



# DISCOVERY

## CHARTER SCHOOL

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Discovery Charter School Board Meeting

Wednesday, May 17th, 2023

Lisa Gonzalez called the meeting to order at 6:34

Ryan Schoffelmeer, Lisa Gonzalez, Lori Knox-Lindsay, Suzanne Radzik, Kelly Hunt Vanderfliet, Jessica Lynch, Tiana Clark, and Mylese Tucker were present.

Miranda Wilkering was not present

Discovery – Ernesto Martinez and Deb Weller were present

Gabrielle Group – Kiki Kourkosis was present

Mission was read by Jessica Lynch.

### OUR VISION:

An inclusive community that nurtures how to think, not what to think — one child at a time.

### OUR MISSION

Discovery Charter School will foster in its students the passion and curiosity necessary for lifelong learning. Students will develop the ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and excel academically. Through an integrated, place-based curriculum, our students will become stewards of their environment and community.

### Informational

Eighth Grade graduation at 6:30 pm in Portage

Thank you to the chaperones and teachers who went to DC

Financial Report by Kiki Kourkovic

Reviewed the Draft Budget

Reported strong cash position with the bulk of the funds coming from grant requests.

Small deficit this month, but still noting positive position year to date.

Stipends will be reflected in June, but we will still be in a strong cash position.

Consent Agenda

Mylese Tucker moved to accept consent agenda, seconded by Suzanne Radzik.

Unanimously passed.

Public Comment

Steven Moeller, Teacher : Summarized concerns about equitable pay that the staff raised following the last meeting. Many staff members were unsatisfied with what was said.

Why is it that Discovery administration is paid on a comparable scale to local schools, but teachers and staff are not?

Why does the administration receive several fringe benefits, such as the Board covering their ISTA retirement contribution, covering 100% of their healthcare premium and a monthly cell phone stipend, when their salary is already on an equitable level with local districts/charters?

Why would admin put any effort into finding a new health care provider when it does not affect them in any capacity?

Cell Phone Stipend: As stated at the meeting on Monday, staff do not qualify for a cell phone stipend at this time because we're not required to carry one.

How does that apply when we're on learning experiences and/or hikes? Staff are expected to communicate with chaperones and communicate with admin about any behavior issues and

concerns or in case of emergencies that may occur. If cell phones are not required, how can staff fulfill those responsibilities?

The board also asks for pictures of things happening in the classroom. We are using our cell phones as ways to document place-based educational opportunities in addition to the fun activities happening within our classrooms. It can't be said that phones are not required when we are asked to share these documents.

A majority of daily communication is sent via the Remind app or texting because teachers are often not checking their email multiple times.

Jenna Phelps Teacher: After the last meeting with staff to discuss the climate results, it's abundantly clear that salaries are a huge issue with staff. Why is the board so dismissive of this subject and so focused on strategic planning when your 1st goal should be that of keeping your staff? Keeping staff happy and feeling appreciated by paying them an equitable (living) salary should always come first.

In what ways has the board been transparent in regards to restructuring?

Why doesn't the board include the superintendent's employment agreement on the Discovery website?

How does the board know if the superintendent is meeting their goals?

If the goal is to stabilize administration, why was an administrator's 2-year contract voided prematurely to create a new administration team?

Is this part of the strategic planning?

Was this a Board of Directors decision or a superintendent's decision?

Why have there been at least 8 executive sessions with the same "Personnel Exception IC 5-14-1.5-6.1 (b) (9)"?

Can you please upload the February board minutes to the website?

Why is there limited discussion of substance at board meetings? The discourse of the public items voted on should happen at the public board meeting and not in email/text.

If the board takes a final action, such as eliminating positions or reprimanding a superintendent, doesn't the Indiana Open Door Law require this decision to be voted on at a public board meeting, even if discussed during an executive session?

Why are staff excluded from the finance committee?

The school finances should especially be transparent.

Duneland's budget along with their capital projects plan and itemized list of expenditures is available on their website.

Why would our staff not have access to our financial budget/statements?

If a staff advisory council was formed, how/who would a representative contact to get on the Board's monthly agenda?

Would a member of the advisory council be welcome to join the board? One vote would not change/influence policy. Six states in the U.S. REQUIRE a teacher to be on their charter school's executive board.

How are financial priorities decided?

How are conflicts of interest evaluated?

How do board members, or the board, decide when to get involved in conflicts when it is not about policy?

Erin Monroe, Teacher – Summarized questions involving the board, governing and policy.

Is the board expected to follow the same chain of command that staff is?

Are emails among staff members considered board business?

Can emails among board members be discussed in executive session?

What happens if, as a stakeholder, I disagree with the direction or decisions the board is making for the school?

Other school boards in this area are held accountable by the citizens they represent and are voted on during an election or appointed by an elected official.

Why can't Discovery stakeholders vote on executive board members/positions?

If the middle school is going to be held to a different/higher standard than the rest of the school & have a separate handbook, shouldn't administration be held to a different/higher standard and also have a handbook separate from all other employees?

If staff makes a request to administration, who then takes it to the board, and the board denies it stating there is no room in the budget - what happens then? Are there any further steps that I can take as an appeal after the board votes that it is not a necessary expenditure?

How are financial priorities decided?

How do the qualifications of the board members warrant these and other massive responsibilities?

Why was it advised by the school's lawyer not to add to the administrator's contract that the admin should not have sexual relationships with staff members?

Is it appropriate that the school's lawyer lives in close proximity to admin?

Is this a conflict of interest?

Is it appropriate for an admin to go directly to one board member regarding staffing needs?

Does one board member have the authority to informally dismiss staffing needs and requests?

Why can't staff complaints/concerns not be raised to the board anonymously?

If said concern relates to admin and admin are at the board meetings, staff are not likely to feel comfortable speaking up.

How can a safe process be created?

Is there a procedure for removal of board members?

How do staff go about requesting the removal of board members?

What if staff don't feel certain board members have their best interests at heart and wish for removal? What steps do you have in place for this?

As board members, do you consider close, personal relationships with admin appropriate?

Do you believe it is an appropriate role to be involved in PAC, the school board, and school athletics, all while maintaining a personal relationship with administration?

Item for Discussion

Strategic Planning tabled

Annual Report tabled

Budget

changes were made in the budget to add a Dean, Social Worker and Executive Director

Changes to text book reimbursement. State will provide reimbursement to the school directly with an ADM based allocation. We don't know the amount yet.

Suzanne Radzik moved to accept budget changes, Lisa Gonzalez seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Kiki Kourkovic excused herself from the meeting at 7:19

Executive Director Hiring Process

Select Staff and Board Members will be present.

Set Questions will be asked.

Self-assessment tabled.

Climate Survey results written by Dr. Halik and read by Kelly Hunt Vander Vliet.

April 7, 2023

Climate reflects the day-to-day quality of life within a school. It is how people feel about norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, quality of teaching, leadership, management, and governance regarding the daily operations of the school. The climate is reflected by the way people generally feel when they walk in the door for work each morning.

Culture is established over time as those things that have become known as past practice and traditions such as in the values, beliefs, behaviors, customs, and attitudes. These things are unwritten but have become the psychological contracts for the way of life within the school community.

School environments vary greatly because of age and/or physical appearance of the school building; by the students who attend the school; and the staff who work there.

More importantly, other factors that can affect a school's climate are class size, quality of instruction, curriculum, monitoring of student academic and behavioral progress, discipline and consequences, interpersonal relationships, leadership expectations, school board, politics, and the community.

It is important to note all stakeholders do not necessarily experience school climate in the same way. There will be variability in individual staff as to how they view it from their lens of reality. Interviews were conducted in small groups of four to seven people to collect general feelings about the way business is conducted within the school. The purpose of the audit was to find common themes that are felt by the majority school staff rather than any personal agenda of some individual staff who have an axe to grind about something or someone.

Schools often utilize a Climate Audit process to assess how teachers and support staff feel about their school. Climate audits provide a snapshot of data that can assist school leadership and governance teams with initial steps toward improving the quality of life within their school.

A Climate Audit was conducted at Discovery Charter School, Porter, Indiana on April 7, 2023, by Dr. James Halik, President and Founder, Compass-Keynote Consulting, LLC. Dr. Halik interviewed in small groups all teachers and support staff for twenty minutes. An identical list of predetermined questions was asked of everyone in each of the twenty-minute small group sessions. To protect the integrity of the audit process small groups were interviewed rather than individual interviews primarily to hold people accountable for their statements. Participants were deliberately not asked their name so they could speak openly knowing all comments would be kept anonymous. However, during introductions everyone was asked to share their position in the school, where they graduated High School, and how many years they have worked at the school.

Dr. Halik recommended some of the questions for the audit to avoid suspicion of a hidden agenda. It should be noted that the questions were discussed with the Board and Superintendent

of Schools prior to the audits. The questions were not distributed ahead of time to prevent participants from collaborating on their responses. A climate audit is a measure of how people feel at that moment when they hear a question for the first time. Audits of this nature are intentionally to be impromptu because it is how people feel that day and on most days about their job.

All responses to the questions were hand scribed by Dr. Halik as he listened during each of the interviews. Each response appears schools report as closely as is reasonably possible to the exact unedited words as they were spoken by each of those interviewed. Dr. Halik did not edit nor change their figure of speech but did capitalize, check spelling, and punctuate accordingly. Every staff member was given an opportunity to participate in the interview process. Voluntary participation for the school corporation was over ninety percent.

The following is a list of the questions asked of each participating group of teachers and support staff:

1. What is one word that best describes the climate (the way you feel when you get up to come to work every morning) for this school?
2. If you had one wish for this school what would that wish be (what would you change)?
3. What is the biggest obstacle that you face that keeps you from meeting the everyday needs of students?
4. How do you feel our staff is equipped to handle diversity, equity, and inclusion?
5. Is there something that you wish the administration and/or school board knew about your school that you believe they do not know or have forgotten?
6. Do you have any closing comments that you would like to share? Is there something you wished I would have asked you that I did not ask that you would like share (compliments and/or concerns)?

Dr. Halik was hired by and worked for the Board and Superintendent of Schools. He served as a committee of one to gather data that would be utilized by the Superintendent for the purpose of improving the climate of individual schools within the East Allen County Schools. Participants were promised anonymity and their comments would be reported confidentially to the Board and Superintendent of Schools.



To protect the integrity of this study all responses were mixed-up to prevent anyone from trying to match specific responses to individual participants names from the scheduled appointments; comments do not parallel to the times on the interview schedules. It would serve no good purpose to share publicly all individual comments. This Executive Summary should serve simply as a guide to begin the improvement process.

It quickly became apparent that the Discovery Charter School was a wonderful place to work. The climate audit was very positive. The most common comment at the conclusion of each audit session from most staff was “things are not perfect, but I would not want to work anywhere else.” This speaks volumes about the quality of life in community and how wonderful the school is for children. Stephen R. Covey reminds us “as good as we are how can we get even better?”

After reviewing all the individual comments shared during the climate audits several common themes became apparent. It is suggested that the leadership in the schools give thought and

have some discussion with audit participants regarding these issues. The climate reports for each of the individual schools should not be compared to one another. Though there are many similarities the differences in personalities involved are distinctly different. Strategies should be collaboratively developed to address the identified concerns. Staff should be made aware of how the administration plans to make changes that would improve climate and morale in the school. In no priority order the following is a list of the areas that should be addressed by the administration.

1. Common one-word adjectives use to reflect on the

schools and the school corporation

Schools:

Support Staff

Positives Concerns

a. Happy None stated

b. Excited

Schools:

Teachers

Positives Concerns

c. Happy a. Overwhelmed

d. Excited b. Hopeful

2. The one wish of staff

a. Support staff desire more training in many areas including better general orientation, technology, behavior management, and student restraints

b. Teachers desire a consistent salary schedule and higher salaries

c. Both special education and general education staff are hopeful for more staff all around

d. Update and add-on to the school; need more space, a gym, better restrooms, larger clinic, and newer technology

3. The biggest obstacles

a. There is inconsistent enforcement of rules, a lack of consequences and consistency

b. The need for someone who advocates for our best interest

c. The shortage of staff; the need for a social worker, Special Education Director, Dean of Students, and instructional assistants

4. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

a. There are staff who could use some training; we have someone on staff who is licensed in this area who could do the training

b. There is not much transparency and open discussion here about race, sexuality, pronouns, and diversity

c. Need clear policies on this topic; we are not prepared

5. School Board and Administration

a. Better communication, too many last minute things happening, miscommunication, and inconsistencies

b. Middle school here is weird: the disrespect, not managed well, more discipline, too much freedom, and needs more administrative supervision

c. There is a lot going on requiring staff to spend extra hours completing their work that distracts from personal time (overwhelming and need more planning time)

d. More support with special education students

e. The need for clear rules that are consistently enforced

6. Closing comments

a. I love teaching here, but I need to earn more money

b. The administration structure needs to be studied

c. The school is out of space and needs some renovation

d. The administration needs to begin punishing children who misbehave

e. Need clear expectations for both the students and staff

f. This is an amazing school and people look forward to coming to work

Culture of Care Policy

Tobacco Free Campus Policy

We want to officially be Tobacco free.

Ernesto drafted a policy including education for students caught with vaping devices or tobacco, also consequences for that behavior.

We want to Include car line in the policy.

Revised Mission statement

Decided to keep the original mission.

PD options to take a section and let teachers and students give ideas as to what those pieces mean and look like.

We want to get back to the original mission when Discovery was founded.

Matters for approval

Board meeting dates.

Suzanne Radzik moved to accept the dates, Ryan Schoffelmeer seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Cleaning Service Contract

Ernesto Martinez suggested going with the Bee Line Cleaning Service Contract for the 23-24 School year.

The cost will be slightly less than what we are currently paying.

Ryan Schoffelmeer moved to accept the contract and Jessica Lynch seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Math Curriculum

With staff input, Envision Math was chosen for the Math Curriculum.

Six Year commitment

Lisa Gonzalez asked if it would be beneficial to look at a different curriculum for Middle School. Deb Weller responded that Mr. Underwood likes Envision.

Lori Knox-Lindsay asked if we are reaching out to high schools to see what 9th grade math is looking like and are we in line with what will be expected of them? Mrs. Weller likes the idea and will look into it.

Tiana Clark asked what the deciding factors were for the choice that was made? Debra Weller explained the curriculum comes with practice workbooks, place based learning, exit tickets, and real world problems. It also comes with success maker that can be purchased additionally. She is also looking at Get More Math, in person PD, video PD for teachers. It can also be used for parents to help their students at home.

Lisa Gonzalez moved to accept Envision Math for the 23-24 school year and Ryan Schoffemeer seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Food Service Management Contract

We received one bid from Ceres.

It is yet unknown if lunch costs will remain the same.

The new bid was not much more than what we currently pay them.

The question of Styrofoam trays was brought up. Ernesto Martinez will check to see if there are other tray options when the dishwasher is down.

Tiana Clark asked if we proactively reach out to service companies? Ernesto Martinez said we post it publicly, but as a single school, we aren't that lucrative for companies.

Lisa Gonzalez moved to accept Ceres FSMC and Suzanne Radzik seconded. Unanimously passed.

Anti Bullying Policy.

Reviewed by Policy Committee

Diane and Deb Weller made a few changes

Kelly Hunt Vander Vliet moved to accept the Anti-Bullying Policy revisions and Suzanne Radzik seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Seclusion and Restraint Policy

Needed a policy separate from the Handbook

Mylese Tucker moved to accept the Seclusion and Restraint Policy and Lori Knox-Lindsay seconded.

Unanimously passed.

Dean Position

Counselor/Social Worker Position

Suzanne Radzik moved to add the Dean position and Counselor/Social worker position and Ryan Schoffelmeer seconded.

Unanimously passed.

School Report by Ernesto Martinez

562 Students.

Door wraps installed.

Waiting on Ellis for quote for an additional light on outside of the doors.

Waiting on numbers from HIRE to add another Key Fob to doors at Kid Stop.

Wooden post knocked down that needs to be replaced

140 swapped out batteries on Chromebooks and no problems with replacements.

June 15th bonuses

Received on Monday, the first of the long awaited IRS Notification. \$350,000 All in, 1.1 Million. 15% goes to firm that did the work. We'll need to make plans for the money!

Deb Weller Reported:

Diversity and Inclusion PD

Graduation and Field Day coming up

Kindergarten graduation

Mrs. Medley recertification for Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI)

Attending SEL conference for High ability and child abuse

Waiting for STAR results

K-5 Discipline report

15 detentions

2 in school suspensions

16 out of school suspensions

Middle School Discipline report

24 Detentions

6 in school suspensions

11 out of school suspensions

Working Groups Update

Development

Market in Portage first Friday of every month

Billboards

Tours

Ernesto Martinez emailed Landmark about updating the school sign, adding some blue to match the doors and stand out from the woods.

Development

Finance will be meeting to review the budget

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion

Kelly Hunt Vander Vliet and Lisa Gonzalez went to Valpo University Symposium. It would be beneficial to send kids next year.

Tiana Clark wants to expand the committee and include students.

Want to schedule a meeting for June, possibly before the Board Meeting and during the day to make it easier for others to attend.

Advisory Committee will meet in two weeks

No PAC update

5:30 next Board meeting

Recognition

Lisa Gonzalez recognized Andi Jahnz-Davis for her great work as Sustainability Chair and the successful Clean up day.

Thanks again to the Wendt family for the tables, chairs and benches. We have a plaque to recognize them.

Lisa adjourned the meeting at 7:33