

Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Meeting
Charter District 4152
March 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, Gretchen Nessel, Dr. Andrew Oxenham, and Rebecca Hauth-Schmid, Scot Stephenson and Doug Franzwa were present.

Board members Dr. Jürgen Konczak and Dr. Stefan Knep were absent.

Board nominee, Ken Greener, was present.

School officials Judi Ingison and Marcy Zachmeier-Ruh were present.

Also present were several parents, teachers, and GAI representatives.

A. Approval of March 24, 2009 Agenda

The following items suggested as changes to the agenda:

- Remove action item review.
- Add MCA preparation as item f.
- Add an update on outdoor facilities plans after Checkpoint Charlie presentation.

Dr. Dorneich moved, Ms. Hauth-Schmid seconded, that the agenda be approved as amended. The motion passed 7:0.

B. Appointment

Dr. Dorneich proposed that he appoint Ken Greener as a member at large of the board, not to exceed 1 year. He stated that he wanted to add another board member since board member Juergen Konczak was on sabbatical (and out of the country) for the next six months. Ken Greener served previously on the board, and brings needed school administration experience to the board. The bylaws state that "In addition to the elected

members of the Board, the Chair shall have the power to appoint up to three additional directors for a one-year term, subject to approval by the Board of Directors.”

Dr. Dorneich moved, Ms. Nessel seconded, that Ken Greener be appointed to the board as a temporary member at large, effective immediately, for a term not to exceed one year. The motion passed 7:0.

C. Consent Agenda

The consent agenda was:

- a) Approval of February 24, 2009 Minutes
- b) Donation register
- c) Payment register – found in SBS packet
- d) Committee Update Brief
- e) Carol M. White Physical Education Program Grant Application
- f) Enrollment/Recruiting

Dr. Dorneich moved, Dr. Oxenham seconded, that the consent agenda be approved. The motion passed 8:0.

D. Strategic planning I

a. Checkpoint Charlie

Andrea Mehrländer from Checkpoint Charlie presented. Ina Frost was also present.

Ms. Mehrländer presented the board with some background about the organization Checkpoint Charlie, its history, and its links to the TCGIS. Checkpoint Charlie provides teachers from Germany, who wish to teach in the US for 2-3 years. The TCGIS is extremely attractive to German teachers. Helping to build a school can involve leaving a mark. For partners who do take German teachers, Checkpoint Charlie invites teachers and administrators to a summer program in Berlin, which involves introducing the German educational system. It is also possible for partner schools to propose new exchange programs.

Dr. Dorneich thanked the representatives of Checkpoint Charlie for providing us with such wonderful teachers.

b. Outdoor planning

Kim Kompel, member of the TCGIS facilities committee, presented the board with an update on outdoor space planning, and the various options currently available, along with the possible costs. The planning is complicated by the fact that the area in front of the school is owned by City of St. Paul and forms part of a public park. Fencing and landscaping are both seen as high priorities, but both require permission from the city. Ms. Kompel is currently in discussion with the City of St. Paul. Once plans have been reviewed and approved, the challenge becomes raising the money to implement the plan.

A number of questions and suggestions were made by board members and others:

- It was suggested that there might be an interest in sharing the cost between the three schools that currently use the grounds.
- Improving the outdoor space should be a high priority for the school.
- Perhaps a two-pronged approach to tackle the fence and the landscaping.
- Target grants that focus specifically on playground area. Perhaps do a matching grant for the plan development. Once such grant has been submitted.
- A fence could also act as a security barrier, by discouraging unwelcome visitors.
- Curb-appeal is important, so it might be worth buying a more expensive, but more attractive, fence.

The board chair thanked Ms. Kompel for all the work that she has already put into this effort.

Action item: Ms. Ingison

The director, Ms. Ingison, will initiate contact with other schools to suggest applying for grants and pursuing other fund-raising activities.

E. Financial Oversight

a. 2009-2010 budget – second look

A three-year plan was presented to the board. Budgets were drawn up for two scenarios: 1) unchanged state aid, and 2) a 10% cut in state aid (based on the DFL

budget proposal). In either case, the current projections show a decreasing fund balance, and the potential for negative cash flows in the later years. Both scenarios assume that the state holdback will increase from 10% to 20%.

We are currently looking for new lines of credit, as our current bank has only provided us with a line of credit of \$10k. Ms. Ingison met with the Bremer Bank representative, who suggested that our conservative forecasting may have negatively impacted our assessment with the bank. However, the bank still backs up payroll so the effective line of credit is closer to \$50k. We are currently looking at non-profit loan funds as a back-up. According to the bank representative, we should keep updating bank on the situation as it develops, and the bank is willing to work with us.

Although the school is now on solid financial ground, the finance committee must plan for the future, and questions now include what we might need to change in our program to meet the future financial challenges. The school has time to make these adjustments, given the fact that all planning takes a look at three-year budget projections. Thus next year should be viewed as our opportunity to set ourselves up for the following years.

Mr. Franzwa requested guidance and feedback from the board on directions for next year's budget. He emphasized that the projections are conservative, including enrollment. Reality is probably that the headcount will be higher than projected, so that as soon as enrollment numbers solidify in September these numbers can be revisited. Also the current year budget is conservative, in that current fund balance is conservative.

Potential areas for cuts were discussed, including the specialties, teacher and staff benefits, interns, and class size. Board members expressed their strong support for continuing to fund native-speaking interns for each class, and to keep class sizes small. A parent suggested that some supply costs could be taken on by parents.

b. Merit pay decision

Dr. Dorneich stated that there was essentially no money for merit pay this year, but that we should start preparing and be ready to act next year. In addition, he asked that the decision timeframe be moved to earlier in the school year.

c. Treasurer's report

SBS report was included in the board packet. Generally the situation remains healthy.

E. Academic Oversight

a. 5th grade curriculum – first look

The Director of Curriculum presented an outline of 5th grade activities. It included the Peeps Village project, which integrates across fields, and brings real-world meaning to learning activities. The Peeps village would also connect with Foss units. Research and observations in Prairie Creek show that it has been a success there, with students eager to do their homework assignments. The format also provides an excellent platform for social interactions.

Some board members expressed the view that the Peeps village was an interesting option, but that it should not necessarily be prescribed as the 5th grade teaching format, and that more discretion should be left to the teacher.

The Director stated that curriculum needed to be presented at a more conceptual level, and that it should be taken as the scaffold. The teacher should be given information about specifically what to teach and how much time to spend on each topic, rather than too detailed information on how to teach it.

The Director of Curriculum stated that best practice seems to involve project-based learning

Dr. Dorneich stated that the board needs to see a framework as a curriculum. Peeps could be used as an example, but teachers need a separate document or guidelines on what needs to be taught.

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

The Director and Director of Curriculum will work to produce a curriculum document that is a framework with more detailed content.

Action item: Ms. Zachmeier-Ruh

The current staffing proposal has 1.75 FTE just for 5th grade. That's untenable in the current funding situation, and needs to be revised and clarified.

b. Sex education

After a brief presentation by the Director of Curriculum, the board discussed various options, and ended with a consensus that this could probably be contracted out to professionals. Potentially emotional subjects like this should probably be taught in English.

Action item: Ms. Zachmeier-Ruh

The Director of Curriculum will identify sex education services to contract.

c. SOPA results

The materials had not been distributed before the meeting, and so discussion was postponed until the next meeting.

d. MCA preparation

Dr. Oxenham made a statement to express dismay at lack of preparation for MCA tests, and the fact that the teachers did not seem to have timely or organized support in identifying any alignment issues between the MCA standards and the current school curriculum. He applauded the teachers for having taken the initiative and altering the teaching schedule as they felt was needed to prepare the students for the upcoming tests.

The Director of Curriculum stated that teachers were shown where the website was that contained the information that they needed.

A more general discussion ensued on the question of how other immersion schools align their curricula.

The Director noted that there are two separate issues, one involving preparation strategies, sample tests, etc., and the other involving curriculum alignment, which is currently where big problem is.

G. Strategic Planning II

a. Policy approvals

Dr. Dorneich noted that there are a large number of policies that the school needs to adopt. Because of the large number, the board should prioritize, starting with the mandatory policies that are not yet in place. These will be tackled over the next few meetings, beginning at the next board meeting.

b. Teacher recruitment

The Director reported that the school has already interviewed a number of candidates, and that more interviews are ongoing. It is hoped that some candidates can be presented to the board at next month's board meeting.

c. Hiring

The board stated that it should not wait until next month to renew the contracts of existing staff, but should hold a special board meeting. This meeting, to be held in approximately 2 weeks, will be closed to hear teacher evaluations and then open to approve the contract renewals. Some new hiring decisions could also be made at the special meeting if promising candidates had been properly vetted and were ready for approval.

d. School Calendar (2009-2010) approval

The Director presented a draft calendar that was drawn up in consultation with the staff. Feedback had been received from an internet poll of parents.

There was general concern that cutting down on instructional time would be detrimental to the teaching mission. Also, there were some logistical issues. Kids who are waiting in line are taking a longer time to eat. It may not be realistic to shorten lunch time to 20 minutes, as proposed in the draft. There are three main elements in the draft: shortening the regular school day, providing periodic early release, and the overall length of the academic year.

One option is to start before Labor Day, and no permission is needed for that. The board was generally in favor of starting early, since Labor Day is late this year.

The gradual start to the school year was discussed, with some questioning whether the several half-days were necessary, given the childcare issues surrounding them. In support of the idea is the aim to slowly get back into the full rhythm and become more efficient.

The board stated that both shortening the school day and having an early release day each week was too much change. It was recommended to leave the length of the day as it was and provide an option to create prep time for teachers to collaborate.

Ms. Hauth-Schmid left at 9:30pm

Dr. Dorneich stated that the board will review the calendar again at the next meeting.

Action item: Ms. Ingison

Prepare calendar options for the board to choose from at the next meeting.

H. Other business

Dr. Dorneich announced that the Director candidate interviews will be held on April 7th, 8th and 9th. The board interviews will take place at 6pm on those days.

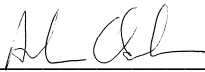
I. Adjourn

Dr. Dorneich moved to adjourn, Dr. Zellmer-Bruhn seconded. The motion passed 7:0. The meeting adjourned at 9:50pm.

Next Regular Board Meeting: April 28, 2009, 6:30 p.m.

Twin Cities German Immersion School Board Secretary

Name: Andrew J. Oxenham

Signed: 

Date: _____

Date March 24, 2009 minutes approved by TCGIS Board: _____

Date March 24, 2009 minutes sent to MN Dept. of Education: _____