

The Circle School Corporation
Annual Meeting of the Membership
December 6, 2021
Minutes

Attendees: Connor Tyrrell (Chair), Ellen Abbott, Johanna Bodnyk, Brook Doerr, Becky Giannelli, Julia James, Michelle Loucas, Reb Loucas, Hladini Mensah, Yasoda Mensah, Havah Reinford, Kirsten Reinford, Marina Reinford, Jim Rietmulder, Jancey Rietmulder-Stone, Ann Sipe, Tracey Speicher, Ann Stillwater, JD Stillwater, Beth Stone, Scott Trask, Cody Unger, Carolyn Wagner, Jennifer Wagner, Mandy Wehler, Lucy White, Shauna Yorty

Meeting Location: Zoom

Meeting called to order at 7:03pm

- 1) Icebreaker (led by Cody Unger)
- 2) Review of Ends We Seek (led by Julia James)
- 3) School Meeting Report to the Membership (*attached*, presented by Carolyn Wagner)
- 4) Board of Trustees Report to the Membership (*attached*, presented by Connor Tyrrell)
- 5) Nominating Committee Report (Ann Sipe, Austin Vogt, and Simon Eisenstein)
Ann Sipe reported that the committee had nominated Becky Giannelli for the Membership-appointed Trustee position.
- 6) **MOTION:** To appoint Becky Giannelli to the Membership-appointed Trustee position on The Circle School Board of Trustees for the term running from March 1, 2022, through February 28, 2023.
(Nominating Committee)
Motion adopted.
- 7) **MOTION:** To advise the Trustees that bylaws section 4.2.3 does not apply to real-time online meetings, such as Zoom.
Motion adopted.
- 8) Members' remarks (time for the Membership to address the Board)
- 9) Questions put to the Membership by the School Meeting: None
- 10) Special elections of Trustees: None

Meeting adjourned at 8:20pm

**Respectfully submitted,
Johanna Bodnyk
Secretary of the Board of Trustees
January 23, 2022**

School Meeting Report to the Annual Meeting December 6, 2021

Selected highlights from December 2, 2020, through December 6, 2021

Events

- The “Join the Conversation” book group (begun in April 2014) met 10 times.
- Beginning during pandemic closures in December, as an experiment formalized by the Executive Committee, an informal online list of virtual “Happenings” (and outdoor on-campus Happenings after Executive Committee action December 9) was created. Any School Meeting Member could create and host Happenings.
- A small group met on the patio at a candlelight Happening titled “Remembering Lily Jordan”, organized by a student. 12 people attended. (Jan 5)
- The Spring Pop-up, a scaled-down version of the Spring Gala, attended by approximately 100 people representing approximately 30 families, raised \$360 for Lily Jordan Memorial Scholarships. (May 15)
- A Circle School team participated in the Race Against Racism and the 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge sponsored by the Harrisburg YWCA, culminating with a walk of 34 laps around the soccer field. (Apr 26)
- Cool Things Outside Corporation held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new swing set. (May 4)
- Held a “Night Under the Stars” dance outdoors, attended by 31 people, including students, former students, staff, and adult chaperones. (May 21)
- Commencement was held in the rain on the evening of Friday, June 11, with 13 graduates present (five graduates from 2021 and eight out of nine 2020 graduates). It was attended by at least 103 people.
- The End-of-Year Campout was held at Pinchot, attended by at least 51 people. (Jun 12)
- The Back-to-School Picnic was held in the school’s backyard, attended by 48. (Sep 11)

Publications, Public appearances, Public Relations

- Published 21 editions of the email newsletter, approximately 753 recipients.
- To facilitate Meadow Campus pledge renewals and changes, added a new link on the website home page and changes to the Be A Hero web page. (Oct 21)
- Published the following [blog posts](#) on the school's website:
 - "Silver Linings: What the pandemic is teaching us about schooling" by Beth Stone (Dec 23)
 - "Circle School mornings again" by Ellen Abbott (Feb 12)
 - "Grow up, America! Polarized politics and democratic schools" by Jim Rietmulder (Apr 13)
 - "Planned giving: It feels good" by Michelle Loucas. (Apr 30)
 - "What Cool Things Outside means to me" by Lily Compton (May 5)
 - "Gratitude in an Upside Down Year" by Ellen Abbott (May 28)
 - "Arbitrary Milestones: a graduation speech" by Eva Marie Adame (Jun 23)
 - "Marina's cardboard spinning wheel" by Marina Reinford (Aug 11)
 - "No, Kids Don't Rule the School" by Jim Rietmulder (Aug 27)
 - "I feel peaceful here, Mommy" by Faith Brooks-Carr (Sep 14)
 - "From Founding Furnace to Post-Curricular" by Jim Rietmulder (Dec 1)
- Made numerous changes to the school's website, including making *Practicing Life* available for download and viewing online, adding a [Planned Giving](#) section, and adding a new page called "Sound Bites."
- The video of a 2-hour Zoom interview (June 11, 2020) of Jim by founders of a democratic school in Russia was published online, along with a transcript in Russian, [here](#). (Dec 2)
- The school was mentioned in the weekly [newsletter](#) from Radish and Rye Food Hub.
- Jim's book, *When Kids Rule the School: The Power and Promise of Democratic Education*, was reviewed in the academic journal "Democracy & Education" (Volume 29, Issue 1, 2021), [here](#).
- Published an email to newsletter recipients by Board Development Officer Michelle Loucas entitled, "Looking forward, and looking back!" (Aug 6)
- Launched ad campaign "Harder Than Math" with ads in the July, August, September, and October issues of TheBurg.

- New Society Publishers announced a contract with Turkish publisher New Human Publishers to produce a Turkish language edition of Jim's book *When Kids Rule the School*. (Aug 10)

Outreach

- The Trustees' Development Officer Michelle Loucas and School Meeting member Pepper Loucas presented self-directed democratic schooling to a master's level class ("Teaching and Learning: Linking Theory and Practice", taught by Paul Sylvester) at Westchester University. (Sep 28) NOTE: Came to SM too late to be included in the last report.
- An interview with Jim was posted by the Learning By Living podcast (July 2020) [here](#).
- Jim attended a meeting of the Self-Directed Education Research Network, attended by 14 (mostly university researchers) from several countries, including Peter Gray (Boston College) and Henry Readhead (Summerhill School, England). (Jan 22)
- Jim attended a forum hosted by Dialogic Pedagogy Journal on "Education vs Learning", attended by (mostly university) scholars from the U.S., Russia, Italy, and Spain. (Mar 8)
- Beth was interviewed and extensively quoted in "Progressive Education is the Opium of the Educators," a recent article ([here](#) or [PDF](#)) published in Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science. Jim provided feedback on a pre-publication draft of the article and is mentioned and quoted numerous times in the article. (Mar 30)
- Jim attended a meeting of the Self-Directed Education Research Network, attended by 13 scholars and practitioners from six countries (U.S., Romania, Czech Republic, England, France, Netherlands). (Mar 22)
- Jim attended a forum of the International University of Students EduBookClub to discuss Peter Gray's book *Free to Learn*. (Mar 30)
- Jim attended a Zoom symposium hosted by the International University of Students to discuss the idea that progressive education is the "opium" of educators, making them complacent with conventional education structures. The symposium was attended by students and educators from Canada, France, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Uganda, United Kingdom, and the U.S. (Apr 19)
- Jim attended a meeting of the Self-Directed Education Research Network. (May 27)

- Pursuant to School Meeting's action of June 2, staff members Ann, Ellen, and Jim were interviewed together (via Zoom) by Dutch researcher Christel Hartkamp-Bakker for about 90 minutes as part of her investigation of democratic schools. At least two qualifying alumni also communicated with the researcher to arrange individual interviews. (Jul 5)
- Jim attended a meeting of the Self-Directed Education Research Network with Peter Gray and other scholars and researchers. (Sep 27)
- Ellen was interviewed by Sydney Sansbury (a senior undergraduate student at Soka University of America), as part of a research paper on the impact of the pandemic on self-directed democratic and "Sudbury" education. (Nov 29)

Visitors

- Chris Courtiol, staff member at Chagrin Valley School, and his wife, Tanja, visited. (May 1)
- Three Susquehanna Township officials walked the campus north boundary: Tom Pyne (elected Commissioner and Wilhelm Road neighbor), David Kratzer (Township Manager), and a township employee responsible for parks. They explained that the township may acquire the parcel of land to the north (east of Ecumenical Retirement Community) for development of a public park, possibly with hiking trails. (Jun 1)
- Educators Madeline and Jesse Resnick visited for three days. (Dec 1-3)
- The school hosted visiting students and staff from Three Rivers Village School. (Dec 6)

Alumni news

- Andrew Neal `11 graduated from Millersville University with a BA in Philosophy and a minor in History. (Nov 11)
- Alumn Cord Bennett (attended 2005-2017) graduated from boot camp and is now a U.S. Marine. (Feb 5)
- An "Alumni Working Group", featured in the email newsletter (May 14), has met monthly to provide opportunities for networking and social engagement among alumni and to support the school.
- Alumn parent and frequent donor Jon Owens (father of Laura Owens `13) passed away. (Oct 1)

- Alumn Briseis Beach (attended dates) and her mother Melissa stopped by for a brief visit. (Nov 12)
- Alumn Cheyenne Malarz visited. (Nov 12)

Staffing

- School Meeting asked the Board of Trustees to take a more active role in hiring staff, and to facilitate succession of founders. School Meeting feels a need to hire soon, wonders about financing of new hires, wants to explore ways of engaging the Board of Trustees in hiring, and wants to support staff succession. (Dec 16)
- Adjusted staff hours and salaries in response to the pandemic for the second half of the 2020-2021 school year. (Feb 17)
- Hired Cody Unger for 100% full-time employment, with a start date of May 6, 2021. (Apr 28).
- Hired Ellen Abbott, Ann Sipe, and JD Stillwater for 100% full-time employment for the 2021-22 school year; 93.75% to 76.25% full-time employment for Beth Stone; and 100% full-time employment for Jim Rietmulder with 2 days off-campus, and 3 days off-campus. (May 26)
- Continued Julia James' part-time employment off-campus for various administrative tasks. (May 26)

Building and Grounds

- Cool Things Outside Corporation had a swing set installed on the west end of the soccer field. (May)
- A large sand pit for sand play was completed north of the building. (Jun 8)

Legislative Actions

- Amended rule 2439.09 to allow sitting and lying on counters in the Meadow Room, Mama Pod, and First-Aid counter, which was previously prohibited. (Mar 24)
- Implemented a JC plea of NO CONTEST (adding to GUILTY and NOT GUILTY). (May 5)

- To make an exception for hammocks, amended the rule requiring closed-toed shoes in the woods to allow an exception if you are in a hammock and your feet are not touching the ground. (May 19)
- Adopted a new rule allowing longer W.I.P.s on cooking projects. (Sep 15)
- Allowed JC Chairs to lower Meadow Room blinds that do not obscure the parking lot by amending rule 2447.20-SM (Don't cover glass). (Sep 8)

Gifts

- Received the following EITC/OSTC donations:
 - \$2,500 from UPMC Diversified Services (Dec 29)
 - \$500 from By Design Consultants, Inc. (Feb 8)
 - \$14,500 from Central Pennsylvania Scholarship Fund (a "Special Purpose Entity"), thanks to donations from four Circle School families. (Mar 11)
 - \$7,500 from First National Bank of Pennsylvania, the bank that now has the Meadow Campus mortgage (Nov 16).
 - \$5,000 from Orrstown Bank. (Nov 18)

Pandemic Measures

- In response to a surge in COVID-19 cases in our region, closed school until January 11, 2021; but in the interim, opened the campus grounds to students when staff are available, provided everyone masks and social distances. (Dec 9)
- Adopted a motion to reopen school on Monday, January 11, in "LITE" mode (Limited In-person Time) with the Health & Safety Plan in effect and lots of Happenings in three locations: Indoors, Outdoors, and Online, each with regulations for safety.
- Adopted a Policy on Pandemic Closure Tuition Credit. (Jan 13)
- Adopted the COVID Prevention Policy 2021-22. Several changes have been made, and the most recent version is available [here](#). (Aug 31)
- Acknowledged Governor Wolf's mask mandate and noted that masks will be required everywhere indoors at school beginning Tuesday, Sept 7, for the duration of the mandate (except as allowed by the Governor's order). (Sep 1)

Other

- Adopted the certification for the Lily Jordan Ukulele, linked [here](#). (Oct 4)
- Permitted Cool Things Outside to experiment with keeping two chickens at school for a month-long period starting after Winter Break and running through the end of January. (Nov 11)

TCS Board of Trustees Report
December 6th, 2021
For the period 12/7/2020 through 12/4/2021

Trustees who have served since the last annual meeting

Trustee	Trustee Since	Term Expiration	Officer	Notes
<u>Current Trustees</u>				
Ellen Abbott	3/1/2020	2/28/2025		
Johanna Bodnyk	3/1/2013	2/28/2022	Secretary	
Becky Giannelli	3/1/2021	2/28/2022		
Julia James	3/1/2019	2/29/2024		
Hladini Mensah	3/1/2020	2/28/2022		
Connor Tyrrell	3/1/2021	2/28/2022	President	
Rob White	3/1/2017	2/28/2023	Treasurer	
<u>Trustees with Expired Terms</u>				
Jim Rietmulder	3/1/2010	2/28/2021		Reached term limit
Jane Smigel	3/1/2020	2/28/2021		

Number of meetings since the last annual meeting

- 13 meetings held via Zoom
- 5 meetings held over email in which motions were voted on
- Held a virtual weekend-long “retreat” via Zoom

Policy Changes

Policies Adopted

None

Policies Repealed

None

Policies Amended

None

Capital Purchases and Sales of \$50,000 or more

- Sold the school's residential property at 431 Bonnymead Ave, adjoining the old Oakleigh Campus, in February 2021. The selling price was \$166,000.

Other Notable Actions and Information

- Over the past year the Board has primarily focused on Covid-19, staff succession planning, supporting staff hiring, anti-racism, and refinancing the school's long-term debt.
- In February 2021, affirmed the Board's intention to eliminate systemic racism within the school as an institution and a community, and created the ad hoc Anti-Racism Committee. The Committee submitted a report of its findings and recommendations to the Board in November. The Board is currently considering motions to create a standing Anti-Racism Committee to continue this work.
- In April 2021, in response to a request from School Meeting for the Board to assist with staff hiring, created an ad hoc Staff Hiring Committee which is charged with representing the Trustees in all matters related to the hiring of School Meeting Staff.
- In April 2021, closed the brokerage account with TD-Ameritrade (formerly Scottrade) as the school hasn't been actively investing since beginning construction on the Meadow Campus.
- In June 2021, Samara paid off the remainder of its mortgage on 210 Oakleigh that was financed by the school.
- In October 2021, entered into a new 20-year loan for \$1,000,000, the remainder of the Meadow Campus mortgage, while also paying off the outstanding balance of the original Fulton Bank mortgage of approximately \$1,200,000.