



MEETING MINUTES (DRAFT)

Twin Cities German Immersion School PTO

Date: 4/8/14

Location: TCGIS Cafeteria

Meeting Called To Order By: Kami Blackwell Kinney, PTO President

Time: 6:35 PM

In Attendance: Karen Arras, Caro Bindert, Kami Blackwell Kinney, Matt Burress, Beki Cook, Nancy Dilts, Ina Elliott, Angela Haeg, Mary Hanrahan, Elena Heindl, Elisabeth Hoff, Kirsten Holmlund, Jeff Horton, Kelly Huxmann, Rebecca Johnson, Susan Block Johnson, Ann Jurewicz, Mickey Jurewicz, Cagla Kazek, Susan Kocher, Kim Koempel, Anke Krug, Cindy Miller, Silke Moeller, Charles Nielson, Shelley Parker, Pia Sektan, Michelle Sheire, Valentin Solakhau, Katie Stephens, Leah Suter, Kari Swedberg, Annegret Theis, Angela Thomas, Tim Thoreen, Marilee Tuite, Isabel Vollenweider, Michelle Wallace, Alexandra Weeding, Chris Weimholt, and Heidi Zimmermann.

SUMMARY OF MEETING

Meeting began with quick introduction of PTO officers. A flyer with yearbook ad info was also passed around.

Agenda: Tonight's agenda was approved with slight changes to timing.

Minutes: Minutes from March 11 meeting were approved as written, with the addition of Beki Cook and the deletion of Charles Nielson in list of those in attendance.

PTO OFFICERS' REPORTS

Kami Blackwell Kinney (President)

Thank you to Cindy Miller and other volunteers for organizing the pizza conference dinner for teachers. Sue Westacott, Julie Elias, Cherste Eidman, Ahmisa Cuadros, and Jeff Horton helped set up. According to our survey, this dinner tops the teachers' list of favorites from the PTO.

Davanni's Pizza Night in Roseville — Thanks to Sue Westacott for organizing, and to Nancy Dilts and Karin Spencer who helped greet families as they arrived. The event raised \$242.10. This was less than the fall event at the St. Paul location, but the vibe was calmer. The combined total of \$587.05 for the two events was just shy of budgeted amounts.

Several volunteer opportunities coming up:

- Recording Secretary — Still looking for a candidate to serve on PTO Exec Board next year. Duties will include a combination of roles of current Archivist and Secretary positions.
- Task force meetings — Let us know if you want to join in. We will be scheduling soon.
- Spring Strudel & Plant Sales — The sales finally opened last night. Shelley Parker is coordinating the strudel side of things. Let her know if you can help with delivery on May 8.
- Teacher Appreciation Week — Rather than giving class gifts, we will celebrate the teachers the whole week of May 5–9. Please contact Cindy Miller with any ideas or suggestions, and to find out how you can help.

Marilee Tuite (Treasurer)

- The Finance Committee met recently to review reports and to sign off on the bank statement for March. The bank statement is available for public viewing tonight.
- The YTD Budget vs. Actuals report and Profit & Loss report are available tonight.
- The bank balance for the end of March was \$30,076.08.
- There were four uncleared checks at the end of March, totaling \$356.70, for expenses related to Maskenball and Amity intern appreciation. That makes the total cash balance \$29,719.38 as of March 31.
- Marilee also made available a high-level recap of Maskenball gross and net profits, based on the bookkeeping perspective of accounts receivable/payable. The PTO netted/kept over \$20,000 from the event, which equals

about 85% of the gross. This does not include in-kind donations like Foto Box. Expenses were a little over \$3,500, or 15% of the gross. One more expense to come for printing Auflauf cookbooks.

Q: How does the financial picture this year compare to past years?

A: Similar, but the overall budget may have been a bit smaller, due to dropping a few of the less popular events.

Karin Spencer (Vice President)

Since Karin Spencer was unable to attend tonight's meeting, the discussion and vote on whether to reimburse for alcohol at intern/teacher appreciation functions will be tabled until the May 13 meeting.

TEACHERS' UNION PRESENTATION AND Q&A

Teachers' Union Officers and other TCGIS teachers

The teachers' union was represented tonight by newly elected officers Susan Block Johnson (president), Caro Bindert (secretary), and Katie Stephens (vice-president); parent liaisons Valentin Solakhau and Susan Kocher; and teachers Leah Suter, Anke Krug, and Cagla Kazek. The union has recently organized committees to outline members' rights, identify a negotiating team, and draft a constitution and by-laws. They are also surveying staff about what to address in the first contract.

The union identified its main goal as wanting to collaborate with the Board and administration to build a better teacher and learning environment. Officers will attend training offered by Education Minnesota. As parent liaisons, Valentin and Susan K. (themselves both parents and teachers) want to make communication between teachers and parents transparent. They will coordinate to be sure some teachers are always present at every PTO meeting.

What follows is a summary of the Q&A portion of the presentation.

Why now? Given all the other changes, why unionize now?

This doesn't change our dedication to the students or the community. It happened due to the right mix of teachers here now, many of whom are not new to the U.S. This made it possible to come together and organize. Going through these changes, the need to organize became more apparent. The built-in turnover rate at TCGIS makes it difficult to organize.

Why partner [with the PTO] now? Parents have tried in the past.

Last year, the teachers used to come to PTO meetings. We will get back to that, making it regular and consistent.

How do you envision the relationship between teachers and the parent community?

Collaborative. We all are working for the best environment for students.

How will unionization improve conditions, benefit students?

When teachers can be more focused on teaching, learning improves. TCGIS teachers will also have access to lots of professional opportunities through organizations.

We are different, as an immersion and charter school. How will you develop the immersion part?

Standards and other overarching...

What specifically can you do to improve the immersion part?

Direct access to other schools like us. Now it will be more organized, allowing easier access.

How does this allow you access to other immersion/charter schools if many others are not unionized??

Since not all immersion programs are charters, there is some additional access.

[expressing frustration about inability to have an open and frank dialogue with the teachers] It feels that there is a wall between us and the teachers right now.

What would be a good way to engage the dialogue?

For instance, just now, the answer was "I can't speak to that right now...." This can come across to some as keeping

information from us.

We have the same goal: open dialogue with parents.

How do you envision the communication?

We are still exploring options. Emails to parents are difficult until we have access. We could create a website or use Facebook, collect personal emails from families. There is a union email address — tcgisunion@gmail.com — you can contact us there if you'd like to be updated. Pass on the message, because only 40% of those who receive the Elternbrief read the Elternbrief.

Union business is all done after hours on the teachers' own time. Our priority right now is the children; the other things will follow, but more slowly. We are encountering new challenges.

The parent-teacher liaison roles seem undefined at the moment. You've set up this email address but with the caveat that you can't respond to us yet. Maybe you should prioritize answering comments and questions to encourage engagement.

There was a study done that showed unionization had no real positive impact on student achievement, but did have a negative impact in the first year of unionization. What are you doing to ensure that won't happen?

We will do our jobs the same way as before. The extra stuff gets done on our own time.

[One person sees putting a union into a charter school setting as difficult, like "putting a square peg into a round hole." Still, that person voices hope that the union will have a positive impact.]

I am really happy to see a union here at the school. I come from a strong union family, and I'm happy to have one here. Teachers, you are already extremely dedicated to the profession, as teachers at a charter school.

Thank you. Five members of the staff here currently do have children at the school. There is a strong commitment to the education and children here. Next year there will be even more teachers with students here.

This democratic process, where we speak with one voice as teachers, gives us more structure as the school continues to grow. A union is one part of this process. Democracy is not always effective, but it gives opportunities to come together and discuss. We hope to have a good relationship with administration and parents.

How do negotiations work? Will parents know anything about it?

We are still learning about the process.

St. Paul public schools really engage the parents in their process.

Organization can fill needs, addressing things that were falling through the cracks, things that require attention.

We support the organization of the teachers; we are not suggesting that the union will make you bad teachers. This will have an impact on the school and admin. resources, though. It will have a financial impact.

Unions often come to the negotiating table already adversarial; I hope it doesn't turn out that way at our school. Let's make it a win-win situation for everyone and not use threats and strikes to get what you want.

Everyone wants a positive engagement with administration — not adversarial.

How much control do you, as a union, have over legal representation?

We, the teachers, are negotiating. It's not Education Minnesota negotiating for us. Legal representation at the table does not mean they are doing the negotiating.

Can you shed light on what role Education Minnesota plays for you?

We can consult them for advice, ask them if we need help. You can bring them to the table, but they don't dictate what is discussed. TCGIS will be a unique charter. The teachers here are the union. We are the only charter school in the state to have a functioning union. We can build something really great.

Do 100% of dues go to Education Minnesota?

No dues are paid until the first contract is made. Some of the dues go to national, state, and local chapters.

What prompted the move to unionization? Operating without a contract? Not having backing for agreements? What brought us to this point?

Trying to decrease turnover, standardize terms and conditions, and formalize the grievance process.

I am surprised at the intensity of the conversation! Why would anyone be scared? I have faith in the teachers and the union, and that you are doing this for the best interest of everyone.

ADMIN REPORT

Jeff Horton (Assistant Director)

Reflection on what Kami's goal is in serving on the PTO. It is to help, serve others (kids, parents). Jeff offered his support of everyone who is taking a risk here — the teachers unionizing, etc.

- Construction — Steel beams arrived today. Craig, the project leader, has been very responsive to our needs and concerns.
- Playground — Jeff will be the chair of the Playground committee. They have surveyed the students and teachers for input, pictures, etc. The playscape will be phased in over the next two years. There will probably be additional fundraising needs in the near future.
- Capstone — German kids from Borghorst will come here around Halloween. We're looking for ideas for what to do with them.
- MCAs — Reading testing is coming up next week. Students will take the tests in the mornings and have the afternoons off. Math testing will be a mobile lab situation.

BOARD REPORT

Kami Blackwell Kinney (speaking for Gregor Adriany, Board Liaison)

Please see the text from Gregor's recent email. This Thursday night there will be an open forum for discussion about percentage of language instruction in the middle school program, as well as about the middle school philosophy in general. All are encouraged to attend.

A summary of the last Board meeting was sent out by the front office. We are still looking for Board candidates. There are currently six people running for three open positions. The Board will also be making a one-year appointment soon.

SPECIAL REPORTS

Angela Thomas, TCGIS parent

Angela came to speak about her involvement with International Experience USA, a student exchange program. She has been with the school for seven years and has hosted five interns as well as a couple of other students.

Why open your home to strangers? In the case of TCGIS, the school and the students truly benefit from the Amity program. It's also a great way to make friends along the way. Last year Angela was asked to host a 15-year-old exchange student. They had the space and could offer three meals a day, so they did. Having a German teenager in their home made the German language relevant for Angela's own kids;

International Experience offers a \$200 referral bonus for any placements made through TCGIS connections. That money would go directly to the PTO. Host families can send their own child to Germany for three weeks for the cost of a plane ticket. Unlike the Amity program, IE exchange students do not necessarily need to have a room of their own — if needed, they can share a room with a child of the same sex who is roughly the same age.

For outbound programs, students must be 17 upon arrival in Germany. They are placed with host families in local schools (*Gesamtschule* or *Gymnasium*) with university-bound students. All students have been able to do this without repeating any school when they return. Families can suggest schools, but the agency makes all arrangements.

Ina Elliott, Amity Committee

The Amity committee was represented tonight by Ina, Chris Weimholt, Elena Heindl, and Isabel Vollenweider. They explained that the school will begin to take on the task of recruiting host families. Parents on the committee will continue to focus on the parent side of things.

Hosts must be able to provide room and board. (Note: 20-year-olds can eat a lot!) A car is not necessary. Some interns take a bus, others drive or are driven to school. Amity interns are grownups, so host families have no real responsibility for them. They are mature, generally 21–29 years old, and used to living on their own with a certain amount of freedom. A certain kind of person tends to apply for the position. Interns are NOT live-in babysitters. Their main goal is to help the school by teaching in our classrooms alongside the lead teachers. They can, however, pitch in and act as part of the host family.

How do you match families and interns?

Representatives from the committee come to your house to make sure conditions are appropriate. They get to know the families and the interns, then send about two applications to each potential host family to see if one intern might be a better fit than another. Once placements have been made, families and interns are also “required” to sit down and have a conversation on a set list of topics.

How do you find families outside of the TCGIS community?

Some are neighbors or friends of TCGIS families, others are substitute teachers. In the past, we have also tried placing ads. Suggestion: maybe contact local high schools.

What is the time commitment involved?

It depends on the individual, but the time commitment is minimal for some families. The interns often spend free time with other interns rather than with their host families.

Is there a policy for how long you must host?

Most families host for one semester; some for a full year. A half semester is also an option.

The Tante & Onkel program can also help out with the interns. These families can organize outings to relieve the burden on the host families. We want to stress that the Tante & Onkel are there to support the host families — talk to the families about what would be most helpful to them.

What about spring break and holidays?

Most interns organize their own trips during breaks. Host families do not need to worry about them.

Staying with a host family provides freedom but also offers the support of a home base. It is also a totally unique experience to live with a family vs. staying somewhere on your own.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Open invitation to all to gather at Como Park Grill after tonight's meeting.
- Next meeting: Tuesday, May 13, 2014 from 6:30 to 8:00 PM at TCGIS. Childcare will be provided.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:09 PM

Minutes Compiled By: Kelly Huxmann, PTO Secretary (2013–2014)