

Minnesota Early Learning Academy, Inc.
Minutes of Thursday, December 8, 2014
Meeting of the Board of Directors

A meeting of the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Early Learning Academy, Inc. (the **Board**) was held on Monday, December 8, 2014 1:00 PM (CST) at the University of St. Thomas, situated at Terrence Murphy Hall, #301, Minneapolis Campus, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

Directors Present

Dean Kephart (via conference line)
Mariela Spejh
Jimmy Longoria (via conference line)
Kit Wilhite
Joseph (Joe) Scherer

Also Present

Jackie Gaare
Vanesa Calderon
Mary Stafford, Distinctive Schools
Susan Loomis, Distinctive Schools
Greg Gurley, Distinctive Schools
Jim Stafford, Distinctive Schools
Signe Anderson, Board Secretary

I. Call to order and approval of the agenda

Dean Kephart asked Board members to review the Agenda for accuracy and content, Joe Scherer moved to approve the agenda and Kit Wilhite seconded the motion and the Agenda was approved unanimously.

II. Review and approval of previous board meeting minutes

Dean Kephart asked Board members to review Minutes of the Board's previous meeting Joe Scherer moved to approve the November Minutes and Kit Wilhite seconded the motion and the previous Board meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

III. Update from Communication/Governance Committee

- a. Mariela Spejh affirmed that there are 4-5 Target team members involved in the committees efforts, and recapped the tools discussed during the committee's working lunch, particularly fundraising, marketing and community engagement. The Committee will reach out to those who weren't able to make the lunch meeting.
- b. Committee viewed Distinctive School's pamphlet and website prototypes and discussed strategies of social media use.
- c. Distinctive Schools will reach out to families directly and electronically; Ruth E. will help with CLUES reach out for data/partnership to identify the correct audience for the academy, Karen T. will reach out to Radio DJ personalities.
- d. Dean asked for questions from board; all expressed excitement and approval of Communication/Governance Committee's progress.

IV. Charter School Planning Grant update

- a. Mary Stafford and Dean announced the Charter School Planning Grant request was denied for a second time last Thursday. The feedback they received from the State Department was confusing (things that had good ratings previously were rated inadequate this time). While this has been difficult they assured the board that Distinctive Schools' is committed to going forward whether they get the grant or not. It was confirmed that there is no way to appeal the decision once it's been made.

- b. At this point in the meeting, Jimmy Longoria joined via voice conference
- c. Joseph Scherer asked “what’s the next interface?” to which Mary replied that we would apply again and keep applying and to look for other options to fundraise.
- d. Jackie Gaare asked when do you reapply and request Mary & Dean to send the board both the grant and the feedback from the US State Dept. This will be posted to the website and Jimmy suggested we should put all board relevant docs there. The State Dept. hasn’t indicated when we can reapply, but most likely the spring.
- e. Mary said she reached out to Al Phan & his organization for the board to access high bar consulting. We want to immediately address criticism to the school’s structure & need to demonstrate we will overcome the denial.
- f. Jimmy asked that the board be very aggressive of filling out by getting parents and influencers on the board and start making press releases.
- g. Dean proposed this was not for the Communications/Governance Committee and asked that we pull together a small group for proactive resolution in response to grant decline.
- h. Joe asked how essential is grant planning in comparison to influx of resources and could we continue the learning academy without the grant. Mary said yes and that our revenue is academy enrollment.

V. Location update

- a. Greg Gurley and Jim Stafford stated they and Ember Reichgott are supporting to speak with non-profit organization Charter School’s Development Cooperation (CSDC) to help setup finance for charter schools (1 pg intro as to who they are), The organization is based in DC but Karl (who is working with us) has worked on 10-12 Twin Cities projects & is from MN. This organization was the force behind Hiawatha expansion.
- b. Viability: Numbers and facility are based on plans; they could assist with financing, and while we’re not sure what the exact terms, we know they are great (funded by grants). Once details are known, Dean will name individuals to work on the board’s perspective
- c. Lease arrangement: Turnkey (upgrade and make suitable for our purposes) and lease back to school based on lease aid / arrangement.
- d. Facilities update: new floor plan available
- e. Someone from board needs to review insurance plan (140 pages) Dean to confirm with Jimmy offline who will look at the information and will address in January Board meeting
- f. We want to acquire Al Fan (Charter School Partners organization) for board; he’s worked with cutting edge, high-performing charter schools. Advised to check out website.
- g. Dean: Board training will promote long-term success of a high performing charter
- h. Mary went over the public charter school movement ranking sheet (will send digitally); MN has great law but health of movement is only 16 overall
- i. We need to respond to grant and potentially add a government to the board for bureaucratic hurdles.

VI. Pre-school update: Not covered during official meeting due to time constraints.

VI. New email addresses

Dean said we will be using MELA email addresses according to bylaw. This will be difficult to transition until school is open, and Dean will update the board in the January meeting.

VIII. December 5th site visit update

- a. Jackie and Dean visited the schools on Friday 12/05/2014. The met with MELA folks at the

Distinctive Schools offices and had an in-depth school visit Friday morning.

- b. At the offices, they met staff and gained a better understanding of the work they do and the rigor they instill in the schools to ensure high performance; the staff highlighted their innovation and data usage to identify what drives student performance.
- c. At the school, they met teachers and students in class and attended the school assembly. Jackie said it was great to see the model in action and to witness challenges first hand.

IX. Board training

- a. MN Association of Charter Schools offers many free courses, which require registration under MELA.
- b. Dean has taken an online evening class and learned a ton
- c. Board to formalize training requirements for foundational board and new board (under bylaw all board members need to take charter school course)
- d. Dean asked the board please visit the website and look at classes. Encouraged to take a class and share the acquired knowledge with the board; Dean will announce Spring lineup when available
- e. Greg attended annual meeting last week on MELA's behalf; materials with dates for upcoming classes will be scanned and sent out

X. Next meeting: date and location

- a. The next meeting will be held on Jan. 16th 2014 and hosted by Kit at The Works at 8:30 am. Meeting location and details would be sent out by Dean.
- b. Proposed agenda items are:
 - i. Update on Communications/Governance Committee on social media outreach
 - ii. Response to grant denial
 - iii. Definition of MELA Vision and Mission; Dean will send out in advance for review before next meeting
 - iv. Dean will review insurance piece
 - v. Outreach CSPG: handling politics & review of vision and mission of MELA as we move forward.
- c. Email Dean for any additional points to discuss

XI . Adjournment

Dean officially adjourned the meeting at 2:00 PM (CST), Dec 8, 2014.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 PM (CST), Dec 8, 2014.

Respectfully submitted,

Signe Anderson, acting as agent of Recording Secretary.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that I was authorized by the Board of the Minnesota Early Learning Academy Inc., a non-profit Minnesota corporation, to take these Minutes as agent of its Secretary, and that the foregoing Minutes reflect the events of the Nov 6, 2014 Board of Directors meeting of Minnesota Early Learning Academy Inc.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereto set my hand this 8th Day of December, 2014

Signe Anderson, acting as agent of Recording Secretary.

***Pre-school update**

- a.** Visuals were brought; the licensure application to be submitted this week and the state has 90 days to respond. It's a big process, but it's supported by First Children's Finance. Jim & Mary are meeting with them 12/07/2014 to determine cost and tool projection - we are in good shape
- b.** Susan said the room was painted, new carpet was put in & space looks great; next is furniture. Susan met last week with the nurse who needs to approve health & policy procedures. Nurse she loved them and the space as well.