

Scattergood Friends School
School Committee Meeting
Open Session Minutes – 16 January 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: Laël Gatewood, Charlie Johnson, Bob Winkleblack, George Bergus, Roy Helm (assistant clerk/acting clerk), Ruth Hampton (clerk), 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, Matt Gauder, Sonja Sondheim, Mark Quee,

Friends settled into silent worship in a timely manner.

The assistant clerk, Roy Helm, read aloud our Mission Statement to consider as grounding for our meeting.

We want to acknowledge and recognize the amazing work of the staff, students, and families to keep the school successfully running.

MINUTE: We approve the minutes, open and closed, of our November 7, 2020 meeting.

Academic: There has been a strong beginning for J term. HS students are working at “remote Scattergood” and the MS students are working 2 days week on campus and at home the other three days. The school has learned a lot about continuing to build community in an online environment.

Being able to use the campus has allowed the MS to focus more fully on Quaker values: crews, lunch together, labs, and gym time all allow a new relationship to the school. Hopefully this will help the merging of the upper and lower schools once the pandemic has subsided; this is a work in progress.

Most students were academically successful in fall. Three students left (not primarily due to academics.) But there are two new students now, and two more expected later in spring. Recruitment appears to be highly dependent on what happens with pandemic. Seven students may graduate in May.

Development: The Annual Fund and other giving is on track, which is impressive given the year. Kendall attended a major gift workshop; there is a phone campaign designed not to ask for money at this point but instead to rework contacts. In a heartening project, Kent Van Zandt and Dan Maxwell (former staff from the 1960-70’s and ‘72 graduate) are reconnecting with Scattergoodians of those years and encouraging their involvement with the school, including donations. The Spring Appeal goes out in March, which, given the year, may require a follow-up creative push and John is considering an online pledge drive variety show with seniors.

Admissions:

MS will likely expand this coming year. HS might drop a bit if Covid resolves. Recruitment is difficult without travel. Marketing alone doesn’t turn candidates into students without personal interactions. Replacing seven seniors will be significant; some may come from the MS, some new international students may receive visas. Retention is very important and current student attitudes are positive so retention may be better than some years.

We discussed the Tuition Policy, which is complicated by many variables and conflicting values.

Shari brought up a proposal which would allow staff children to attend Scattergood tuition-free. (Currently staff pays 15% tuition.) It would be a good recruitment and retention tool for staff. There was general support for the idea, though no decisions were made. The cost, at present, would not be significant and because staff children won't bump out other paying students. Until the numbers of staff kids increases it seems easy to implement, but we need to research the implications.

Staff students would still have to go through admission process. If dorms are full, dorm housing would not be guaranteed. One staff member stated feeling that the tuition was reasonable and it was noted that families could still contribute. Another staff member noted that if free tuition had been a staff benefit when their family was considering relocating, it would have been easier to make the decision to come to Scattergood.

Is it counter-intuitive to have this conversation while we are discussing capping financial aid? The big picture is about sustainability, and a free-tuition benefit for staff children would affect staffing sustainability. Would it make sense to create an endowed scholarship for staff children? This would then leave the general tuition assistance monies untouched.

John suggested that this discussion be moved to a closed session of the School Committee. He is recusing himself from the decision because he could benefit. We need to consider the tax implications, future cost of even more staff students, who is eligible, and other questions.

We returned to addressing financial aid and scholarships. Because the named scholarships are not specifically funded, they are really tuition discounts. Shari feels that it is important to offer targeted discounts and create scholarships that are funded. The Measey Foundation money, the Gwen Schupe scholarship fund, and parts of the Scattergood Foundation monies are intended for scholarships/tuition assistance. The school could budget that money plus some of the Annual Fund towards scholarships and tuition assistance so we have a known amount being given and the amount can be budgeted and capped. There was an attempt to build a scholarship fund through the monthly meetings, but that needs to be more strongly pursued and we don't know how well it will be received.

Perhaps the idea of Student Tuition Sponsorship could be added to an endowed fund. If the scholarship money is more personalized, it helps in fundraising and also helps students understand the community network that is supporting them. The distinction was made between a scholarship, based on merit or some other criteria, and tuition remission, which is need based and critical to concerns of equity.

The school would like to move away from sliding-scale tuition, publicly posting the maximum, and noting that there is tuition assistance available. The minimum tuition would be internal number, not externally published. Students currently receiving scholarships would be grandfathered in for their time at Scattergood.

We agreed that this important conversation could be discussed in each subcommittee.

Because this will impact the '21-'22 academic year, we need to have a called meeting. Roy will work with John, Shari, Kim and Kendall to define the parameters of the meeting. It is tentatively scheduled for Feb 13th to last no more than 3 hours. Staff will figure out the incremental costs per students and other pertinent background information.

Facilities: Facilities work has been busy as usual. Lots of painting, sensitivity tests on various systems, critter control, water inspections, etc. Having the students gone has been a boon for the ability to do maintenance work. Matt is beginning to think about the next steps for some of our longer-term projects like sprinkling system and well project and boiler.

Farm: There is a new structure on the farm, but the contractors will finish clean-up after the snow melts. Concrete will not be poured until spring. Otherwise, it's winter and things are quiet.

Spiritual and Community Life: The committee is working on the Student handbook, focusing on the issues of chemical health, inclusive housing for non-binary students, social media policy, and mediation with sensitivity to power dynamics and trauma. Sonja is researching other boarding school policies

Consultation and Finance: The finance report and operating budget are pretty clear. Our cash position is reasonably strong. Cash flow is cyclical thing, but is looking more solid than we had anticipated.

We talked about applying for another PPP loan. The paperwork is extensive and it's not clear if we qualify, but Kim and John will explore the option.

Head Report: In short, things are going well. Fall term was a big success and the Covid plans worked well to keep students safe. The planning for J terms allowed for a better virtual learning environment. It's been good to have the MS here and all are looking forward to the HS returning. The work is very difficult in terms of Covid and financial planning, with the vaccines being rolled out somewhat haphazardly and how that affects enrollment management. We need to consider how to integrate technology as we transition out of Covid. Tuition and scholarships need to be figured out to get to a balanced budget. We are headed in right direction, but challenging discussions will be necessary for a sustainable, thriving Scattergood.

When the committee inquired how John was doing, he said he was ok: busy, but not overtaxed, feeling the weight of the role, but not overwhelmed. John expressed his gratitude for the school's deep Quaker roots. He is enrolled in the ISACS workshops for New heads that meet monthly. He will use the rest of the New Head transition funds for educational travel, maybe a Pendle Hill or TABS workshop or other professional development.

Handbook updates: There is work to be done on the handbooks and we should form a plan and work on crucial ones first. We have annual tasks listed in the handbook, but not those that need to be done on a longer-term basis. Larger questions include defining who is responsible for which parts of the handbooks. Bigger questions: What is in a handbook? Who is responsible for various handbooks? What policies must come to the School Committee and which are operational policies under the purview of the staff? We want consistent language in the three handbooks as well as a process for changing them. Ultimately, we will probably want some legal counsel on parts of them. From the School Committee Lael, Roy, Matt Zisk and Charlie have volunteered, and a few staff will likely also join.

This year's remaining School Committee meeting dates are: 2/13 (called meeting), 3/13, 5/1, 7/20.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Greenler
Recording Clerk