

**STEM Magnet Academy  
Local School Council  
Regular Meeting Minutes**

December 2, 2014

**I. Call to order**

Mrs. Langston called to order the regular meeting of the Local School Council for the STEM Magnet Academy at 5:30pm on December 2, 2014 at the STEM Magnet Academy gymnasium.

**II. Roll call/Establish Quorum**

Mrs. Langston conducted a roll call. The following persons were present:

Jeremiah Abiade  
Maria Amoruso  
Deborah Bonner  
Deana Caccavale  
Deidra Harper  
Sadika Langston  
Jeff McCarter  
William O'Neill (left at 7:08)  
Gretchen Brinza  
Lindsay McGrane  
Zakiya Libby-Williams  
Maria McManus

Quorum was established.

**III. Review and Approval of Agenda**

Mrs. Langston moved to approve the agenda with the amendment. Mrs. Caccavale seconded the motion.

Vote: 12 in favor

**IV. Review and Approval November 5, 2014 Meeting Minutes**

Mrs. McGrane presented LSC members with copies of minutes from the November 5, 2014 meeting. Mrs. Langston moved that the minutes be amended to include Mr. Dispensa's statement that his team will visit STEM to conduct an analysis of the usage of space. Mrs. Langston moved that the minutes be approved. Mr. Abiade seconded the motion.

Vote: 12 in favor.

## **V. Chairperson's Report**

- Agenda – Mrs. Langston made the suggestion that we adhere to Dr. O'Neill's suggestion that we conduct the meeting in accordance with the times suggested on the agenda. Mrs. Brinza asked about how time is allocated for each agenda item. Mrs. Langston stated that she speaks to parties who will be presenting to get an idea of how long each speaker will need.
- LSC Training – All training modules except for principal evaluation and retention are available online. There are also various locations throughout the city where in-person training will be available to LSC members.
- Weebly Website – Mrs. Langston asked about the possibility of launching the Weebly site. Mrs. Brinza clarified that the Weebly site is up and updated. Mrs. Langston asked about the possibility of getting that posted to the STEM website and Mrs. Brinza stated that she had sent an email containing the website link and that Ms. Falco would add that tab to the STEM website when she was able.
- 5 Essentials Survey – Mrs. Langston stated that a STEM parent recently emailed the LSC and shared that the 2013-2014 5 Essentials Survey data was available. Mrs. Langston cautioned that there was a low response rate, but stated that there may be some useful information in the survey. Mrs. Langston also asked that the survey not be used to assign blame, but be seen as a tool for improvement.

## **VI. Principal's Report**

- Internal Accounts – Account information for November was made available and list of disbursements for the month of November by Ms. McManus. Mrs. Amoruso asked if the income from the silent auction items were contained in this report. Ms. McManus stated that there is a line on the account that shows the amount of money raised and that the amount reflected is a combination of monies raised at the past two silent auction events. Mrs. Amoruso asked how much money was raised by this year's silent auction. Ms. McManus stated that \$5300 was raised this year.
- Facilities Walk Through – Mr. Dispensa supplied Ms. McManus with a Space Utilization and Prioritization form that needs to be filled out prior to a visit from his team. Mr. Dispensa hopes to have his team visit STEM prior to the Winter Break.
- Christmas Cheer – STEM families are being asked to donate food items for a food drive to benefit a church in the Austin neighborhood for the holiday season. Mrs. Amoruso asked how the partner was chosen. Ms. McManus shared that this is a church that she is a member of and stated that we would be open to partnering with other organizations if there were suggestions.
- 5 Essentials Survey – Ms. McManus stated that 60% of staff took the survey (14 staff members, 23 were eligible). Mr. Abiade asked about the typical rate of completion.

Ms. McManus state that in year 1, there was 100% response rate. During year 1 Ms. McManus pushed the survey out to staff and in year 3 Ms. Falco pushed it out. Mrs. Brinza stated that she felt it was possible that didn't take the survey because the survey asks respondents to identify as a specific grade level/specialty area and that that teachers may be afraid that the results would be attributable to them. Mrs. Langston stated that she felt that teachers need to know about the survey in order to take it, and that not knowing the survey was available may have been an issue. Ms. McManus clarified that teachers receive surveys via email. Mr. McCarter stated that the data was quite concerning – many were classified as weak, very weak, or neutral. Mr. McCarter asked how Ms. McManus reads this data and how it informs her practice. Mr. McCarter shared some of the results, stating that for the item “The principal puts the needs of children ahead of personal and political interests,” 29% of respondents strongly disagreed. Ms. McManus stated that 29% of respondents would be 4 people and she felt like people. Mr. McCarter read the results of an item regarding professional development for teachers and asked how the leader of a school looks at these responses and how those responses inform their practice. Ms. McManus stated that teachers have the opportunity to attend professional development and that there is a budget line allocated for PD. She sometimes recommends professional development opportunities to teachers. Mrs. Brinza, Ms. Lohitsa, and Ms. Falco have been to conferences to support their instruction. Mr. McCarter asked if Ms. McManus looks at the data and asks what can be done to effectively to assuage concerns here and create a healthier climate. Ms. McManus stated that she feels that people are entitled to their opinion and that when STEM opened it was political environment. Mr. McCarter asked if there are changes made as a result of this data. Ms. McManus spoke about the teacher-teacher trust item and how there has been an effort to address this through team building at Irons Oaks and at staff meetings. Ms. McManus seeks staff input to plan for team building. Mrs. Amoruso state that according to the report, schools that are strong on 3 out of 5 essentials are 10x more likely to achieve student growth. Mrs. Amoruso would like us to work as a team to look at this data and address the culture and climate at the school when the data becomes available. Mrs. Amoruso also stated that she would like to hear feedback from the team (teachers) in terms of their reactions and moving towards improvement. Mrs. Amoruso stated that she also feels that it is important to have a 100% response rate. Dr. Bonner stated that every principal wants to improve. Dr. Bonner asked if it is possible to create a safe environment in which people feel comfortable having this conversation where tough issues are addressed. Mrs. Amoruso suggested that maybe the PPLC be used as a way to gather information about teacher concerns. Mrs. Brinza stated that she feels like this is important. Ms. McManus stated that she got a preliminary report during the summer, but that the final data was not available to her until it was published. Mrs. Brinza stated that she loves what she does, but feels like this can be a difficult place to work. Mrs. Brinza stated

that she is committed to working to improve the climate at STEM and that she feels like this work has the potential to make our school great. Mrs. Brinza is comfortable being the channel through which teachers voice their concerns. Mrs. Brinza is fearful of what might happen if we do not work on improving our deficiencies. Mrs. Harper shared a concern about how the issue of confidentiality plays into responses. Mr. Abiade stated that he feels that it is important to use the data at hand. Mrs. McGrane stated that she felt that it was important to treat the data as valid because it also reflects negatively on the climate among teachers at the school, and that may point to the fact that people were being honest about their experience. Dr. Bonner asked how you get people to talk the way that they talk in the survey to hear about the issues that were brought up as concerns. Mrs. Brinza asked what Dr. Bonner did in this situation when she was a principal. Dr. Bonner stated that she had to share her vulnerability as a principal. Principals have to deal with the issues and not take it personally. Dr. O'Neill stated that the statistical significance of this survey is zero. Dr. O'Neill stated that the data does not provide an accurate picture. Mr. Abiade suggested that the LSC may be a vehicle to explore the data further. Mr. Abiade stated that he felt that this was important to acknowledge and use the data provided by the survey. Mrs. Amoruso stated that she felt it was important for teachers to have a forum and that the nature of the forum should depend on what teachers need to create a safe place to communicate. Mrs. Amoruso stated that our goal should be to become more collaborative. Dr. O'Neill suggested that we move on, as the issues addressed by this survey cannot be solved during this meeting. Mrs. Harper suggested that the teacher representatives look into the survey further. Mrs. Langston also acknowledged teacher-parent issues in the survey and feels we should also look into this data further. Mr. McCarter stated that he would like to counter Dr. O'Neill's statement by saying that a respected university conducted this survey and that this data is significant as it provides a comparison to CPS schools. McCarter stated that we need to foster a safe environment in which changes to our climate and culture can be discussed. Mr. McCarter stated that we are striving for a collaborative school and that we should work to improve our culture. Mr. McCarter asked what that safe space would be. Ms. McManus stated that everyone's input would be required. Mrs. Langston stated that this data is a piece of the a larger picture of STEM.

## **VII. Public Participation**

-- Mrs. Gulley – Mrs. Gulley shared that in order for us to accomplish what our parent representatives have suggested we have to get to a point where we respect each other. Mrs. Gulley feels like there is little respect from parents to administration, from teacher to teacher, and among teachers and parents. Mrs. Gulley shared that in order to get past lack of respect, we need to value each other and possibility of building a great school. Mrs. Gulley stated that we need to keep it as fresh as it was in the beginning and feels that everyone is turning towards themselves and their personal agenda. Mrs. Gulley

encouraged members of our school community to be vulnerable and take risks. Mrs. Gulley stated that we need to be careful to realize that our teachers are human.

-- Ms. Demaray – Ms. Demaray spoke of the importance of collaboration at STEM. She feels as though collaboration among some teachers very high, but this is not among all teachers. Ms. Demaray stated the need to create a safe environment. Ms. Demaray stated that, as a new member of the community, she feels like this is a divided staff.

-- Ms. Lohitsa – Ms. Lohitsa stated that change needs to happen on all factors and on all levels. This is not personal but is a professional issue. A lot of this work has to happen internally. Ms. Lohitsa stated that we haven't really had a situation for us to communicate. Mrs. Lohitsa shared that she feels we need to address the issue of creating more of a community.

-- Mr. Norris – Mr. Norris questioned the reason that in a previous year 100% of eligible staff members responded to the survey and only 60% of teachers responded to the survey in 2013-2014. Mrs. Langston asked why 40% of teachers did not respond.

-- Mr. Rosen – Mr. Rosen stated that he disagreed with idea that exploring the 5 Essentials Data was futile. He also asked that the LSC not ignore the teacher-parent data included in the survey.

-- Mrs. Valdivia – Mrs. Valdivia thanked teachers and staff for being transparent and talking about the situation and urged the LSC to address the morale issue. Dr. O'Neill said that perhaps we should hold off on addressing this data until a permanent principal has been selected.

-- Mr. Benton – Mr. Benton respectfully disagreed that the data is not significant, pointing out that the likelihood that 6 out of 14 responses were random is unlikely. Mr. Benton stated that the 5 Essentials Survey data should not be dismissed.

-- Mrs. Amoruso asked if it is possible to have teachers and administration meet to discuss the 5 Essentials Survey data. Mr. Abiade suggested that the first step would be to establish a safe place for discussion. Mrs. Langston suggested that the discussion include parents as well. Mrs. Brinza shared that because we are in year 4, there has been time to address these concerns through positive discourse. Dr. Bonner asked if these issues had been the focus in previous years and had been actively addressed.

## **VIII. Old Business**

-- LSC training modules (group training) – Mrs. Langston said that the LSC needs to decide if we are going to do group training, specifically on Principal Selection. Mr. Abiade shared that he felt that it would be beneficial. Mr. Abiade took the online module and did not feel adequately prepared by the online version. Mrs. Amoruso stated that she would be interested in taking the Principal Selection module as a group, in person. Mrs. Harper shared that she is interested in the Principal Selection and Budget modules for in-person training. Ms. McManus stated that she will reach out to Mr. Pittman to schedule in-person training for Principal Selection and Budget. Mrs.

Amoruso asked if a later time in the day would be possible. Ms. McManus stated that Mr. Pittman selects the time. Mrs. Brinza suggested using a collaborative meeting tool to find times that would work for different people.

## **IX. New Business**

-- Start Principal Selection Process – Mrs. Langston made a motion that we not begin the process until we have had the training. The motion was seconded. Mr. Abiade suggested that if we did not vote to begin the process, we would have to put that on the agenda for the future. Mr. McCarter stated that he feels that it is important to begin the process so that we are not playing catch up. Mr. Abiade suggested that we vote to begin the process, as there are a number of steps that must be taken before we post the position. Mr. McCarter suggested that people both take the module online and do the in person training and expressed concern about delaying the start of the process. Mrs. Langston amended her motion to state that we should begin the principal selection process. Mr. Abiade seconded the motion.

Vote: 10 in favor; 1 opposed.

-- Mr. Abiade moved to establish a Principal Selection Committee to include non-LSC members. This committee would screen resumes and support the process. Mr. Abiade stated that he felt it would be beneficial to take advantage of people in the STEM community with HR backgrounds and principal selection backgrounds. Mrs. Amoruso suggested that the number of participants for the subcommittee be capped. Mr. McCarter seconded the motion. Dr. O'Neill felt that this motion was too open-ended and that there should be more specifications for the subcommittee, such as confirmation that members live in the community or have children here. Dr. Bonner stated that we may not need to go through the entire process described. Mr. Abiade stated that we do need to review resumes.

Vote: 5 in favor; 6 opposed.

-- RFP for LSC operational funds – Dr. Bonner described the use of LSC operational funds and stated that these funds are used for training and reimbursement of LSC members for expenses, like refreshments. The council must vote this RFP on. Mrs. Langston asked if Dr. Bonner's LSC had used the money. Dr. Bonner stated that in her experience, the money was used more for reimbursement for materials and refreshments than for training. Ms. McManus proposed allocating \$300 of the \$400 in operational funds for supplies and \$100 for refreshments. Ms. McManus made a motion to request \$400 in operational funds from CPS, with \$300 to be used for supplies and \$100 to be used for refreshments. Mrs. Brinza seconded the motion.

Vote: 12 in favor

## **X. Committee reports and updates**

-- Facilities – Mr. McCarter shared that a meeting has been scheduled for December 10, 2014 from 5:15-6:15pm at school. Mr. McCarter stated that his committee would be willing to help with form Mr. Dispensa required prior to his site visit. Mr. McCarter also stated that he would like for representatives from his committee to be part of the walk through, if appropriate.

-- Budget – No report.

-- Bylaws – Ms. McManus will have final draft to Mrs. Amoruso by tomorrow (December 3<sup>rd</sup>). Mrs. Amoruso will email the draft to the CPS Legal Department and cc the secretary and chair on the email.

-- Friends of STEM organization – Mr. Benton presented the LSC with three fundraising proposals. The first proposal was for informal social for parents, to encourage parents to come to a less formal event than the Gala. This event would include Giving Trees, which would provide an opportunity for targeted giving for various items. This event would have a suggested donation rather than a firm ticket price. The second proposal was for the annual Friends of STEM Gala. This event would include a silent auction as well as corporate sponsorships. The corporate sponsorship would allow teachers and staff to attend the Gala cost-free. The third proposal was the annual Walk-a-Thon. Mrs. Harper asked about the results of the annual appeal. Mr. Benton stated that they have received pledges for \$4000-\$5000 in recurring gifts, but did not have a total amount given as one time gifts at this time. Mrs. Langston asked about the theme and how money raised through the Walk-a-Thon will be spent this year. Mr. Benton shared that there is no theme yet. Ms. McManus moved to approve these three fundraising proposals. Mr. McCarter seconded the motion.

Vote: 11 in favor; 1 opposed.

-- CIWP – No report

-- PPLC – No report

## **XI. Public Participation**

-- Mrs. Als Delgado – Mrs. Als Delgado shared her experience with Principal Selection. She stated that the requirements for participation on the Principal Selection committee can be as strict as the LSC would like. She also stated that all Principal Selection committee meetings would still fall under the regulations of the Open Meetings Act. Mrs. Als Delgado stated that the committee may be restricted, but the meetings would still be required to be open. A Principal Selection Committee does not vote on any action, just makes recommendations to the LSC. Mr. Abiade asked who

would be driving the process if we do not establish a committee. Mrs. Langston stated that she envisioned this being a process that was an LSC committee. Mr. Abiade expressed his concern that the LSC need to do something to move forward on this matter. Mrs. Amoruso asked that the discussion of including non-LSC members on a Principal Selection committee be made an agenda item for our January meeting.

-- Mr. Benton – Mr. Benton stated that at the last LSC meeting, a comment was made that it would be a “slap in the face” to ask Ms. McManus to interview for the principal’s contract at STEM. Mr. Benton stated that he felt that it was in appropriate to say that; he feels that it is part of the LSC’s due diligence to be respectful of the process. Mr. Benton feels that Ms. McManus would be a strong, competitive candidate for the position and stated that he feels it is the LSC’s job to choose best candidate. Mr. Benton urged the LSC to follow process robustly and quickly. Mr. Benton stated that this process should not be conducted haphazardly and feels that dragging out the process would be unhealthy.

**XII. CIWP/Budget Amendments (optional)**

**XIII. Closed Session (optional)**

**XIV. Announcements**

-- Next Regular Meeting date January 14, 2015 at 5:30pm in the STEM Gym.

**XV. Adjournment**

Mrs. Langston moves to adjourn the meeting at 7:12pm. Mrs. Caccavale seconded the motion.

Vote: 11 in favor.

Minutes submitted by: Lindsay McGrane

Minutes approved: 11 in favor 1/14/15