

Scattergood Friends School
Called School Committee Meeting
Open Session Minutes – 13 February 2021
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, Shari Sollars, Sonja Sponheim

Friends settled into silent worship in a timely manner at 9:00 am. The Assistant Clerk, Roy Helm, read

"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest."
Benjamin Franklin

Thanks to everyone who was able to attend. Today's topic for the called meeting was student tuition assistance and scholarships and how changing our current practice could improve budgeting and accountability, while also nurturing the culture we want to grow. This is of some urgency because the school needs to set next year's budget soon. We didn't discuss staff tuition remission, which needs to be worked out in closed session to avoid staff conflicts of interest and we also need to gather some more information regarding things like tax code.

John started with definitions of tuition assistance and scholarships. Tuition assistance is the same as financial aid and is largely determined with a formula to determine an appropriate cost to the family, and the school may tweak this number. Scholarships are reductions in tuition given to families for other than demonstrated need, such as Quaker background, merit, and artistic ability.

Currently we receive around \$400K in both tuition assistance and scholarship funds from the Scattergood Foundation and the Measey Foundation. We also receive some restricted donations, which may be designated for one or the other. For instance, the \$500 Gwendolyn Schupe scholarship, which is fully funded, is earmarked for artistic students. On the other hand, the Berquist scholarship is not funded.

John is requesting guidance on how best to separate tuition assistance and scholarship monies and whether we should set a cap on total funding for tuition assistance. On the scholarship end of things, what guidance can the SC offer about how to best focus these funds? Do we wish to support Quaker scholarships? Diversity, Equity and Inclusion scholarships? There was general agreement that both these areas are important.

Until this year, \$400K is about what we spent in both categories but those were low enrollment years. The \$400K may be a starting point, growing as we grow enrollment. If we run out of funding this year, John could ask for a budget increase from the Consultation and Finance Committee, who would then bring a recommendation to the full School Committee. John envisions a process that gives him some guardrails and also keeps him and the school accountable for and clearer about the amount of student aid dispersed. The school will have to make tough decisions, and having a budget in place helps the school urge families to stretch a bit. For instance, students might attend as day students for two years and then be boarding for their last two years.

It is important that there is a way to increase the cap for flexibility. For instance, if all the money was awarded and then a couple of students arrive that would enroll if they had some amount of award and for a cost of \$10K, the school could bring in \$50K, it could be worth raising the cap. John believes this change will create a system that will help move the school towards both budgetary clarity and increased enrollment.

John clarified that this new process would replace the sliding scale tuition which has created more of a bargaining relationship with families than is useful. Students would be grandfathered in with their current rate of assistance or scholarship. (The school currently has two merit and two Quaker scholarship recipients, which brings the students' cost to the minimum tuition.) Returning to a tuition assistance model allows the school to focus on student need, with a hope that our average tuition will increase in time. There was a general sense that this makes fiscal sense and can be ratcheted up incrementally.

Scattergood is still a significant bargain financially when compared with *rural* boarding schools in the mid-Atlantic region. (Urban boarding schools are more expensive.) The boarding rate is high for families who haven't considered boarding, but it's comparatively very reasonable, and the day rate is competitive even in the Midwest. John believes that even at full tuition rate we are competitive and there is a market out there for the price point we hope to attain.

The sliding scale tuition model was instituted to help with sticker shock and getting people to move beyond website perusal. The school would need to increase marketing and messaging, talking about tuition assistance prominently on the website to help move people from perusal to inquiry. Shari believes this could help the school expand the applicant pool. John noted that if our scholarships reflect the families and students, that is likely to increase inquiries.

We discussed whether it was better to have a few larger scholarships or a greater number of smaller awards. Which would be strategically more effective? The staff believes that the 75% scholarship rate is too high, but 40% might be more reasonable.

We discussed the incremental cost of allowing students in at lower tuition rates. This has been used as a reason in the past for high levels of tuition assistance. There is a balance here. When enrollment has been very low, it helped keep higher pay students to have a healthy-sized community. At some point, this incremental cost becomes burdensome. And in all cases, there is the issue of externalities, the impacts beyond budget that are not accounted for, like increased workload for staff, staff retention, salaries and benefits, and facility wear and tear. One SC member noted that the opportunity costs can cut both ways in terms of workload. If there aren't enough students to constitute a class, the staff must do more independent studies, which is inefficient and demanding. There is clearly a cost/benefit balance that must be kept in mind.

There was discussion about how to increase awareness of tuition assistance for Quaker families in the area's Yearly Meetings, including direct outreach to families with appropriately aged children.

Minute: We approve the Head of School and Business Manager putting together a tuition assistance budget and creating a procedure by which the Head of School can come back to School Committee, to adjust the budget as needed.

Regarding scholarships, we appreciate that they show the priorities of the school and reflect our mission. What does it mean that IYMC owns the school? How does the YM serve us and vice versa? The fact that some people come to Quakerism because of their Quaker school experience may be useful for fundraising efforts within the Yearly Meetings. We acknowledged a need for further discussion about the role of the School Committee in fundraising and outreach with the new model, especially in regards to funding the specific scholarships.

We discussed the merit and limitations of offering specifically Quaker scholarships. Staff shared the image that our Quaker students are like the yeast in the dough that is the school. It gives structure and leavening. We want to encourage that, and also acknowledge that our non-Quaker students may bring similar value. We might explore offering a scholarship that includes those from other traditional peace churches as well as Quaker families. It is important to understand the philosophy behind the scholarships, they show our priorities and what students we are trying to encourage to come to Scattergood.

Kendall suggested a Scattergoodian scholarship, that would be undergirded with the SPICES. This would be one kind of branding, but it would be different than one that is specifically Quaker (or Quaker/Brethren/Mennonite.) It was also noted that the merit scholarship (if not strictly financially based) is vague enough that many students can see themselves in it.

The scholarships need to be funded, and one value in defining the scholarships is the ability to seek funding from donors who see that we support what they believe in. We didn't arrive at any conclusions about this today, but it needs further consideration, especially in regards to the School Committee's involvement in finding funding.

John suggested the school continue to work on the scholarships that Shari can use as an admissions tool and that also incorporate social justice concerns. This is about clarification and direction for marketing and fundraising, not changing the internal values of the school. It is part of the maturing of the institution: operate in a budgeted environment rather than just assuming that needs will be met, as was done in the in the past.

We closed with a period of silence and gratitude.

This year's remaining School Committee meeting dates are: 3/13, 5/1, 7/20.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Greenler
Recording Clerk