

Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Meeting  
Charter District 4152  
February 24, 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, Dr. Stefan Knep, Gretchen Nessel, Dr. Andrew Oxenham, and Rebecca Hauth-Schmid were present. Scott Stephenson arrived at 6:50. Board members Doug Franzwa and Dr. Jürgen Konczak were absent.

School officials Judi Ingison and Marcy Zachmeier-Ruh were present

In addition several parents and teachers attended the meeting, along with two representatives from the Germanic-American Institute (GAI).

**A. Approval of February 24, 2009 Agenda**

Dr. Dorneich added the agenda item of “Director’s Search” at the end of Strategic Planning II (Item H.e).

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Oxenham seconded, that the February 24 agenda be approved as amended. The motion was carried 6:0.

**B. Consent Agenda**

The consent agenda was:

- a) Approval of January 27, 2009 Minutes
- b) Donation register
- c) Payment register – found in SBS packet
- d) Committee Update Brief
- e) Enrollment/Recruiting
- f) MCA Preparation Plan

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Zellmer-Bruhn seconded, that the consent agenda be approved. The motion was carried 6:0.

## **C. Strategic planning I**

### **a. Board training**

The Board Chair had received feedback from various groups on what is going well and not going well with the Board. As school grows the board has more responsibility to perform and communicate with the various stakeholders. Given the substantial turn-over (three new members each year), some thought has gone into how to get new members up to speed. The board should take steps to professionalize itself and codify procedures. Several new steps were suggested:

1) Training – all members are required to get training. Dr. Dorneich will invite an expert to the school to provide in-house training for the board. Board members should also look for other opportunities through, for instance, MACS and MAP.

2) Roles and responsibilities: Most established boards have their roles and responsibilities in written form. We should start a process of defining that for our board. Each member should write down what the roles and responsibilities are. Some things already written in the by-laws – these will be distributed to board members by the chair. These written notes are to be delivered by the next board meeting.

3) Governance committee. In the non-profit world the role of the governance committee has been receiving much attention recently. This committee subsumes the nominating committee, and identifies best practices to help boards function better. The traditional head of the governance committee is the board secretary (Dr. Oxenham). There are currently no other members; other members can be board members and/or other members of the community. The remainder of year will be spent gathering in written form what the board chair has in terms of institutional memory, and passing it on to the governance committee.

4) Strategic plan. A conversation should begin on defining a strategic plan (see below). The Director of Curriculum stated her appreciation for the active role that the board has taken in steering the school, not just advice but pitching in.

#### **Action item: Dr. Dorneich**

*Michael Dorneich will distribute the by-laws to the other board members.*

#### **Action item: All Board Members**

*All board members will submit a written description of their perceived role on the board by next meeting (March 24, 2009).*

**Action item: Dr. Dorneich, Ms. Ingison**

*Kick off a strategic planning process. Stake-holders (board, directors, teachers, parents, GAI representatives) will begin to formulate a strategic plan.*

**b. GAI Oversight Committee**

Members of the GAI oversight committee presented to the board. Representatives were Nancy Bostrom (GAI Chair and member of the GAI-TCGIS oversight committee), Sylvia Lovett (chair of oversight committee), and Mary-Fred Bausman-Watkins (member of oversight committee). Ms. Bostrom stated that the Minnesota Sponsorship Guide outlines the role of the oversight committee. The GAI grants the charter to the board of the school, and then determines whether the students at the school are making sufficient academic progress. There is a contractual agreement between GAI and school. Specific oversight activities (from sponsor guide) include: review school audits and reports, communicate with school board, attend board meetings at least quarterly, review board operations, onsite operations, gather data on student achievement, look at assessment tools that are used by school and compare them with the aims of the school and GAI.

Ms. Bausman-Watkins stated that the role of the sponsor and oversight committee may be strengthened in upcoming legislation, because experience has shown that schools have failed when its board was failing in its oversight role, either through not realizing or not fulfilling its duties. In such cases, the media has often blamed the Minnesota Department of Education (DoE). By increasing the accountability of the board to the sponsor, and the oversight responsibilities of the sponsor, some of the responsibility will shift from the DoE to the sponsor. So far the legislative proposals do not go beyond what the GAI and the TCGIS already do or plan to do.

**c. Strategic Plan**

In course of the director search committee activities, the committee met with head of the Park Spanish immersion school in the St. Louis Park. That school had implemented a process to develop a strategic plan over a period of 18 months. With all stakeholders, they defined what the core mission of the school was, and developed a plan of how to get there. There are some remaining questions regarding the TCGIS, some of which might be well addressed by a formal strategic plan. A strategic plan can serve several purposes. It defines identity, gives us a way to identify how to evaluate ourselves, gives

us a “touchstone” in the case of disagreements or difficult issues, or establish which new opportunities (e.g. grants) to pursue. It would provide the community and the leadership with a guide, to avoid arbitrary changes in direction.

The Park Spanish Immersion school principal has agreed to come to talk to board about their process. Once the process is underway, it was suggested that the school go to the Carlson School for pro bono help, rather than paying for a facilitator. A facilitator wouldn't necessarily require immersion experience – his/her role would be a neutral party who guides the process. Another benefit is that it would focus our energies more, and would allow the whole school to set up its priorities. In some cases it can be as important to decide what not to pursue as it is to decide what to pursue, and a strategic plan can help in this decision process.

Dr. Dorneich moved, Ms. Nessel seconded, that the school kick off a strategic plan process. The motion was carried 7:0.

#### **d. Amity Intern Update**

A proposal was made by the Amity intern hosting committee, represented by Ms. Bausman-Watkins, to only offer as many positions to interns as there are identified host families. This would be a break from the past, where Amity interns have been invited, and the search for host families continues until they arrive. Given the increasing number of Amity interns, this has led to stressful situations, where the school has been short of host families up until very close to the deadline, and has put particular pressure on the committee members, who have often ended up hosting themselves. Only inviting interns for whom we have committed housing would relieve that stress. However, this also means that the process would have to end in May, and may well lead to the situation where we do not have one intern per class anymore.

A suggestion was made to tie interns to classes which have a host family, but this was rejected as potentially putting K and 1<sup>st</sup> grade at a disadvantage. It was pointed out that host families do not necessarily have to be school families. On the other hand, it cannot be simply a “hotel” arrangement – the intern should be “embedded” in a family, as this is part of the J1 visa's cultural exchange dimension. The contract states clearly that it is the school's responsibility to find housing. Interns may be asked to babysit, but it cannot be a requirement; also they are not permitted to work more than 10 hours per week. The teachers' experience is that an intern is a marvelous addition to the classroom; adding a native speaker really assists in creating an immersion environment. Half an intern may or may not work; in some cases it can result in a schedule that is so disjointed that it may be better not to have an intern at all. So far, TCGIS has been fortunate to have one intern per class; this is not the case in most immersion schools.

Children in early grades are not always ready to work together in small groups without supervision. Even in higher grades, there are often many things going on in the classroom; having someone else to help out is really useful.

The discussion made it clear that interns are important, but the question remains as to what is realistic. It may not be sustainable to offer 10, 12, or 14 positions a year. There is a concern that we may burn out our community with repeated requests for hosting. The director noted that the school has now assumed responsibility for the interns' lunch, so that lessens somewhat the burden on the host families. It was suggested that direct requests from the classroom teachers for an intern the following year may yield better results in terms of volunteer host families.

Explicit grant funded for the Amity interns only runs through end of next year. However, in board and finance committee meetings, the Amity interns always end up as a top priority, so it is highly likely that the school will continue to provide funding for interns, even after the grant expires.

The board's direction to the committee was to proceed as they saw fit, and to only commit to as many interns as they had identified host families, but to maintain very high-profile advertising and recruitment of host families, making it clear to the community that a lack of host families will result in the loss of the current system of one intern per class.

## **D. Financial Oversight**

### **a. 2009-2010 budget – first look**

SBS has prepared a very preliminary budget outlook for 09/10 and for two subsequent years. Many aspects are uncertain, including state funding and lease aid, etc. Projections for student enrollment are very conservative. Taking a look at the cashflow situation, some negative cash balances are anticipated. One decision of the finance committee is to increase our line of credit to \$150K to mitigate cashflow risks due to a possible increase in state holdback, although it was noted that the school has never yet tapped into its line of credit.

### **b. Treasurer's Report**

Stefan Knep reported to the board the details, as found in SBS report in board packet. There was a concern on future State level of funding. The amount of hold-back may

increase from 10% to perhaps 20%. This could significantly influence our cashflow going into future years. However, this may remain uncertain until June.

## **E. Academic Oversight**

### **a. Middle School Curriculum**

Changes in the middle school documents from last month's board meeting were distributed before this meeting. The workgroup involved the director of curriculum, the director, Ms. Nettet, Ms. Hauth-Schmidt, and Dr. Dorneich. Wording relating to ability-based or readiness-level grouping was changed, but serving individual needs was emphasized. There was a question regarding academic English (the English vocabulary needed to succeed in standardized tests and in high school, in subjects that are taught in German at TCGIS). The two options are to teach this as a separate class or within the regular (German) class. The inherent tension here is 1) that it makes more pedagogic sense teach the English vocabulary at the same time as performing the actual exercise, but 2) that immersion research suggests that complete (physical and temporal) separation of the languages improves language retention. The compromise that the workgroup came to was to separate instruction in time and lesson, if not by classroom. The other question involved Geography, which had initially been proposed as a separate unit. There is, however, an opinion by many that Geography is better integrated within the World History unit. More investigation is underway to suggest solutions here.

Ms. Nettet moved, Dr. Oxenham seconded, that the middle school documents be approved. The motion was carried 7:0.

### **b. Differentiation**

The board and school administration wants to make it public that the TCGIS is committed to differentiation. This includes improving what we are doing now in all current grades, as well as in our plans for Middle School. The director of curriculum undertook two weeks of training at two locations on differentiation from a highly-regarded expert in the area. There is the feeling in the school that this has been an ongoing issue that has never been adequately formally addressed. The teachers have come up with good suggestions to assist in this process. In the past, differentiation may not have been appropriately implemented because it was often done in the class by interns who had not received sufficient or appropriate training; the director of curriculum is now concentrating on training incoming Amity interns.

Mr. Stephenson noted that, as a teacher, taking ability-based teaching completely out of the toolbox would be a bad mistake. Particularly in the lowest grades, where there are vast differences in German language background (ranging from fluent to non-existent), as well as English reading background (ranging from fluent reading to not recognizing the letters), it would be unfair to attempt to teach all children the same material. Ms. Hauth-Schmid noted that it was not that readiness-level differentiation was banned, rather that it should only be one of many types of groupings that are used in each classroom, so that we avoid hard-set “higher, middle, and lower” tracks within a class.

There is interesting work being done in rural districts, which are about the same size as us, including useful materials for enrichment. It was further noted that school districts may soon be required to implement procedures to identify “talented and gifted” students, and that the TCGIS should be proactive in drawing up such policies.

### **c. MCA Preparation plan**

Ms. Ingison reported that the teachers are already involved in several activities that will prepare the students for these tests, including the use of the test-prep book, which goes through the different strands and gives the students practice tests in each. There are also online tests, which are administered in the classrooms. There are some curriculum alignment issues. For instance, decimals and fractions only come at the end of the year in grade 4 German curriculum, so there are plans to move some units around so that the students have had enough exposure to them before the MCA tests are taken. Ms. Ingison has also introduced some new materials, including flashcards, to ensure that the students have enough opportunity to absorb the necessary English vocabulary. Practice problems are done in English and German. Playing games are used as reviews.

As far as MAP (measures of academic progress) test goes, the school has computer issues. Similar problems will arise with the state tests, so these need to be addressed. The MAP gives the students practice, and will break down students’ scores and provide the school with a better idea of how they are performing in the different areas of the MCA tests. It also provides an assessment of growth, so one can track over time, giving a measure of annual progress. This can help in identifying students now, so that the school can develop and implement a plan for the students who will require additional support.

Ms. Grimm (2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher) noted that this question addresses precisely the question of academic English that was raised with the Middle School curriculum. Experiences here could be used to guide development of the Middle School program. The question was raised whether teachers and parents are receiving enough feedback

on the results of these practice tests; there seemed to be some confusion as to whether the practice tests were to be done in the student's spare time and whether or not teachers are looking at them at all.

A final point was that the proposed Strategic Plan should clearly determine the level of importance that will be placed on test scores within the school's mission and philosophy.

## **F. Strategic Planning II**

### **a. Teacher Recruitment**

Ms. Ingison reported that postings for vacant teacher positions are out, and that a letter was sent home to parents today, explaining the situation and asking for volunteers for interview teams, guided by steering task force. All positions will remain posted until filled.

Regarding current staff evaluations, the goal is to have them well underway in March.

A question was raised regarding when the school should contact Checkpoint Charlie, the agency which has supplied us with teachers from Germany in the past. It seems that we are roughly on schedule, similar to last year, which worked out well. There also seems to be more interest now from US (Minnesota) residents in our teaching positions. Some potential recruits have attended parent information sessions, and have identified themselves afterwards as being interested in teaching here. This is seen as a very positive development.

Ms. Grimm urged that the net should be cast wider, to target not only German teachers, but also any other teachers who are native or near-native speakers of German. We should advertise more widely, distribute flyers, and hit parents much harder, trying to spread the news by word of mouth. A high school German teacher had recommended that the school should send out e-mails to all German teachers in the area.

The question was raised as to the job description for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. Ms. Ingison stated that we may end up with a general classroom teacher. Concern was expressed that we may no specialist for math/science planned for 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Board members expressed a need to hear more details about specific plans for next year's 5<sup>th</sup> grade plans regarding STEM subjects.

### **Action item: Ms. Zachmeier-Ruh, Ms. Ingison**

*The director and/or director of curriculum should present to the board a plan for ensuring that sufficiently high-level STEM teaching capability in next year's 5<sup>th</sup> grade.*

It was noted that plans are underway to get the TCGIS on a certified list so that we avoid future problems with teachers from Germany not being able to stay more than one year. The Director of Curriculum noted that there is also the possibility that we receive a new teacher position from the German government.

#### **b. Hiring**

No new hires

#### **c. Board Nominations Update**

The board nomination season is beginning. Unfortunately, Mr. Franzwa is resigning at the end of this year, due to professional and personal reasons. The process will be that the Board will elect a new member who will serve out the remainder of Mr. Franzwa's term. The board will attempt to recruit another financial expert.

The other issue is that Dr. Konczak is gone on sabbatical for the next seven months. That takes the board down to eight active members. Dr. Dorneich noted that, as chair, he has the authority to appointment someone to the board to act as a short-term replacement for Dr. Konczak. Dr. Dorneich has talked to Mr. Ken Greener, a former board member, and Mr. Greener has expressed a willingness to return to board duties. Aside from being a previous board member, Mr. Greener has 30 years experience in school administration. There was general enthusiasm from the board for the appointment.

#### **d. School Calendar (2009-2010) – first look**

This is the first part of a longer process that will involve parent, teacher and board input. Initial proposal involves more teacher development days, a shorter school day (8:15-2:45), implemented by firming up the start time (rather than starting 15 minutes late), and shortening lunch from 30 to 20 minutes. Early release on Wednesdays at 2pm would be used for curriculum planning. The school currently uses a lot of substitute teachers, including for parent-teacher conferences; this use could be streamlined and reduced. A parent community meeting will be held on March 3<sup>rd</sup> to discuss the issue.

### **e. Kindergarten**

We currently have 50 applications for K-plus (half-day school plus half-day enrichment) and 12 for half-day only. Given the high enrollment numbers for K-plus, it seems that school can reasonably go forward with the plan to offer two K-plus classes.

Dr. Dorneich moved, Ms. Hauth-Schmid seconded, that the school proceed with two K-plus classes for Fall 2009. The motion was carried 7:0.

### **f. Director search**

Dr. Dorneich discussed the board's decision taken at the last board meeting to enter into negotiations with Ms. Ingison for the position of director. That decision reflected the board's enthusiasm for the excellent work Ms. Ingison had done by jumping into a difficult situation and steering the school through its move to a new location. However, the decision had been taken without sufficient input from parents, teachers and staff, and without the necessary formal process of an interview and a parent presentation by the candidate. This lack of consultation and process had led to considerable negative feedback from many of the school's stake-holders. Dr. Dorneich noted that the board had acted with the school's best interests in mind and that, given the lack of other viable candidates and the high teacher turnover this year, there was a risk in allowing the director search to continue into the spring. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that the board had not fulfilled its obligation to consult widely and to follow the process in closing the search against the recommendation of the search committee. Aside from the question of process, a premature decision would also detract from the legitimacy of the future director's appointment and may jeopardize the "buy-in" of parent community. With these considerations in mind, Dr. Dorneich proposed that the search be reopened, but that the necessary recruitment steps be followed with Ms. Ingison as soon as possible, and that the search committee identify and process any other viable candidates with commensurate speed and efficiency.

Dr. Dorneich proposed, Dr. Knep seconded, that the search for a permanent director be reopened. The motion was carried 7:0.

### **G. Directors' Evaluations – Closed portion of meeting**

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Knep seconded, to move to closed session at 9:20pm. The motion passed 7:0.

The directors' evaluations were discussed.

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Knep seconded, to open the meeting at 10:35pm.

### H. Other Business

Ms. Hauth-Schmid, Ms. Nessel, Mr. Stephenson left.

The lack of a financial person on the board was discussed. It was suggested that a "bridge person" would be useful.

### I. Adjourn

Dr. Dorneich proposed, Dr. Knep seconded, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4:0.

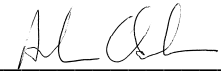
The meeting was adjourned at 10:45 pm.

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

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Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Secretary

Name: Andrew J. Oxenham

Signed: 

Date: March 24, 2009

February 24, 2009 minutes approved by TCGIS Board: March 24, 2009

February 24, 2009 minutes sent to MN Dept. of Education: \_\_\_\_\_