. Dorniech moved, Dr. Zellmer-Bruhn seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was passed 8-0.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:30 pm.

Next Board Meeting: February 24, 2009, 6:30 p.m.

Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Secretary

Name: Andrew J. Oxenham

Signed:  _____

Date: _____

Date January 27, 2009 minutes approved by TCGIS Board: _____

Date January 27, 2009 minutes sent to MN Dept. of Education: _____