

River Grove Elementary
Board of Directors Meeting
Tuesday, January 12, 2021
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Online via Zoom

MINUTES

1.0 Call to Order: Meeting was called to order at 6:03pm by Chair Dan Miller

1.1 Roll Call: Angie Hong, Annie Beck, Marcy Ost, Jessica Hansen, Bre DeCorsey, Lisa Dochniak. Also in attendance Drew Goodson and Ele Anderson.

2.0 Approve Agenda: Motion to approve agenda by DeCorsey. Second by Beck. All in favor. Agenda approved.

3.0 Approve Minutes November 2020: Board members reviewed meeting minutes from Nov. 12 and Nov. 19. Member DeCorsey noted that the MN Department of Education link on page 3 of the Nov. 12 minutes is no longer active.

Motion to approve Nov. 12 by DeCorsey. Second by Hansen. All in favor. Minutes approved.

Motion to approve Nov. 19 by Dochniak. Second by Ost. All in favor. Minutes approved.

4.0 Community Discussion

4.1 River Grove Community Updates

4.1.1 Board Member Driven Initiatives: No updates.

4.1.2 Authorizer Comments: Not in attendance.

4.2 Citizen Comments: No comments from citizens were received.

5.0 Finance Reports & Actions: Kyle Knudson, The Anton Group (TAG)

- Knudson reviewed the December financials. Total cost of annual staff salaries are slightly lower than expected, while contract and materials expenses are slightly higher.
- Cash flow is looking good currently but they are expecting a 15-20% holdback from the State in 21-22, so it is good to have a line of credit for when that happens.
- River Grove is expecting a \$107,000 deficit at the end of the year. The board originally approved a budget with a predicted \$90k deficit. This is due to additional COVID cost needs - additional cleaning and staff.

NOTES:

1. \$9000 left in SSSB Marine. There were still a few (3 or 4) vendors pulling straight from SSB that will need to be moved if haven't already.
2. TAG still anticipates a 15-20% holdback for FY22. Would be good to apply through Bell this year so there is (1) a history and (2) they get all their questions answered before its crunch time about how MN charters are funded.
3. There is about 4x the funding for the second round of "CARES" money for schools as the first time. Expected to be distributed in the same formulas. Means more money for tech/ mental health, summer school, etc for RG.

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- River Grove's financial decision will allow us to be able to use our debt reserve fund to cover the deficit this year while still keeping a near 10% balance going forward.

5.1.1 November and December 2020 Approvals

Motion to approve financial statements by Beck. Second by Hong. All in favor. Financials approved.

5.1.2 Staff Stipend Goals - at previous meetings, the board had considered a proposal from Goodson

to give staff additional stipends to compensate them for their additional work this year. This would happen in April or May. However, given the financial strain the school is under this year, the financial committee is waiting to see if that will be possible.

6.0 Director's Report: Drew Goodson

- Goodson provided updates on current enrollment for 20-21 and new applications received for 21-22.
 - 61 total applications for next year, which is 9 higher than last year. 44 applications for kindergarten. Some families are applying with the intent to move to Marine if they are accepted. There are also families that held back incoming kindergarteners this year, due to COVID, but will enroll next year.
- There is currently a roof replacement project underway on campus at the commons. River Grove also secured an Iso-Aire purifier that will be used in the room used for daycare.
- River Grove will be hiring some new staff for 2021.

6.1.1 PTO Report

- Breena Slivik provided an update on recent PTO meetings.
 - Only two people attended the last meeting. The PTO sponsored a staff-building activity before the holidays, sponsored a tree for the Marine Enchanted Forest, and organized the merchandise pick-up.
 - PTO is currently planning for a Read-a-Thon this spring and a take-home craft kit for new families. Also hoping to plan a community sledding day.
 - PTO also recently sent a letter to May Twp families updating them on River Grove's CUP amendment request and encouraging them to contact their township board members and attend the upcoming meeting.
 - Jessica Hansen and Annie Beck thanked the PTO for the gifts for teachers.

7.0 Old Business

7.1 May Township Conditional Use Permit Updates

- River Grove submitted a CUP amendment request to May Twp to increase the school's enrollment limit to allow for two sections of each grade (300 students). Last Thursday, the township board held a pre-hearing to review the CUP components including traffic study, where families live that attend Grove, status of septic inspections, and safety plans.
- Next will be a planning commission meeting on Jan. 28. There will be a public comment opportunity and parents are encouraged to attend and speak.
- If the CUP amendment request is denied or delayed, we will need to turn away some of the students applying to attend River Grove next year.
- May Twp has 60 days since Dec. 10 to make a decision and is allowed to extend for another 60 days after that, if needed. That could mean early April by the time we have a decision.

8.0 New Business

8.1 2021-2022 Class Sizes

- River Grove is currently expecting openings for 20 new students, all in Kindergarten, next year if May Twp does not approve the CUP amendment request.
- Staff are currently recommending that we offer enrollment for only 1 section of kindergarteners next year and consider opening a second section later if it becomes possible. This would also give us a better idea of which families actually decide to enroll. A lot of families apply to multiple schools and eventually decide to turn down openings at Grove when offered.
- After May Twp. makes a decision on the CUP amendment, River Grove could decide to open

a second section of Kindergarten or accept more students for the older grades. Unfortunately, it could be as late as April before the board is able to do this and we might have to turn away families that chose to homeschool in 20-21 and want to come back in 21-22. Goodson encouraged May Twp. families to contact their officials and voice their support for River Grove and the CUP amendment request.

- Motion to approve staff recommendation as stated and add one section of kindergarten in 21-22. Motion by Beck. Second by Ost. All in favor. Motion approved.

8.2 2021-2022 School Calendar

- Proposal to start school before Labor Day on Aug. 30. MEA will no longer be happening in 2021, so Grove is proposing a shorter break in October, but not a full week. Spring break March 7-11 would be the same at District 834. Staff will be requesting board approval for the calendar at the February board meeting.

9.0 COVID Response and Learning Model Changes: Goodson

- The current number of positive cases per 10,000 county population is 44.49, which is down from a high of 159 in Nov/Dec when the school moved to full distant learning.
- Based on the initial guidance provided by the state at the beginning of the school year, this would put Grove in the category where it would be safe to return to hybrid in-person learning. However, it is still higher than the rate recommended by the CDC for safe return to school (that would be 20/10,000).
- However, on Dec. 17, Governor Walz announced that these guidelines would no longer apply and elementary schools are now encouraged to return to in-person learning with the incorporation of additional safety measures.
 - The State Dept. of Health has determined that children are less likely to contract and spread the COVID virus.
 - Changes to safety protocols: recommended bi-weekly COVID testing; face shields for teachers and staff; 3ft of distancing between student; phased return to school.
 - Grove teachers and staff are expected to receive vaccines by the end of February but not yet.
 - Nearby district and charter schools are planning to reopen following a phased approach, with k-2 coming back beginning Jan. 19 and 3-5 coming back two weeks later in February.
 - Staff survey: There are a mix of responses. Some want to remain fully distant; others want to come back fully in person. Not many want to go back to hybrid due to the difficulty in implementation.
 - Family survey: 5 students requested a move from DL to on campus; 5 requested a move from on-campus to DL.
 - Staffing/operations: Grove has job postings open for gen ed and spEd paras. Transportation - we need to be able to maintain 50% capacity only. Megan Lapos, school nurse, is confident that Grove can implement the recommended testing protocol.
 - Tentative proposal:
 - Jan. 27-29 (W-F) - off school, prep/grading days
 - Feb. 1: K-2 return to campus (M-Th)
 - Feb. 16: 3-6 return to campus (M-Th)
 - Commit to continuing this schedule until the end of the school year. Students may return to 5 days per week after spring break or remain 4/days per week for the rest of the year.
 - Why? It's in the best interest of students and would meet the desire of most parents. It is in line with what other schools are doing. Waiting 1-2 weeks to resume would get us closer to the time when vaccines will be available for teachers. MDH and MDE feel confident that it is safe to return young kids to school and recommended by Michael Olsterholm and American

Academy of Pediatrics.

○ Board member questions and concerns:

- Beck - need to consider the reality of trying to maintain a 6ft distance with students when it is winter and they need help with winter clothing, etc .
- Miller - need to consider the reality that we might encounter the same operational concerns as previously due to quarantine recommendations. May need to hire additional staff to cover these shortages when they occur. Should we push back the opening day even later.
- Ost - does the school anticipate any families deciding to move to distance learning if we go back fully in person? Goodson - maybe. They have considered hiring a third distance learning teacher, if needed.
- Goodson - he gets calls from parents every single day asking when the school will reopen. We can't "remain on an island" for too long.
- Miller - it's true that the surrounding districts are re-opening, but they can also draw staff from the middle and high schools to help cover shortages and we can't.
- Hansen - do we have applications for the para position?
- Goodson - yes. He is also confident that parents will answer the call for paid support positions if needed. SpEd support also needs to be worked out before we return to in person. We might have less staffing need if we're returning to fully in person instead of hybrid.
- Hansen - should we consider beginning on Feb. 1 instead of Feb. 8?
- Dochniak - should we consider shifting our current staff if there are unequal class sizes or a big change in the number of students choosing in-person vs distance.
- Goodson - we did send parents an email with a survey to try to gauge how many shifts might happen.
- Dochniak - St. Paul Schools are planning to reopen on Feb. 1 and she is recommending that Grove does as well. They will be reopening 5 days a week. About 1/3 of families are opting to remain in distance learning.
- Hong - was initially reluctant to send her child to school fully in-person due to uncertainties related to health. Now feels more confident it is safe due to updated health guidelines. Other schools have remained fully in person throughout the fall and many of our parents are at a breaking point. Could we move forward with an intent to begin on Feb. 1 and then push it back to Feb. 8 if there are a large number of families wanting to shift to distance learning.
- Hansen - would prefer to plan on Feb. 8 from the get-go.
- Dochniak - if we wait a week to resume, there should be a convincing reason why. Does the school have funds to hire an additional distance learning teacher? We're already at a deficit.
- Goodson - there could be some families that only feel comfortable with hybrid, but his instinct is that most are comfortable with shifting from hybrid to fully in-person. Those that are in distance learning will probably choose to remain that way.
- Ost - one parent did contact her with concerns about how large the class sizes will be if the school re-opens fully in person.
- Goodson - Ele can send out a follow-up email to parents and ask them to respond by next week Monday.
- Miller - tell parents our intent is to return on Feb. 1, barring unforeseen circumstances.
- Ost - are we still giving families the possibility to switch learning modes after spring break?
- Goodson - that was the original plan, but we may have problems if there are a lot of

distance learning families that want to come back in April and it dramatically affects staffing.

- Dochniak - could we wait to make a decision on what happens in April based on how much shifting might happen in this round?
- How much difference does a week make? Hong: We're talking about Feb. 1 vs Feb. 8 for the younger kids, but it would be Feb. 16 or Feb. 23 for grades 3-6. Hansen & Beck - a large number of teachers aren't comfortable returning to school fully in person yet. Pushing back the start date would get us closer to the vaccine. Miller - we need to remember too that the vaccine requires two shots and people won't be fully immunized until a month after their first shot. Hansen - would feel more comfortable if we wait a week for her own comfort. .

Motion by Beck to adopt the staff recommendation for learning mode change but with start dates shifted back to Feb. 8 and 23, respectively. Second by Hansen. Voting aye - Hong, Ost, Miller. Voting nay - Dochniak, DeCorsey. Motion passes.

10.0 Next Board of Directors Meeting: Tuesday, February 16, 2021.

11.0 Adjournment - Meeting adjourned by Chair Miller at 8:22pm.