

FINAL

Centre Learning Community Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes: Special Meeting

Date/Time/Place: Tues. Oct. 26, 2010/ 6:30 p.m. / Centre Learning Community – Big Room

Trustees Present:

Amanda Dietrick, Student Rep. (Teacher)
Ron Boyles (alt. for T. Daher) Comm. Rep.
Carl Cotner, Community Rep.
Andrea Kennedy, Teacher Rep.
Brian Rowan, Teacher Rep.

Lisa Maras, Family Rep.
Jackie Dillon-Fast, Community Rep.
Patty Webb (alt. for G. Boldt) Family Rep.
Katherine Watt, Community Rep.

Public Present:

Kosta Dussias, Business Manager
Pat Hunt, Educational Compliance Officer
Mark Toci, Teacher
Morgan Ilgen, Teacher
Donna Fischer, Teacher
Kelly Kennedy, Teacher

Siobhan Lynam, Teacher
Jim Maras, Parent
Marie-Jeanne Cotner, Parent
Nicholas Cotner, Student
Sean Cotner, Student

- I. Jackie Dillon-Fast called the meeting to order.
- II. Kosta Dussias presented information about the 2009-2010 Annual Report:
 - A. It was submitted to the state electronically at the end of July 2010, accepted by the State College Area School District on Sept. 1, 2010. The PDE electronic filing system won't reopen for new filings until summer 2011.
- III. Page by page review of Annual Report began. Copies of the "Integrated Concerns" document and list of questions about supplementary documents attached hereto.
- IV. **Page 2.** Trustees asked about the number of staff.
Answer: 10 full-time teaching staff (8 classroom, 2 special education)
11 part-time teaching staff (rotating cast across three trimesters)
4 full-time administrative staff
Business Manager
Educational Compliance Officer
Secretary
Specials/Afterschool Coordinator

- V. **Page 6.** Trustees asked about the “Strategic Planning Committee.”

Answer: There is no formal Strategic Planning Committee with a specific membership, regular meeting schedule and records of agendas, minutes and strategic plans documents. Although traditional public schools must write strategic plans every six years, state law does not dictate how the Strategic Planning process is supposed to occur in charter schools; it’s left to the discretion of each charter school.

At CLC, the Annual Report is the Strategic Plan for the school. It’s developed and reviewed informally, primarily by teaching and administrative staff, during meetings throughout the school year and during the summer. To meet the educational requirements of state and federal law, including PSSA testing benchmarks and the Adequate Yearly Progress requirements of No Child Left Behind, the Annual Report strategic plan component lists three “Goals” (Reading, Math and Attendance) along with activities (including informal meetings with parents) designed to meet those goals and assess progress toward meeting those goals. [NCLB calls for 100% passing rates by 2014.]

Trustees expressed concerns about the lack of documentation regarding strategic planning in prior years’ minutes, while acknowledging that the past is not within the current Board’s control. Trustees also expressed an interest in increasing parental access to the strategic planning process. Staff (Trustees and non-Trustees) pointed out that, due to variations in record-keeping styles, a lack of documentation does not necessarily mean the activity didn’t occur. Trustees also expressed concern about the wording of the Annual Report’s “Strategic Planning Committee” section being misleading, open to interpretation as a formal committee although in practice it functions informally.

Discussions about Future Action: The Board may formalize the process by adopting new governing provisions for strategic planning. At a minimum, the Board should appoint two Trustees to serve on the Strategic Planning Committee.

- VI. **Page 9.** Trustees asked about parental notification about PSSAs.

Answer: The School Calendar lists the dates, highlighted in yellow. Tests are not scheduled for Mondays, because kids don’t tend to perform well on Mondays. Letters are sent home to parents a few weeks before the testing.

- VII. **Page 18.** Trustees asked about “portfolios” of student work as presented to parents.

Answer: Portfolios at CLC may be paper folders but more likely student websites containing the work done throughout the year. Student work is also presented during

end-of-unit events open to parents (demonstrations, museums, etc.), and during parent-teacher conferences available upon request.

Discussions about Future Action: Given CLC's technology orientation, it would be good to see the "online portfolios/student websites" referenced in next year's Annual Report.

VIII. **Page 18.** Trustees asked about the peer review process.

Answer: CLC's peer review process is unique. Most schools have principals conduct staff reviews, and most teachers fight efforts to implement peer review, but CLC teachers "embrace" the process as initially intimidating but very helpful overall because it creates an environment in which the teachers can push each other to improve teaching skills and strategies. Process involves teacher observations, self-assessments and peer assessments using a standard rubric form, followed by a mid-year meeting in which the reviewed teacher presents a portfolio of teaching work for the first semester and then the assessments are discussed with a view to improving teaching quality for the second semester. Same process begins again approximately in April for the end of the school year, although the timing of the mid-year and end-of-year reviews may vary depending on the academic calendar each school year (i.e., in-service days, staff meetings, etc.). Process sometimes results in numerical scores, sometimes in more "holistic" format: teachers revise the process from time to time. For all teachers, Pat Hunt fills out and files a Form 5501 "Employee Rating Form" with the PDE.

The staff may use peer review results to recommend pay raises and renewal/non-renewal of contracts to the Board of Trustees at the end of the academic year.

IX. **Page 20.** Trustees asked about Board elections in spring 2010, expressing concern that the paragraph didn't accurately represent the sequence of events.

Answer: Kosta Dussias worded the paragraph to give an overview and permit readers to ask for more detail if they wanted more detail, acknowledging that the complexity of the situation and his short deadline made it difficult to summarize events in a few sentences, adding that he would welcome more "eyes" editing the Annual Report before submission. Patty Webb noted that precisely "rendering a living process into text" is extremely difficult if not impossible, adding "Undertaking this kind of report is really a dance – with people shooting at your feet." Carl Cotner and others noted that one of his main concerns is that people who try to improve how things are done have been attacked as "saboteurs" rather than validated as sincerely concerned about the overall strength and quality of the school.

Discussions about Future Action: Board would like to develop a new, more inclusive drafting process for next year's Annual Report.

- X. **Page 21.** Trustees asked about Roberts Rules of Order, administration's efforts to educate Board on legal issues.

Answer: Administrators try to assist Board with legal questions, but may not always have accurate information to share. Pat Hunt's specialty is educational compliance, rather than charter school governance.

Discussions about Future Action: Board will schedule training session with experts who specialize in Charter School law to obtain up-to-date, comprehensive information about Board's roles, responsibilities etc.

- XI. **Page 21.** Trustees asked about parent surveys.

Answer: Staff sends out links to online surveys twice a year, once in the middle, once at the end. Response rate is better from students than from parents. Kosta Dussias has the Google documents available for Trustees interested in seeing compiled responses. Trustees see survey results as a good tool for upcoming recruitment and retention discussions, and are interested in finding ways to contribute questions to upcoming surveys before the surveys go out to students and parents.

Discussions about Future Action: Trustees would like to see the survey results from past years. Brian Rowan coordinates the survey process. Trustees may forward proposed questions for the mid-year survey to him, no later than mid-December. Survey will be on the December agenda.

- XII. **Page 21.** Trustees asked about "head teacher" designation, organizational structure.

Answer: There are two head teachers at CLC – Mark Toci and Donna Fischer. Their role is mostly related to mentoring other teachers. Overall, the school has a diffuse authority system, not clearly hierarchical.

Discussions about Future Action: Board would like to put together an organizational chart to make it more clear who is responsible for handling which types of problems as they arise.

- XIII. **Page 21-22.** Trustees asked about Community Advisory Council and other items related to community involvement.

Answer: The Community Advisory Council item was inadvertently left in the Annual Report from prior years, but the council has not met in recent years. Administrators are interested having Trustees forward relevant information to Kosta Dussias during the year and read the Annual Report prior to submission to catch errors. There has not yet been an open house this year (2010-2011), apart from the “Meet and Greet” at Back to School Night, but there was one prior to 2009-2010 year. There have not been monthly “face to face” meetings between parents and teachers for several years, but there is some interest in converting Friends of CLC (currently parents-only) back to a parent-teacher organization.

- XIV. **Page 23.** Trustees asked about a potential conflict of interest for a prior Trustee.
Answer: No conflict existed. Trustee worked for a different bank, not the bank used by CLC.
- XV. **Page 26.** Trustees asked about seeing copies of Job Descriptions.
Answer: Job Descriptions provided to Trustees by Kosta Dussias via e-mail.
- XVI. **Page 27.** Trustees asked about “fifth and sixth grade students...” phrases.
Answer: That was true under the original bylaws and charter, but not under the current bylaws.
- XVII. **Page 29.** Trustees asked about exit interviews.
Answer: Formal exit interviews aren’t done when students leave CLC and are not required. Administrators do keep an Excel spreadsheet listing dates and reasons for withdrawal. Lisa Maras will forward the spreadsheet to the rest of the Board.
- XVIII. **IDEA Discipline Chart.** Trustees asked if it’s been used.
Answer: Not recently – no children fall under its provisions currently.. The flowchart comes from Special Education policies established in the 1970s to set disciplinary guidelines for children with IEPs.
- XIX. **Special Education.** Faculty Leadership Council doesn’t have regular meetings, membership, records etc. It’s an as-needed committee comprising Mark Toci, Donna Fischer, Pat Hunt and the special education teachers, that meets to discuss emerging issues for specific students. The “Centre Intermediate Unit #10” runs educational programs for teachers. Trustees could participate if they wanted to. IEP meetings include student, parents, regular teachers, special education teachers and ECO.
- XX. **Professional Development.** All teachers’ participation in continuing education is registered with the PDE online.

XXI. **Induction Reports.** New teachers have to have mentors to obtain Level 2 certification. The induction report is a form filled out by the new teacher and mentor to document the mentoring, which is filed in the personnel folder.

XXII. **Wellness Policy:** Trustees asked about whether CLC has a “School Health Council.” Answer: Not yet. State College Area School District provides nutritious lunches, but CLC Board needs to establish a council to oversee wellness policies.

XXIII. **Miscellaneous.** Disciplinary information is reported to the state twice a year.

XXIV. **DISCUSSION & DECISION.** After a short discussion about the feasibility, risks, and benefits of different Annual Report revision approaches, the Board straw-pollled several proposals and unanimously (9-0) adopted the following proposal.

It is proposed that the board and administration work together to revise the existing text in the 2009-2010 Annual Report document based on the clarifications achieved tonight. This revised 2009-2010 Annual Report document will be made available to the rechartering districts if clarifications are requested during the rechartering process.

XXV. **ADJOURNMENT.** Meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.
Next regular meeting November 17, 6:30 p.m. at CLC.