

MINUTES
VSWEA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REGULAR MEETING
WEDNESDAY, February 3, 2021
VIA [Zoom](#)

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Gregory Schneider (GS) – President

John Tanner (JT)

April Sauer (AS) – Secretary

Danielle Martinez (DM)

Dan Franks (DF) – Treasurer

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

The President, Treasurer, and Secretary were present and a quorum was reached.

GUESTS

Invitees of the Board:

Frank Mirizio (FM)

Liz Beaven (LB)

Michelle Kratzer (MK)

Members of the public present via Zoom/Registration through Google Forms:

- Masako Gardner
- Susan Kerr
- Becky King

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- Jim King
- Laura Slayton-Garcia
- Tammy Lopez
- Jamie
- JJ
- Kim Baker
- Jill Thomas
- Packer Family
- Crystal Lee
- Debbie Allen
- Sarah Baize
- Barb
- Deirdre Egan
- Nick Casura
- Kristen Ziegenbein
- Dru Smith-Crain
- Colleen Pope
- Harper Rose
- Laure Heaney
- Helena Moriarty
- Megan
- Gina Limesand
- Sami Rank
- Deb
- Heather Sullivan
- Heather Bayles
- Jean Falconburg

OPENING VERSE / INTRODUCTIONS

Meeting was called to order at 6:32pm. GS welcomed the public to the meeting, read the opening verse, and reviewed meeting procedures.

The Board members introduced themselves along with FM--Executive Director, MK—Parent Council Chair, and LB—President of the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education.

EDUCATION

GS Gave brief introduction to LB from the Alliance for Public Waldorf Education.

LB Would love to make her presentation a bit interactive and asks that we interrupt her as needed. DMS has been around for a long time. The Alliance hasn't worked much with DMS

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faculty. The first Waldorf school was in 1928. For a long time, Waldorf meant independent. Until the 1990's, they were all independent schools with not a great deal of oversight. During that time, Waldorf schools developed a culture in terms of looks, feel, etc. Definitions of what is and isn't Waldorf happened during that time. There are varying degrees of Waldorf education and people commit at different levels. In the 1980's people began discussing how to make Waldorf schools public. Charter legislation was passed, and it was relatively easy to get a charter approved. Most were focused on access, equity, and justice. Most Waldorf public schools were started by alumni or teachers. Public Waldorf education right now is primarily charters.

LB Schools that switched from independent to public had interesting strengths and challenges. It wasn't always understood what accountability would look like for a charter. There can be some challenges navigating in the public sphere. The Alliance was formed as a protective gesture. The Alliance has roughly 50 schools involved. We have an annual conference. We have some curriculum alignment with Common Core. We are a largely volunteer organization because we think this work really matters. Making Waldorf education available is really important. We are not an accreditor, nor do we do oversight. We do have a set of Core Principles, and to be a member we ask that schools follow these. 7 Core Principles of the Alliance have some overlap to AWSNA. Briefly reviewed Alliance Core Principles. There will be articles coming out soon reviewing the conference that was just had. Discussed DMS background with the Alliance. Encourages school biography work. Why it was founded, who founded it, what the goals were, what are the patterns of challenges and strengths? Why was the switch made to the public sector? What are our goals, and what is our identity as a school?

LB What have we been doing since March? And how are the children doing? How are they really doing? What does public Waldorf look like virtually? We've spent twenty years saying stay off screens, and now we're saying you have to do school on screens. How do we language that? How do we make sense of that? What about accountability? What about the young ones? Reviewed a lot of questions and how they fit with our guiding principles. The key is about connection. How are we maintaining a feeling of connection? Parent evenings? Many issues of equity and learning have emerged. Accountability to authorizers, health and safety, to our mission/charter, to parents/children in regards to progress. Asked about our current school situation.

GS Reviewed benchmarks and that we are now in virtual.

LB We need to abandon the idea that when we go back to school it'll be the same. It's not going to be the same. One of the questions we have is about early childhood. We have seen wonderfully creative work from early childhood. Teachers are tired. They have been heroic, and they're tired. Parents have been doing an extraordinary juggling act. What does Waldorf look like in the public with this pandemic?

GS Since you ended on the virtual method of teaching, could you share some examples of good Waldorf teaching?

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LB We have a members only group where teachers can discuss ideas. These teachers started a family project. They had themes and whole family engagement. Amazing middle and upper grade activities around pandemics. Engaging young people in being historians and looking up previous pandemics. With younger children it's been a balance of on screen and off screen, but there are varying opinions. Storytime works well on screen. Teachers singing while muting children works. One thing that has worked really well is that teachers have been able to share their lives in a way they never have before. We now know their pets and their homes. Circle works well on Zoom. You have to know your students well. Craft kits that go home on a regular basis. Baking activities. From the beginning until now it has been an amazing transformation. It was a creative challenge—we're stuck with this, but now what do we do? Free sharing of resources and ideas has been wonderful.

GS Asked questions regarding access to members portal.

LB She will check on access for FM and our staff.

FM From the beginning of the pandemic the thought process was "this is for just a little while," so that's the part that I think has really hit everyone. This is not for a little while, and that has caused consternation for everyone. Could you solve that for us?

LB There was no possibility to plan for this or prepare for it. If we're honest—I call it action research. There will be findings coming out of this. We will know education differently after this. Internet connections became important. And then we had the layering of "This isn't Waldorf. We don't do this." Teachers grieved for what was lost and the impact of the children. But children need us. So adaption—how do we do this in the best way possibly that has integrity and puts the needs of the children in the center? Would EC choose virtual classrooms? No, but they did it really well. One of the things this has done is it's forced us to give up certainty. How do we do this differently without driving everyone into the ground? Even if we're all open again in the fall, it's going to reverberate for a long time. There's a lot to consider next year. I think the key was we had to get past "we don't want to do this," and we're not all there yet.

GS There's an ongoing debate of what is Waldorf. How in the public sector do you message this? "This is what we aspire to, but this is how we are doing it."

LB Waldorf is those 7 principles. It is based on the work of Rudolf Steiner. Steiner's work is relational. It really says that teachers matter. The origins of the schools were about social change—strong social goals. Waldorf aspires to be for any child. Waldorf has a goal of collaborative leadership that tried to put the pedagogy into the hands of the teachers. Waldorf says we're all learning together. It is education for change. A lot of the stuckness is usually around school culture.

GS We are currently trying to reorient ourselves and answer the questions you've asked tonight.

LB I've felt helpless. I would love to help. We are not alone in this. She's aware that we have Joan and Peter as shepherds. There is no requirement for a teacher or a parent to ascribe to a certain set of beliefs or practices or have membership in anthroposophy. This is important.

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Some groups may be studying anthroposophy, and that is an individual choice. This is where we can get into trouble and not just in public schools. Teachers need to work on skills of observation, reflective practices, and here are some tools to help you with that. We have to be conscious of the language we are using. Is our language inclusive or is it off-putting? Is the language appropriate for the public realm and does it say who you are?

AS Shared about reading the school's charter and wanting what was written in those pages. DMS could still live up to its potential, but it's important as you said to learn from our history. You mentioned some exercises we could do to keep our school's history. Could you share those ideas with us? I think it will help us to move forward and toward the goals and ideals found in the charter.

LB Absolutely. It's very enlivening. I'd be happy to send some things if you're interested. Building a timeline. Who was there? Who were the founders? Who held the thread? Wouldn't it be lovely if we did this work all the time. It's often done when there's a crisis. It's very informative. It's Greek—know thyself.

FM Has an appointment with Joan and Peter. I don't know what I don't know. Can you lead me to what I should be asking?

LB You would be helped by a brief overview of the history. Who were the key players? Who would they recommended you speak to? Why did the school move to a charter? Start with the story. What's the story from Desert Marigold from these two perspectives? I could be wrong, but I'm looking at this from the perspective of the Alliance. What caused the school to become isolated? You are not doing this alone, folks. You could all do with some talking partners. Start with who you've got and ask them their perspective of the school how we arrived to this point.

GS Thanked LB for her presentation and time.

LB You've got a good school. You're doing important work and have children depending on you. Nothing is normal. There's a certain freedom in that. Let me know how I can help you.

PARENT COUNCIL UPDATE

GS Invited MK to share an update from Parent Council.

MK Meetings have switched to the second Tuesday of the month. 2/9 is the next meeting. Reading Waldorf: A Family Guide 2nd edition. Invited everyone to attend book club on Mondays 8pm. Garden Workday had a good turnout about 6 people. We got a lot of jobs done. Thanked Mr. Schantz for helping set that up. Parent Council funding requests are due April 1st. Any projects or teaching trainings could be requested at the start of March. Wanted to know if Parent Council could help in any way with the school-wide contemplation exercise.

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GS Absolutely. We are in the preliminary stages, but we will absolutely have Parent Council be a part of it.

MK Haven't received a financial report in several months. Hoping for an update soon.

GS Perhaps that is on me. Priscilla has sent me those statements, and I will forward them to you. I'm so sorry.

BUDGET AND FINANCE

Fundraising

GS I understand there was a meeting with DM, AS, and FM.

DM She did offer to discount her fee. She shared some ideas for bigger ticket fundraising. She also said that she could write a grant to cover her fees if necessary if our fundraiser fails in any way. We have appreciated Parent Council, and now we need to do some fundraising and get into some deeper pockets and outside pockets.

FM What if we could agree to a certain percentage?

DM That would be worth discussing. She's done some pricing like that before.

GS That would be great. If we're winning; she's winning. My only hesitation right now based on her proposal, is should we ask around for other people? How quickly should we jump into this?

DM I'm hoping to ask our community to see who has some skills in this area.

GS I suppose we could send out a survey on Parent Square. I don't think waiting two weeks will be an issue.

AS Asked various questions regarding fundraising and getting other bids for a contracted employee and what our obligations are for posting job opening and hiring.

GS It's not an employee of the school, so it's a bit different. It's been our practice to get a couple bids. DM, if you could go back to ask a contingency? AS, can you put together a google form to survey the community?

AS DM, can you send me the questions you had in mind and then I can put the survey together?

DM Yes, I'll do that.

GS Discussed Tax Credit and Educational Investment Campaign reminders that went out last week. Hoping to send out more reminders. We've received about \$40,000 this year, but we can

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easily reach \$60-80 if all families contribute. If you haven't contributed this year, please do so. There's a \$2100 gap between what the state gives us and the model we use. Anything you can give, we will greatly appreciate and put to good use.

Enrollment Update

GS Invited FM to give an enrollment update.

FM We got about 7-8 kids, but we lost 1 or 2. We are back above. We're at 255 with kinder counting as half.

GS I think that's the highest I've seen this year.

FM We do have a chance to take a couple more. We wouldn't get funding for those kids, but we would have them for next year. I don't know why so many people are moving to AZ right now, but they are so that's nice. And they're coming from Waldorf schools. All of the kids we've taken in the last weeks have come from Waldorf schools.

GS For the 100th day—there was only one student absent.

FM I sent out a reminder for the 100th day, and families listened, so thank you.

Proposal for Staff Training

GS A while ago, the board discussed some training for faculty and staff, and Teresa sent us a resource. She sent us a proposal for about \$5-6000. Did we get something more specific in writing?

FM I haven't heard back from her, but there are two activities. This is just for staff. This is separate from the contemplation activity.

Lawn Mower Proposal

GS Steve Pawlo sent us an alternative proposal for a lawn mower. We had approved a new mower purchase, but it wasn't purchased. Steve found a different mower. It costs more.

FM The good news on that purchase was that there's a five year payment plan.

GS moved to approve the purchase of the lawn mower based on the Bingham Equipment Company for \$11764.06 financed at 0% over 60 months. DF second. The following discussion took place:

JT While I agree that it's a good deal, I think the addition of funds is too high right now.

DM Did we ask the community for a mower donation?

Gs This isn't a home lawn mower.

DM It might be worth asking. We're surrounded by golf courses.

GS What do you think FM?

FM The one we have is shot. It will cut down the man hours needed to take care of the grounds. ASU had this and another company—they are used but given to the company. It's a commercial mower. It'll get the job done quickly. This frees them up on time.

DM How do we get on this list to get mower donations like this?

DF Do we know how much time is spent mowing?

More discussion around the mower specifications.

JT Would like to find another way to fund this. I don't think we should pull it from the general fund at this time.

No further discussion. Unanimous vote in opposition: GS, DF, JT, AS, DM. **Motion Does Not Pass.**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR UPDATE

Plans for Growing the High School

FM The ideas stemmed from high school teachers. We discussed what would keep students from leaving and what would bring students from the outside. We discussed athletics. Smaller sports that we could feasibly do—golf, tennis, chess, frisbee golf, volleyball. The other thing is fine arts. Right now we don't have a theater, music, strings. We do a lot of productions normally, which Covid has shut down. We want those programs in full swing. Extracurricular programs that are fun and challenging. Then we discussed academics—sustainability—our campus is biosphere 3. We have natural resources on campus we could use. We could work with South Mountain Community College to find donations even in terms of guest speakers. The other idea was about robotics. We may be putting together a robotics class. Those are some ideas to present to junior high parents as they prepare to choose a high school. We need to make a flyer for our neighboring schools and for our school. Parents he spoke to were excited about these ideas. We have the most room for growth in the high school. We could have 50 more students in the high school, so we are really brainstorming what to do next.

GS That all sounds extremely exciting. Thank you for the general updates you sent.

DM I didn't hear soccer.

FM Yes, we will keep soccer and everything else we had before.

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COVID-19

GS Reviewed Maricopa County Guidance on the AZDHS site. The recommended delivery model is still virtual. Numbers are going down. We hope that continues so we can return to hybrid learning. If this continues, we should be back to hybrid soon. FM, is there anything we need to know about?

FM I'll take a moment to brag about our staff. Our teachers and staff have been heroic in the extra effort to make this all work. How do you do woodworking and eurythmy on zoom, but our teachers are figuring it out. Our teachers are tired. This is getting old. Wow to our teachers. They do an amazing job, and they work really hard. They are doing everything they can.

GS On behalf of the board, thank you to all of our teachers. Discussed Governor Ducey's comment on not funding empty seats. Do you know any specifics about that?

FM They cannot change the funding for this school year. Teachers have contracts, and that's the law. I think this is more of a threat right now because he's frustrated. We're all frustrated. But I haven't seen anything official on that.

COMMUNITY

GS FM mentioned his meeting with Peter and Joan. I have a follow up meeting with them as well to talk about their view of the school and the ideas they have for a school-wide contemplation exercise. We have a town hall this Saturday, 2/6 at 3pm with FM, DM, myself, and Christie Martin. It will be a good place for back and forth conversation. You do need to register to attend that.

BOARD PROCEDURES

Approval of Minutes

GS Moved to approve the 01/20/21 regular meeting minutes. JT second. No further discussion. Unanimous vote in favor: GS, DF, JT, AS, DM. **Motion passes.**

School Calendar

GS FM sent out a school calendar to the board for approval. Any discussion?

AS The calendar added MLK day and Good Friday this time around, so it looks good.

GS moved to approve the calendar for the 2021-2022 school year circulated by FM. DF second. No further discussion. Unanimous vote in favor: JT, GS, AS, DF, DM. **Motion passes.**

Board Growth

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AS Discussed Board Build website. It offers trainings for professional individuals who would like to volunteer on a board, and it offers boards an opportunity to post board member openings. Individuals can match to organizations. It's a good way to solicit interest in board members outside of our community. I've made an account and posted an opening for our board, so now we'll see if we get any interest.

GS Moved to adjourn. DF second. No further discussion. Unanimous vote in favor: JT, GS, AS, DF, DM. **Motion passes.**

JT read the closing verse.

CLOSING VERSE

Meeting was adjourned at 8:33pm.

Prepared by AS on 02.03.2021.