

**Serendipity Center**  
**November 17, 2021 Board Meeting Minutes**

**Present:** Eric Robertston, Erika Schwartz, Shannon Dale, Wendy Ricketts, Patrick Wrobel, Paul Fields, Dan Smith, Rick Larson, Lori Silverman, Rachel Gardell, Michael Hsu, Matty Berryessa (staff), Jackie Trussel (staff), Rachel Gitner (staff), Mark Takehara (staff)  
**Absent:** Kat Hendrix

Paul calls the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

**Approval of October Minutes.** No questions. **Wendy moves to approve October board meeting minutes as written, Eric seconds the motion. Unanimously approved.**

**Welcome Serendipity's new Director of Development Rachel Gitner!**

Rachel shares that her philosophy is that fundraising is not about asking for money, it's about fostering emotional and personal connections with Serendipity Center and communicating that passion to friends and family.

**Wendy** asks how long Rachel will be able to work with Breesa. Breesa's contract has been extended until the end of December to assist with the annual campaign. She won't be working as many hours as she had been, but we will be able to extend additional hours if needed.

**Lori** asks where Rachel is working from and if she has seen students when they are in school. Rachel's office is in the Key Bank extension. Rachel had toured the school prior to Covid and was really struck by the students. She will have some classroom observations next week. **Mark** shares that understanding the program is a priority for Rachel's onboarding so that she can be an effective communicator about our mission and program.

**Paul** welcomes Rachel and looks forward to hearing more from her on development and

**Program Report (Jackie Trussel, Treatment Director)**

- **Staffing update:** Staffing shortage has had a huge impact on morale. We think staff leaving has stopped and are starting to hire new people, though it's hard to get applicants. Have a few candidates. The staff enrichment committee has been doing a lot of good things for staff. Safety Coordinator is doing a great job keeping on top of the Covid regulations and med specialist has been amazing with quarantine and isolation needs. Staff were very concerned to come back into the building with kids who are very disruptive and aggressive and felt that it was more harmful from a trauma perspective. Admin team made a commitment to return those kids to their home districts and program leaders made a commitment to be on the floor helping the staff daily. It was a hard decision to pause new enrollments due to low staffing/safety concerns, but now we are planning for kids to return slowly and safely.
- **Programs Update:** 71 kids today, 2 students successfully returning to home districts. Started the school year with low enrollment for a variety of reasons (attrition, Covid, graduation rates), which was a blessing because staffing was also very low. Kids were really dysregulated at the

beginning of the year; not school ready. They are starting to settle in and getting back into the predictable routine. Some classrooms have had to be quarantined due to Covid, but we are hoping that the elementary school kids will start to get vaccinated. Jackie has been with Serendipity for 25 years and has never had a start of the year this hard. Student of the Month program is back and has been well received. Having Mark on campus at arrival has been good.

**Lori** comments that she is impressed with staff's ability to have a safe place for kids to be and helping them to settle in rather than being in a reactive mode.

**Wendy** asks about the 2 kids transitioning back to their home districts. Jackie shares that they are planned transitions and these are kids who were ready to go back perhaps before Covid.

**Paul** asks about vaccine availability for kids. Jackie thinks it will be slower going with the younger kids. It would make staff feel more comfortable if the kids were vaccinated.

Vaccinations shorten the amount of time the kids are in quarantine. Vaccination status of students hasn't affected our staff applicant pool.

### **Finance Report (Dan)**

- **September Financials** : Expected loss, slight revenue shortfall which was offset by reduction in expenses. On track with budget.

- **Budget vs. Actuals:**

- **Projected Budget based on 70 enrolled students:** Reviewed projected budget. ERTC credits (related to stimulus package). The new stimulus package did not continue the ERTC credits, so assuming enrollment stays constant, this budget projection is accurate.

**Mark** shares that the projected budget includes compensation changes.

- **Staff Compensation Proposal (Dan/Mark/Matty):** Culmination of a couple of months of hard work from Matty. Getting staff to an equitable pay scale was critical. This is essential for sustainability of the program. Similar to neighboring districts' pay scale. This will not apply to everyone in the organization but will touch the majority of the people providing direct services to the students, where we are facing lowest staffing.

Identified the areas and certifications that we value and set those as our steps with escalators based on education/certification/experience annually. This gives our staff some predictability in their pay increases and lets us place new people on a scale that is clearly defined. This will be extremely impactful for some of our teachers who will be getting a 10% increase immediately. It matches Centennial SD in the first 8 years, which is helpful because we lose a lot of people at the 3-5 year mark. Hourly pay scale will be harder to explain to employees because we pay an hourly rate per hour worked rather than the 192 day schedule like many public school districts, but it will show them that we are competitive.

**Dan** shares that the Finance Committee is very supportive of this plan. This will increase salary expense but there is also a cost for not making these kinds of changes--cost of turnover, cost of

retraining--and this investment in our employees is necessary for long term sustainability of our program.

**Paul** acknowledges the equitability component.

**Wendy** is excited about this, but wonders about how this will work for years when we don't have low enrollment/low staffing. Matty projected for growth in staffing; many of the staffing shortages are among the IAs, which come with an increase in students and are partially covered by tuition. It does add to our costs in years to come and we need to figure out how to address that. Our COLA adjustment is lower than school districts, so it would be reasonable to explain that tuition increases are directly related to those increased costs. This change would affect 27 hourly 23 salaried employees and make us more competitive immediately.

**Rick** thanks Matty for his hard work. Is "years of service" really service or just steps? Should be called steps, Matty will clarify. Asks about COLA increases: will that be applied to base plus index or not? Applies to base plus index, Matty will clarify. What are rules for stepovers (employee who has BA and is working towards MA, etc.). Employees will keep their step when they increase degrees/certifications (move columns). Employees will be frozen on their step until they earn their teaching license to incentivize getting licensed.

**Jackie** shares that she has been at Serendipity a long time and the board has always been supportive of this plan, and Matty worked so hard, but Mark deserves some credit for addressing this so quickly.

**Wendy motions to approve the revised compensation model as presented. Rick seconds the motion. Unanimously approved.**

Paul shares that Matty will let board know how a COLA adjustment can be made to employees who are not affected by the pay scale.

### **Committee Reports**

#### **• Capital Committee (Rick)**

(See report) Looking to expand committee with community members who may be interested in fundraising. BRIC will be updating proposal and share with us by Thanksgiving. Breaking ground in June 2023, must have preapplication conference with the City of Portland in the Spring of 2022. Must have wherewithal and budget to pay the consultants. Working on putting milestones into timeline.

Paul is impressed with the cadre of folks at meeting and Rick's command of the subject matter of the process.

#### **• Donor Advisory Committee (Erika)**

Four Pillar Phone Banking: Paul, Lori, Erika volunteer for 12/8/21 from 6-8 p.m.; Lori and Erika volunteer for 12/13/21 from 6-8 p.m. Classroom holiday wish lists: Wendy, Erika, Patrick volunteer to assist. Erika will email entire board this information.

#### **• Programs Committee (Michael)**

Michael drafted a letter for the staff to acknowledge the challenges of this year. We raised \$525 for the staff support fund. Michael will follow up with staff to get more information about what they plan to do with the money. Shea will forward Michael's letter to the board. Mark shares that the staff was pleased that the board is aware of the challenges they're facing. They are happy that they have representation at the board meetings.

• **Nominations and Equity Committee (Wendy)**

Equity themes for students were country of origin, education and communication. Wendy asks board to discuss these topics with people they know. Nominations are slow due to Covid, but things are starting to come back alive.

• **Data and Outcomes Committee (Paul)**

Series of meetings to understand and facilitate adoption of Synergy software. These meetings have helped the core group of employees to decide to make this change. Things are looking better.

**Executive Director Report (Mark)**

• **Finance Committee, Executive Committee, and Board Meeting monthly cadence change.**

Will be announcing pay scale changes to staff. Will also announce that we will be accepting and enrolling new students in a safe and responsible manner. Will be looking at what additional support staff we need.

Cadence of meetings: Board meeting to 4th Wednesday of month so Finance Committee meets on 3rd wed and Executive Committee meets on 4th wednesday so we will be able to review the previous month's finances and have a better picture of financial status, effective January 2022. Shea will send out new meeting notices.

**Shannon** asks about December board meeting. Placeholder in case we need to vote on something. We will know by first week of December if we need to have the meeting or not.

**Meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.**

**Upcoming Dates of Importance**

**Upcoming Events:**

**Upcoming Meetings: January Board Meeting: Wednesday 1/26@ 5:30pm**