

Frederick Classical Charter School  
Public Board of Trustees Meeting  
Monday, May 11, 2015  
8445 Spires Way, Suite CC  
Frederick, MD 21701

Quorum Established: 7:16pm

In Attendance: Tom Neumark - President, Ginger Mortellaro – Vice President, Sue Middleton – Secretary, Tara Dodson – Active Member

Not In Attendance: James Voss – Treasurer, Michele Clune – Active Member

I. Public Comment:

- a. Parent interested in seeing a “Battle of the Books” competition started within the school
  - i. It is a nationwide competition for students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade through high school to help increase reading within the school and is used as an incentive for students to read. It can be done afterschool and does not have to interfere with class time. Parkway Elementary currently does it.
- b. Parent concerns:
  - i. Concerned with the direction of the school no longer being truly classical education focused
    1. Currently only two teachers are using classical education to teach. Classical education is not being addressed within most classrooms. Our 6<sup>th</sup> grade students are only on their 2<sup>nd</sup> book since the beginning of the school year and parents have been told that there are not enough books available for them to study; they instead are spending more time on poetry; there is also a belief that diagramming is “useless”
  - ii. Very unhappy with current Head of School in the following ways:
    1. Decision making practices
    2. Lack of consistency with responses to parental questions which has further built a lack of faith and trust
    3. Regular school routines are not being followed
    4. Does not want to take responsibility (e.g. Janitor was not properly background checked before working in our school with our students but blamed one of the Board members for this error)
    5. Non-professional actions being conducted during school time

6. Several families feel that the Board “protects” the Head of School and as a result, does not feel supported by the Board
    7. Mrs. Hall (guidance counselor) is not being professionally used for the part-time hours she spends at the school.  
Would like to see her more involved with bullying and other student incidents to help students work through these issues, but she “does not have enough resources” to deal with these issues. Currently, she is being used to do recess duty. There is also a lack of communication from Head of School to Mrs. Hall related to behavioral reports. Reports are also not being communicated back to parents to keep them aware of what follow up has been done – especially when incidents continue to reoccur
  - iii. Feeling that we are moving towards a typical public school model
  - iv. The school community is losing parents who were with the school from the beginning who came to the school looking for true classical education for their children but they are no longer at the school, or if they are, they are not willing to stay passed the new school year
- II. Approval of April meeting minutes – Sue motioned to approve. Ginger seconded. Board approved.
- III. Approval of agenda – Sue motioned to add “Facility Update.” Tara motioned to approve. Ginger seconded. Board approved.
- IV. Facility Update (Karen Place):
  - a. Cleaned furniture for Mrs. Tucker to begin using new office in the new wing
  - b. Mrs. Hall also has an office in the new wing
  - c. Mrs. Cummins is still deciding on which classrooms to use
  - d. New multipurpose room:
    - i. Based on the walls and floors being made of cement without covering, we are looking into wall pads as well as rubber flooring. We would install both ourselves. Layout to be approved by Mrs. Cummins and the timeframe is based on when the ordered is received
    - ii. Play area outside needs special netting as there have been a few complaints from neighboring tenants who said they saw students deliberately throwing balls to hit cars. As a result, our landlord now requires us to put up netting. A drainage covering should go down by next week Thursday.
    - iii. We are currently short one classroom for the new school year so we are looking to split our current science room. If our landlord

does the work, they have already been told of the importance of the getting the job done by the middle of August before the new school year begins.

- iv. G. Mortellaro question: Is there anything against us using an outside company to do internal work for our current space?
  - 1. Karen needs to confirm with our landlord; our landlord may still need to sign for a permit (since they are the building owner)

V. Middle School Survey:

- a. The Baltimore Sun wrote an editorial on schools providing a survey to middle school students to gain information on middle school student behaviors, which include sensitive subject matter. The survey is aimed at 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> graders and is unclear as to who receives it. It is a Maryland state initiative which is received via email
  - i. Parent present confirmed her child received a survey and that it is written in a way that “you have been selected” addressed to the child; not as clear when received that the survey is sent through the state to gather information or what type of information is being gathered until you get into answering the questions
  - ii. The Board does not want FCCS parents to feel that they are in a position where they are forced to answer such a survey, or that “they are being told” to complete this survey. The Board just wanted to raise this issue to the community.

VI. Committees for 2015/2016:

- a. Open Committee Chair positions for the coming school year – see attached document
  - i. Formal announcement of open positions will be sent from the Board via email to families
  - ii. Anyone interested in filling open positions should contact the Board
- b. Board is planning to have two open houses at the beginning of the new school year; one for returning families, another for new families. These open houses will be strictly for the Board and FCCS families to attend (teachers will not be in attendance)
  - i. Open houses would allow committees discuss their purpose/goals for the coming school year
  - ii. Open houses would also allow families to have an opportunity to join committees prior to the start of the school year

VII. Parent Survey:

- a. Ready for the Board to review (currently with G. Mortellaro and S. Middleton for approval)
- b. Board hopes to receive more response from families than last year

- c. Any comments/concerns from families about anything related to the school can and should be sent via the survey
- VIII. Dr. Tolman's Visit (April):
  - a. Dr. Tolman is an internationally known leading authority on reading, and she also trains our teachers, but her discussion hosted at the school in April was not well attended (about 15 people including 2 teachers) which is disappointing to the Board. The Board is concerned with the lack of attendance/interest from families on these subject matters.
  - b. A discussion with Christopher Perrin will also be hosted at the school this month which the Board hopes will have better attendance
- IX. Finance & Fundraising (Tim Summers):
  - a. We are anticipating a surplus of about \$142K by the end of the current school year (see attached financial statements). Adding 8<sup>th</sup> grade will provide a bit of a financial boost for the new school year, but we will also reach our "cruising altitude" since no more grades will be added after the 2015-2016 school year. We also have yet to purchase textbooks for next year so there is a bit more spending to be made before the start of the new school year.
- X. Staffing:
  - a. The Board has been actively participating in interviews and is still working on other positions.
  - b. Assistant Principal is in progress (need to go through FCPS channels)
- XI. Treasurer Recruitment:
  - a. James Voss' family is moving to Utah so the Board is looking for someone to fill the Treasurer role
- XII. Board Comments:
  - a. Ginger
    - i. (response to parent comment) Janitor was background checked in MD, DC, VA according to the private company used to locate and hire him to work; despite this, FCPS deemed it necessary for him to get further fingerprinting which I was not previous aware of.
    - ii. Volunteers are key to making our school function and it is important for us to locate a lead volunteer with Shelly stepping down from this role for next year. Any and everything we do at the school needs volunteers.
    - iii. The lack of classical education is discouraging, but Mrs. Cummins is currently in Arizona at a classical school and will be going to Hillsdale (in PA) to learn how classical schools operate. Dr. Perrin will also be coming to the school for 3 days to work with our teachers to help bring a classical focus within the school.

iv. The uniform committee is up and running again and a new family parent is interested in leading it. Information will be sent out to families in a few weeks

b. Tara

- i. In the rumor mill going around our school, I have taken offence to hearing my name being thrown around that I am “harassing teachers”. If people are speaking about one individual, then that is how it should be communicated, but it is not fair to generalize comments to represent the whole Board.
- ii. The idea that “the board of trustees doesn’t like someone so they get them fired” is simply not true. This is illegal; neither do we have that power.

c. Sue

- i. (responding to parental concerns regarding the Head of School) The job of the Board is to always support and encourage our administration. I don’t agree with every decision our Head of School makes, but we spent a lot of time interviewing, and she also went through the vigorous interview process that we created. Our Head of School does have a lot of work to do, and maybe I have a bit more patience than others and am more willing for people to make mistakes. I’m not disagreeing with some comments that were made, but I stand up for our Head of School. The relationship we are trying to have with her is one of trust so that we can feel that we can go to her with respect and try to communicate with her. It won’t help our school to get a new Head of School every year. Let’s work on her weaknesses. If she is not willing to make changes where we made suggestions, then we may be having a similar conversation to what we did last year with our previous Head of School who did not have any supportive action to follow up with us, and she further left on her own accord. We are not at the school doing the day to day with Mrs. Cummins and I believe people are seeing things with a very narrow lens accordingly to their personal experiences. We are a work in progress. My child is in this school as well so I too have a vested interest, but I still believe that our worst day at FCCS is still better than the best day within the regular public school system.

d. Tom

- i. Thank you to the Magnus family who are one of the founding families still around. Our school was supposed to be a truly classical school, but it’s not and this is very disappointing for me. True that it is better than what you would get at a traditional public school, but it is still not classical. Most of our teachers have not

read our application – this is a problem. It is hard to implement something amongst people who do not know or understand the vision of what is being implemented. I too agree that there is a lack of literature being made available to our students. The Board has tried to meet with staff to discuss various concerns as well as provide them with information over the last two years but it has been unsuccessful thus far. We are trying to get the good, the true and the beautiful happening here at the school all the time, but it is currently only happening 10% of the time. The issue is that the Board does not have control, but we are still trying despite the lack of leverage that we have. The really good teachers are trying, but they are required to learn a lot in a short period of time. I sincerely apologize for this situation since we cannot succeed given our current limitations. There are pockets of excellence, but this is not what we signed up for. Tomorrow, the Governor will sign a bill that will make things harder than it already is for charter schools in Maryland as we will no longer have the right to appeal decisions that are made. We are in a state which disadvantages us on purpose, but we still need families to stand up and fight.

XIII. Open Discussion:

- a. Parent - believes issues with Head of School are being based on individual, personal family issues. Also concerned that our Head of School will eventually “burnout” given the fact that she wears too many hats and plays too many roles and responsibilities being the sole administrator and would like to see our Head of School receive more support from families.
- b. Parent and T. Dodson commented on wanting to eliminate the negativity within the school and would like to see more of “if you have a problem, also have a solution.”
- c. Parent believes often-times rumors happen due to poor or delayed communication of an event or events and would like to see more of an effort between families, Head of School, staff, and the Board to work together to create a sense of community.
- d. T. Neumark commented on the times and ways that the Board has reached out to communicate and meet with staff. He explained the difficulties our staff and Head of School have being the “servant to two masters” between FCCS and FCPS. They are all FCPS employees, yet some of the ways FCCS can best succeed is not always in line with FCPS contracts.
  - i. T. Dodson noted that at times the FCPS culture is set up to interfere with this relationship.
- e. S. Middleton stated that classical professional development for staff and the Head of School is key for both the Board and staff to be on the same

- page. Without the understanding and knowledge of a true classical education, there will be room for staff and the Board to be at odds.
- f. Parent commented on the difficulties which arose in the fall when one of the first grade teachers unexpectedly took a leave of absence and eventually resigned. Parent would like to ensure that lessons have been learned from this event as she does not want to see something like this happen again. The multiple substitute teachers, the lack of consistent instruction, and the lost instruction time was detrimental to our students. She expressed frustration that Board members did not seem to be experiencing the same level of anger and frustration over it as she and others were.
    - i. Board members responded that they too were very frustrated, however, also understood that there were very few good options for a consistent and appropriate presence in the class for the remainder of the year.
  - g. Parent wanted to clarify uniform references to “dress”. When a memo goes out stating that students should be in their “dress” uniform, it does not mean that girls have to wear a dress. They may still wear pants; the “dress” refers to wearing a shirt or blouse with the FCCS crest embroidered on it.
  - h. Parent expressed concerns over an incident where a child reportedly went missing for a period of time, presumably in the school. She expressed concerns over what our Head of School did to address the situation.
  - i. Various parents commented that more frequent communications from our Head of School, even short blurbs of information, help to make people feel connected, and that our leadership is truly engaged and strong.
  - j. Parent commented that when a child in a class has head lice, the entire school should receive a memo, not just the class that the child is in.
  - k. Parent suggested for staff (ideally staff teams) should provide a monthly newsletter about what is going on in their classes.
  - l. The “beer in the locker” incident was discussed and many parents were concerned that a memo was not sent out immediately to discuss it. Parents found out from their students which led to more questions than answers and tended to enflame the situation. While they did recognize the beer incident as a harmless middle school prank, they felt that had it been communicated right away, it would not have been a big deal. Parents would have known about it, and the speculation and talk over it would have subsided much more quickly.
    - i. S. Middleton commented that not every incident that happens necessitates a memo to go out to families. She feels a line needs to be drawn otherwise the administrator would be writing memos all day. S. Middleton also stated that she spoke with a principal friend at another school (K-12) about this incident, and this individual would not have communicated the incident at all to the families at

his school. She maintains that communications such as these should be limited to safety issues.

- ii. T. Neumark encouraged families who wish to develop a policy on what types of information they feel should be communicated by our administration, should write up a proposal and submit it to the Board for review.

Meeting adjourned 9:30pm.