

St. Cloud Math and Science Academy Board of Directors

Special Board Meeting Minutes

1025 18th St. N

St. Cloud, MN 56303

May 10, 2018

Mission

To serve the needs of all students as they prepare to become life-long learners and contributing members of society through integration of Science, Technology, Math and Engineering into the traditional content areas of Reading, Language Skills, Social Studies, the Arts and Physical Education. Kindness and respect for others is the foundation upon which students will develop into critical and ethical thinkers who will be prepared to meet the challenges of future job market and intrapersonal skills requirements.

Vision

Is to see all students succeed in school to develop self-confidence, learn to appreciate and get along with others, become proficient in all content areas, explore and use unique abilities, graduate from high school and pursue further training including but not limited to, the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math in order to become productive citizens.

School Improvement Goals:

- 1) Increase student achievement in reading and math
- 2) Increase our English Learner scores by one level each year
- 3) Integrate science so that our students have a higher number of minutes per day dedicated to STEM activities
- 4) Improve student behavior and focus on consistent school wide expectations
- 5) Increase our level of parent and community engagement

Minutes taken by Allison White

1. **Call the meeting to Order at 4:40 PM**
2. **Visitors were welcomed**
3. **Reading of Mission Reading of Vision**
4. **Roll Call/Quorum**

Jenna Scott	Present
Mary White-Levilain	Present
Adow Ali	Present
Amy Cross	Present
Karsten Potts	Present

5. **Conflict of Interest –Charter School Board Members – N/A**

Public Input

6. **Approval the agenda – One item was added since we received a board member application at the meeting**

7. This is a Question and Answer meeting to address questions and concerns asked by parents and community members during a meeting at school on 5/7/2018. Anyone with additional questions and concerns after the board response must sign up before the board meeting begins. Two minutes will be given to each concerned citizen to address unanswered questions.
8. New Board member application review

RESPONSE FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD.

We would like to address the issues that were brought up in the parent meeting on Monday 5/7/2018.

The issues that we are addressing are as follows:

ISSUES:

Workplace Culture:

- Evidently there is a growing toxic workplace culture, employee harassment, unfair firing, grossly unprofessional behavior including yelling, talk down, condescending behavior toward immigrant workers and workers of color coming from the school management.

Teacher climate survey shows that 89% of staff feel good about the climate in relating to collegiality and teamwork of staff

95% of teachers believe that the school is a good place for me to work and learn

100% of teachers feel the principal promotes the success of all students

100% of teachers feel the school principal follows through on commitments

100% of teachers feel the principal shows appreciation for my hard work and effort in my classroom

95% of teachers are satisfied with the principal's support of staff when a personal or professional need has presented itself.

100% of teachers are satisfied with the principals support of staff when dealing with parental issues and concerns.

89% of staff are satisfied with the availability of the principal if they have questions or concerns.

If a staff member is fired, they have received at least one verbal warning, one written warning, and one day of suspension at home before being fired. In each of the last two situations, they would have met with the principal and would have signed a statement "You must make immediate and sustained improvement. Failure to do so, or any further performance or disciplinary issues, will result in further disciplinary action, up to and including termination".

2. Poor Educational Performance:

- Apparently the school is failing our students. Management continuously created chaotic School environment which is not conducive for learning. Teachers leave every year out of

frustration with the leadership and new teachers are hired every year because they cannot deal with evidently tyrannical boss. Students lose valuable opportunity to learn from experienced teachers who leave after gaining experience in the classroom.

- School environment is a hostile environment with students and staff being labeled names

Our school performance has increased every school year since we opened. Our school performance has shown significant increases in academics since the move to the new building. We are in the middle of spring testing. Of the students tested already in reading 70 out of 71 (99%) students have shown higher scores in the spring for reading. Of the students tested already in Math, 66 of 67 (99%) students have shown higher scores in the spring for Math.

The school management does not condone chaos in the school. At school assemblies if students are not listening, they are told the assembly will stop and they will go back to class. If students are not following rules, our discipline policy is followed and students are asked to follow the rules and apologize to their teachers. If students are not ready to be in class, they need to sit in the office and work on many academic assignments until they are ready to be calm and go back to class.

We try to keep our staff each year. Last school year, we had a teacher that left the school for more pay and one teacher that left the school because she was having a baby. This school year, we will lose one teacher because they are moving to Nebraska and two other staff that are moving to the cities for family reasons.

Teachers are not leaving because they are unhappy. See climate survey data in #1

School environment is not hostile and staff and students are not labeled.
Climate survey question about safety 94% of teachers feel students are safe at this school.
100% of teachers feel safe at this school.

3. Poor Relationship with Parents:

- We have a concern about the safety of our children at school. Our children have complained about being unsafe at school with many parents also reporting that their children don't feel safe at school.
- Parents and staff have complained and observed Tammy push a child to the ground or loudly yelling at students, staff and parents in front of other school employees.
- Parents have lost confidence in Tammy's leadership and want to see immediate change. Tammy has failed to build relationship based on mutual respect with parents. As parents, therefore, we do not trust our children's future in Ms. Tammy's leadership.

2015-2016 Parent Survey – 95.7% parent satisfaction with 102 families completing survey
2016-2017 Parent Survey – 100% Parent satisfaction with 94 families completing survey

2017-2018 Parent Survey: Our parent survey was given on February 20th. We had 93 parents complete the survey. For the question, I am overall satisfied with the education that my child receives at SCMSA, 97% were satisfied

Adults in my child's school seem to work well with one another; 95% said agree or strongly agree

My child has been insulted, teased, harassed or otherwise verbally abused more than one at this school – 95% say disagree or strongly disagree

In my child's school, there are clear rules against physically hurting other people for example (hitting, pushing or tripping) 96% Agree or strongly agree

When the assistant director left our school a letter was sent home explaining the situation. I understand that many families didn't read the letter. I should have sent out a text or voice message communication instead of a letter.

Administration denies any allegations regarding handling any student issue in an inappropriate manner.

There are times when students need to be restrained because they are hurting other students or staff. I have not restrained a child without another staff member present. I was a special education teacher for 20 years. I do not get physical with a child unless it is a trained crisis prevention technique. I am trained in CPI (crisis prevention intervention)

4. **Racial Discrimination:**

- Executive Director failed to recruit teachers and staff of color and when she did she fired them in relatively short period of time. The school failed to create inclusive environment. Most often, the few workers of color work for years without hardly seeing a penny in raise or without comparative pay to their peers elsewhere while Caucasian workers get raises worth thousands of dollars every year.
- Dutiful immigrant workers are fired and replaced with white workers for no reason

- Before Azad's last day 4/25/2018, we had 10 Somali staff members at our school. We have 2 licensed teachers that are black. I have not fired a staff of color since March 2015. This was our first school year. Every staff member that worked at our school last year received a 3% raise this school year.

2017-2018 School year - how staff that resign are replaced

- In November a non-Somali staff member resigned (1st grade title para) - I replaced her with a qualified Somali staff member
In December a Somali staff member resigned (ELL Para) – I replaced him with a qualified Somali staff member

In March a non-Somali staff member resigned (SPED para) – I increased a part time Somali staff member to a full time position and had her take this position
In April A Somali staff member resigned – We will replace him with a parent liaison position.

5. Attack on Board Independence:

- Direct interference on board oversight activities. No member of the current board is elected. Almost all have apparently been handpicked by the Director and almost all are current teachers. There is a lot of conflict of interest. Director plays favoritism; the board lacks independence and has limited understanding of the needs and experience of the immigrant students who form the basis of the school.

On March 23rd , 2018 every student in our school brought home a letter from the school board asking if they would like to nominate themselves or another school member to be on the school board. **On April 5th, 2018** two of our board members were at our STEM night trying to recruit more parents to be on our school board. There was a deadline in which interested board members needed to apply. 2 teachers were nominated (not by Tammy Bengtson) both of these teachers than applied
4 community members/parents were nominated - all of them were called about the nominations. One of them returned the phone call and they are unable to be in the board because of their work schedule. The other 3 did not return calls. At our Annual Meeting on May 23rd, we will vote for the 2 members that applied for the board.
Since I was hired, we have had a total of 8 Somali board members. We currently have one Somali board member. Two former board members had parents express concerns to them regarding the school. The two former board members did not try to meet with the principal to resolve the issue outside of the media.

6. Leadership Change: (Some feel Tammy Bengtson must resign effective immediately:

RESPONSE:

Recently our school board asked the Director to complete a self-evaluation based on her job description. The director shared this evaluation at the school board meeting in April. The director used facts to justify her evaluation marks on each area of her job description. In the area of School finance, the school finance manager completed the job description and gave her a mark of Exemplary. The school board was supportive of the self-evaluation during the school board meeting in April. SEE SUMMARY BELOW: All areas of the director's job description

School leadership, instructional leadership, effective communication, parent involvement, professional development and Human Resources, School management and daily operations and compliance, School management Board Regulations and fiscal responsibilities are the areas of the director's job description. All areas are proficient or Exemplary. Teachers have put together a petition to share at the school board meeting that states the reason they stay at the school is due to the school leadership.

5:35 PM Community members and parents present at the board meeting asked for a 10 minute recess. It was approved and we were to reconvene at 5:45PM.

The parents and community members left the meeting. The board reconvened with all board members except Adow Ali. The board reviewed a new parent application to the board. Mohamed Ali is a parent and has 3 students at our school. In light of the recent demonstrations and complaints to add more Somali board members, the board felt that we needed to have immediate representation on the board. Mohamed completed the application and brought his application to the board president.

Karsten Potts made a motion to approve Mohamed Ali's application to the board. Jenna Scott seconded the motion. The motion passed and Mohamed Ali was voted as a new board member. He will replace a board that resigned in March. His term lasts until 6/30/2019.

The 2 minute question/answer session did not occur. Members that were on this list left after the recess. The solutions and plans to resolve the conflict were not heard by the parents or the community members before they left the meeting. A parent meeting was scheduled for May 11, 2018 at 4:00 PM to share the solutions and plans with any parents interested in attending the parent meeting.

- Additional questions and concerns for citizens signed up to speak

Andrew Schultz

Rita Doroff

Jama Alimad

A Ali

Athar

Yusuf Osman

Ifaq

Nimo

Meeting adjournment: Karsten made a motion to adjourn the meeting, Jenna Seconded the motion. Motion carried. Adjournment at 7:15 PM

Solutions and plans to resolve concerns

- We plan to have a mediator to work with everyone to come up with a solution.
- There continues to be inaccurate information circulating in the community regarding events that have happened at school. It is unfortunate that certain individuals appear to be spreading inaccurate information for the purpose of trying to advance an agenda that is harming the Academy and its students. We hope to use the mediation process to address this issue, but families need to understand that there is some information the Academy cannot legally share due to state and federal laws regarding data privacy.
- Somali speaking staff member at the front desk
- We need to hire another assistant director
- We need to add additional board members to the board on May 23

Currently we have 6 Board Members

Karsten Potts-

Mary White-Levilain -

Amy Cross

Jenna Scott -

Adow Ali

Mohammed Ali

- We want to develop an advisory council with staff, parents and a board rep. This council will work with parents to resolve conflict and any other concerns that arise. They will report to the board each month.
- In the meantime, it is important that your children are in school. They are doing well and they need every day of school to continue to grow . This is not the way the process works if you are upset with school leaders.
- We hear you , we are looking for a solution.