

Scattergood Friends School
School Committee Meeting
Open Session Minutes – 12 September 2020
Conducted via Zoom

Mission Statement

Scattergood Friends School challenges students with a college-preparatory curriculum, farm experience, a shared work program, and community living in the spirit of Quaker faith.

Present: Ruth Hampton, Laël Gatewood, Charlie Johnson, Bob Winkleblack, George Bergus, Roy Helm, Kent Tjossem, David Wilcox, Alex Lippitt, Bob Winchell, Tom Wahl, Aaron Woolfson, Matt Zisk, Nancy Jordan, Karen Greenler

Staff Present: John Zimmerman, Kendall Smith, Kim Jones, Sam Taylor, Jamie Newton, Shari Sollars, Matt Gauder, Sonja Sondheim, Mark Quee, Dani Evans-Schreiber, Sadie Kirschenman, Anabel Higgin-Houser,

Friends settled into silent worship in a timely manner. The clerk shared:

“Do not be dismayed by the brokenness of the world. All things break. And all things can be mended. Not with time, as they say, but with intention. So go. Love intentionally, extravagantly, unconditionally. The broken world waits in darkness for the light that is you.”



— L.R. Knost

We offered introductions all around; it is good to see Friends, old and new. Ruth shared some of the School Committee meeting expectations and intentions. School Committee functions in the manner of a Quaker business meeting and yet we are an entity with external deadlines that must be met which sometimes require a more secular approach. We work to find a sense of the meeting, and bring a worshipful approach into our meetings, listening for the Still Small Voice. We need our analytical minds, held and informed by Spirit.

MINUTE: We approve the minutes, open and closed, of July 21, 2020.

MINUTE: We approve the minutes, open and closed, of the Called Meeting (via Zoom) on August 1, 2020.

MINUTE: We approved, by email, the subcommittee slate for Academic Year 2020-2021.

Academics: Retention, recruitment, and the preparations for the open school environment were major topics, as well as preparing for a change in instruction modality at any time, if necessary. November 21 will be end of fall semester and upper school will return home. Middle school will continue with distance learning for two more weeks. Integration of curriculum and extra-curricular activities between upper and lower schools is an upcoming discussion. The ISACS self-study is on hold, due to the pandemic, and will be taken up next fall, starting with the self-reporting process. We deeply appreciate the tremendous work that staff have done to prepare for opening this fall.

Development: The sub-committee met and expressed appreciation for Kendall’s report and work. The Gift Committee will bring a recommendation to SC for the Blackburn estate gift but for now, given the unprecedented times we are in, we will hold the funds and proposed spending plans will be brought to the School Committee. Smaller gatherings that are project-oriented (e.g. kiln and loom repair and tree planting) might be possible summer of 2021, and the large Arts Reunion will be postponed until summer 2022. There were many trees lost in the derecho and further tree planting speaks both to a campus need and to a spiritual framework of understanding our work. Watch for a more formalized ‘ask’ for the tree planting project. Prior to planting, we need to understand the influence of the expansion of the interstate as well as noise mitigation concerns. The annual fund is doing well and Annual Report will go out soon.

Spiritual and Community Life: With 19 new students, the integration/formation of the student body is different this year. New and returning students have different expectations and experiences which have caused some challenges and there has been a need to bring new students up to speed on community standards around gender inclusivity. Sonja works to move students beyond “enduring” Collection to growing in understanding of its worth. This is more difficult during Covid, but the work continues apace.

Facilities: The derecho took up a great deal of time as the clean-up needs outpaced other tasks. Some good news is that the generator worked well and wells were not contaminated. Many community members came forward to help with storm clean up and fortunately there was no harm to people and minimum damage to buildings. Matt has also been working very hard updating residences for new staff. Because of the storm damage and greater than expected housing repairs, the capital budget allocations may need to be adjusted. The SC is open to changes in capital budget; the sub-committee will bring revisions to the full committee.

Farm: The high tunnel and the tomato crop were damaged in the derecho, but the damage was not as bad as it might have been. The farm will have overall lower production compared to last year. The high tunnel can be repaired and the biggest sadness is losing so many big trees. Because of Covid, there has been only limited interaction between upper and middle schools, with each group working on their own projects. Upper school is at the farm all morning when weather is good. Middle school starts at the farm every day with science and farm chores. The farm is being actively used as a living laboratory.

HR: We will conduct a Head Evaluation survey earlier than normal because of change in academic calendar. The subcommittee will work with John to include questions he would find useful for his own growth. They are beginning the process of conducting an exit interview with our former Head (Thomas Weber).

MINUTE: We affirm that the HR Subcommittee will be conducting a Head survey/evaluation this fall.

Admissions: The sub-committee had a lively meeting and celebrated the good news in Shari’s report: 43 students on campus! Appreciation was expressed for the posts and our new subcommittee member, Ayanna Dewer. Shari highlighted the perennial challenge of getting more higher-paying students. Most of our students are at the minimum tuition pay rate and this tuition is subsidized out of revenue. In terms of branding and perception, many people still view us as a “last chance” school; we need to change this. Funding scholarships and tuition discounts need more focus and attention to find the financial sweet spot; this includes considering a financial aid cap. Shari would like to see a more disciplined admissions calendar and more aggressive recruiting across the country, especially in the east and west coast markets. Admissions is suggesting a maximum end tuition increase of about 3%, with a possible gradual increase in the minimum tuition. Another consideration is adding fees for supplies, etc. These efforts would bring tuition more in line with costs.

There was a discussion about what it costs to run the school and how much each student increases that cost. This of course varies depending on the base figures used. Last year’s budget was about \$1.35 million (which is already lean and seen as not sustainable). Depending on enrollment and the expenses considered, this has meant each student may cost between \$31,400 to \$52,000. Obviously, we want more full pay students, higher retention, and more financial aid, but how do we get there? How do we increase income and stabilize that income stream? We may want to hire a dedicated marketing person. The administration will be working over the next year to clarify the cost to operate Scattergood and quantify the additional incremental cost per student, given some base level enrollment which also depends on the type of student (boarding, day, HS, MS). This quantitative analysis will help us decide the real cost of accepting an additional student and will help inform us about our capacity for lower paying students. There was discussion about raising tuition vs development income and the desire to remain accessible to students who are a good fit for the community as well as offering better remuneration for staff.

We may want to consider better educating our community on the details of costs of running a school as we have conversations about a sustainable budget.

MINUTE: We recommend tuition increases of approximately 3% for the upper end of our tuition scale.

- Upper school boarding - \$35,500 to \$36,600, maximum
- Upper school day - \$18,600 to \$19,000, maximum

Minimum tuition amounts and Middle School tuitions were tabled; a proposal will be brought to the November SC meeting for approval.

Consultation and Finance: We usually have adequate cash flow at this time of year with tuition, grants, and foundation monies coming in. The cash flow gets tight in late October and November, January is again comfortable and then February and March the flow is low again. Fortunately, we haven't had to use our bank line of credit over the summer. The PPP funds we received are eligible for full forgiveness. Our income decreased last year because of Covid discounts, so the PPP loan/grant are seen as supplemental and not shown as income on the operating statements. We have shifted to a cash basis accounting, rather than an accrual basis.

MINUTE: We accept the Short Form Operating Statement of September 1, 2020.

Five year planning model: An ad-hoc group has been working on a 5 year spreadsheet planning model we received from NAIS to help schools with budgeting and to view how various changes can affect the future picture. The model breaks out the upper boarding, upper day, and middle school, and shows scenarios which could be a "basic, better, and best financial model" or a "Covid, no Covid, and recovery model" or whatever we want. Alex gave us a tutorial on this program which will become a working tool for the committee over time.

The Head Report was a good snapshot of the current state of the school. It's been a very busy 2.5 months since John arrived. In addition to the usual work there are also the additional pressures of Covid, and the complications of transitioning to new leadership. It is notable that there is much optimism in the face of the difficulties ahead. The increase in enrollment has a positive impact and affects the energy levels. The budget concerns are real and John's goal is to seek out a sustainable trajectory of growth that remains mission centered.

November retreat: Matt Zisk and maybe Aaron Woolfson will work with Ruth and John on planning the retreat. It's likely Matt G. and another staff person will join as well.

We did our annual photo via a screenshot on zoom which will go on our page in the school's website located in the drop-down menu under "About" and click on "School Committee". Two agenda items were tabled to be revisited via email. Upcoming School Committee meeting dates are: 9/12, 11/7, 1/16, 3/13, 5/1, 7/20.

We proceeded into closed session.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Greenler
Recording Clerk